

## UNIT 12

# A Visit to the Swat Valley

H. P. Stewart



### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit, the students will be able to:

- Demonstrate attentive listening skills while working in a whole class setting and taking turns to speak with standard pronunciation and intonation.
- Practice précis writing skills.
- Give an informed personal and analytical response to a variety of texts and provide some textual references in support.
- Critique how authors distinguish their position from that of others.
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing in different varieties of texts.
  - Observe hyphenation conventions.
  - Produce legible work that shows the correct spelling of the conventions of punctuation and capitalization.
- Develop précis writing skills. Write précis effectively.
- Use paraphrasing skills to paraphrase a poem.



### Pre-reading:

- What challenges or feelings of anticipation do you associate with a journey through an unfamiliar and potentially rugged landscape?
- How might the history of a place influence a traveller's experience and the overall atmosphere of a landscape?

Spring time is beautiful in most places, but when the young leaves and the fruit blossom, the flowers in the fields and the new shoots of wheat and rice, are put in a setting with snow-capped mountains behind them and a blue river in front with shining white and yellow pebbles, it makes a picture that causes the visitor to exclaim with pleasure and remember for years to come.

We went over the Malakand Pass on a dazzlingly clear day after a good deal of rain. The **precipices**, the rocks, the road winding around the cliffs, the steepness and **cragginess** of it made one feel as if the giant's castle has to be stormed before one entered the enchanted land. The giant was absent, there were no pickets on the hills, the little forts were empty, there was no one to challenge us as we crept round the last frightening curve but all the same we travelled with caution peering ahead to see what was around the corner. Then we were in the outskirts of the stronghold and beyond was a green and pleasant valley.

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Wherever we turned, there were pictures, willows just coming into leaf, pale yellow rather than green, with dark trunks, bending over a canal, dark lines of trees across the lush green of the valley where the roads crossed and clear streams in which the blue of the hills was reflected, the mustard fields still in bloom while in the Punjab they were only a memory, the wheat still young, any new leaves and blossoms on the shisham trees, the persian lilace leafless with yellow berries from last summer shining against the blue of the sky, red poppies among the wheat and sometimes on the roofs of the houses, fresh snow even on the hills in the middle distance and village clean and washed by the recent rain and the white capped hills behind them. Every few miles there were quaint little forts each with four top heavy towers some of them, half hidden by the alder trees in the stream bed between the fort and the road, some standing starkly against blue and purple hills.

On the road there were Gujar folk travelling, camped in the shelter of rocks, the women in their black garments walking behind the animals, great baskets on their heads and then we saw a pretty little girl among them with her arms full of red poppies. Every now and again we came to a clump of olive trees and discovered that only in the graveyards did groups of these trees survive. The graves were often surmounted by sharp stones dug from the hillside, one for the head and one for the foot, often at an angle that suggested arms held wide or even wings. Some of the olive trees dripped with fresh **mistletoes** the leaves of which were small and neat and pale green, a smaller variety than one usually sees. The hill tops were covered with Buddhist remains and all over the valley there were ruins from old monasteries and stupas and houses as if in this sheltered place time had stood still.

There were arched bridges over the streams and so much stone with which to build clean walls, some of them not even held together with mortar. A lot of the stone was **schist** which splits like slate. What lovely floors it would make!

The botanists among us were excited with the wild flowers by the road side and up the slopes of the hills. There were big patches of a giant yellow mint **nepeta** purple as heather among the rocks, heavy heads of golden **sophora** and everywhere there were fruit trees in blossom. In places the little wild iris still in bloom both the purple and yellow varieties, and we later found a few stalks of the big pale lavender Hazara lily which most of us had never seen before, growing on the banks of irrigation ditches.

Saidu Sharif was a surprise. The villages on the hillside built with the stone from their own rocks melted into the colour of the hills, but this city with its great white mosque surrounded by all those houses was unexpected and the big hotel even more so. However, we were very glad to be so comfortable. There were flowers in the garden and red blossoms on the silk cotton tree, looking somehow strange deep blue hills instead of the paler blue of the sky. Just before we came to the hotel, we crossed a branch of the Swat River and for a brief moment had a glimpse of the length of the

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valley from the bridge. The snows were so vivid, the water so blue and the pebbles so shining that it looked almost unreal, like the very brightest of picture postcards. Next day we followed the opposite bank of the river. We had come up the left bank with the snowy range behind us, now we faced the snows, going through Mingora with its shops, as far as, Manglaur. There a bend of the river in front of a government dispensary made a blue mirror at the foot of a range of Show mountains, and little fields and lines of trees came down to meet the water from huts perched up on the slopes of the hills. A man was fishing in the clear thus water with a big net. Huge boulders guarded the near banks of the streams. From here some of the party went up a side valley to see a **bas-relief** high the head almost completely free. It was a two mile walk from where the motor statue of Buddha carved on the face of the rock about twenty-five feet high, the head almost completely free. It was a two mile walk from where the motor road ended and some were a little weary when they returned to drink their tea on the dispensary verandah facing the snows. All the patients had gone home by this time and the place was deserted. It was very peaceful.

When we had gathered strength again, we took to the road once more and followed it until we came to a valley that led up into the hills to Miandam. The road was narrow, even a little frightening in place, but every turn brought some thing beautiful. The loveliest sight was provided by the medlar trees in full bloom, a cascade of lacy white that suddenly seemed to fill the valley. When we stopped at the head of the valley we looked back again at the snows, at fold after fold of blue and purple hills and the foreground a **terraced** hillside with fine green fields trimmed with mustard bloom, huts with low flat roofs, and at our feet pink and white fruit blossoms on the trees at the edge of the fields. We could see bits of snow between the dark pines nearer ridges of the hills and deep in the valley the fresh new green of trees and bushes. Here and there were oak trees also and walnut trees, so many different shades of green.

We came back in the evening, following the river, now quiet instead of sparkling with cool shadows across the hills. We rounded the great buttress of rock that guards the bend of the river and came suddenly on a wedding procession that completely filled the road. The bride was in a **doli** surrounded by women on foot, all dressed in black garments with the most beautifully embroidered black shawls, gay embroidery on their shirts, all kinds of jewellery, some with baskets on their heads covered with a cloth some with embroidered jackets, a few with red trousers and all of them skipping along with dancing steps, clapping their hands and evidently enjoying themselves thoroughly. We were told that it used to be the custom to send the bridegroom off by himself three weeks before the wedding. Evidently it was not considered proper for him to enjoy the fun. The **dowry** beds were in the procession too, utensils, bedding, a low table, all that the bride would need in her new home. Later on, we saw the wedding party in a courtyard where there were gaily clad dancers entertaining the company.

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The next day was planned for the geologists and those who wanted to have a better look at the Buddhist ruins. Every hilltop seemed to bristle with the last few stones that once formed a monastery, a fortress of **stupa** or even a dwelling house. There were remains of stupas that had once been elaborately covered with carvings little bits of which still remain. What must the valley have looked like when all these **saffron-clad** Buddhist monks could look down at the rice fields by the riverside and watch the sun setting along the pink flushed crest of the snows? How far did they have to carry their water? Are the forests gone that once provided them with fuel? Or was it part of their simple needs? Sir Aurel Stein once visited the Swat valley and wrote about these Buddhist times in a book called 'On Alexander's Track on the Indus' but I have not yet been able to find a copy of his record.

We spent part of the day shopping in the bazar. Everyone wanted Swat blankets and variety was great, some wool, some cotton and all kinds of mixtures, usually in gay stripes red and yellow and blue and green, some for curtains and some for cottage bedspreads. A few of the ladies bought black scarves with magenta trimmings, some wanted a Swat hat to show to their friends. They seemed to me very ugly things and so under becoming to the handsome lads that wore them, but very warm. I preferred the pretty caps trimmed in gold thread that you would see on the head of some lovely child, usually the son of a local Khan.

By evening of the second day, the clouds began to gather and the next day it was drizzling. Hoping it would clear up in an hour or two we set out for Pir Baba, thinking that we would not have time to see this interesting road on our return journey for it is a good deal longer and there are four passes to cross before one comes to the shrine. We went over the bridge across the Saidu River and some miles down the same road we had come by on our arrival, then we turned off to the left and after a while began to climb. The road was steep and narrow and it seemed leading long way to the top of the first pass, which was the big highest of the four passes on the way. It was very windy. The road that we could see zig-zagging down the next big hill did not look very inviting with a rainy sky overhead. So, we turned and came back by the way we had gone and we were glad to be back in the valley again. By now the rain was blurring the hills and almost shutting out the view. We ate in the car, looking on at Buddhist ruins, for no one wanted to climb up there in the rain. The colours all became soft, the snow disappeared, the flowers hung their soft heads and the distant hills were hidden in the mist. We finally returned to the hotel to spend the rest of the afternoon sorting specimens of flowers, making notes, making a few sketches of the flowers and drinking tea. The mist came farther up the valley until the nearest hills were also covered. Of all that riot of colour only a soft grey blue remained.

We had planned to go to a rest-house at Bahrein and perhaps to visit Kalam, but next day it was raining so hard that we got discouraged. It looked as if it was in for days of

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wet weather. So we came out of the valley as we had gone into it, by Chakdara and the Malakand Pass. Family after family of Gujars walked on the road in the pouring rain, driving their animals in front of them loaded with their household possessions. It was sad to see them so **bedraggled** in the wet. One little girl in black and red had a black lamb in her arms, as if it too, had become discouraged in the rain. We saw where the Swat River was joined by the Dir River and wondered if Alexander had come into India through Dir. The hills have sharp points to them and looked as flat as if they had been cut out of cardboard. We saw a baby leopard skin hanging in a roadside shop and wondered where it had come from. They had jackal skins in the shops at Mingora. In the rain the rocks near the pass were almost black and contrasted sharply with the lush green and gold of the valley. The pass over Malakand had seemed scary when we were going into Swat but after the Pir Baba Road it looked a highway. The rain followed us all the way to the Punjab.

It would be nice to spend a long time in the valley of Swat. I should like to paint dozens of pictures and visit the higher hills. The flowers are so lovely in the spring. But to get round in the comfort one should have one's own car. The roads are good and several of the side valleys motorable. Our visit was so brief that it had the effect of an afternoon's performance at the cinema with a film in two parts: one in bright sunshine, the other in the rain and I shall always regret a part three which I did not see, the roads we did not travel and the hills we may never have an opportunity to climb.

### Theme

The unit evocatively portrays the enchanting beauty and serene tranquillity of the Swat Valley in spring, capturing a landscape of breathtaking contrasts—snow-capped mountains, vibrant fields of blossoms, and crystal-clear rivers set against ancient ruins and cultural richness. Through vivid imagery, the narrative conveys a sense of awe and timelessness, celebrating the valley's natural splendour, historical depth, and the gentle rhythm of local life, while also acknowledging the fleeting nature of such an idyllic experience. It is a tribute to a place where nature, history, and human presence harmonize into an unforgettable tapestry of sights, sounds, and emotions.

### About the author

H. P. Stewart is the insightful author behind *A Visit to the Swat Valley*, a work that reflects his deep appreciation for the cultural and natural richness of the region. With a keen eye for detail and a passion for exploration, Stewart brings to life the landscapes, traditions, and people of Swat through vivid and engaging prose. His writing not only serves as a travelogue but also as a thoughtful commentary on the historical and social nuances of the area. Stewart's ability to weave narrative with observation makes his work both informative and immersive. Through this publication, he invites readers to experience the beauty and complexity of Swat Valley as though they were journeying alongside him.



## Glossary

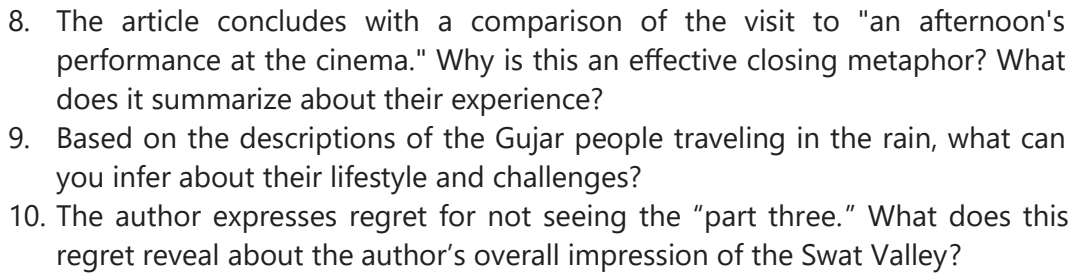
| Words               | Meanings                                                              |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>bas-relief</b>   | a type of sculpture with slightly raised figures on a flat background |
| <b>bedraggled</b>   | messy and wet, typically from being in the rain                       |
| <b>cragginess</b>   | the quality of being rough, uneven, and full of rocks                 |
| <b>doli</b>         | a palanquin used to carry a bride                                     |
| <b>dowry</b>        | property or money brought by a bride to her husband at marriage       |
| <b>mistletoe</b>    | a parasitic plant that grows on trees                                 |
| <b>nepeta</b>       | a genus of flowering plants, commonly known as catmint                |
| <b>precipices</b>   | very steep rock faces or cliffs                                       |
| <b>saffron-clad</b> | dressed in robes of a bright orange-yellow colour                     |
| <b>schist</b>       | a type of rock that splits easily into thin layers                    |
| <b>sophora</b>      | a genus of trees and shrubs with typically yellow flowers             |
| <b>stupa</b>        | a buddhist shrine, typically a dome-shaped structure                  |
| <b>terraced</b>     | (of land) shaped into a series of flat areas resembling steps         |



## Reading and Critical Thinking

### A. Answer the following questions:

1. What might be the author's deeper purpose in writing this detailed account of her visit to the Swat Valley?
2. How does the author's tone shift between the descriptions of the sunny days and the final rainy departure? What specific words contribute to these different moods?
3. The article mentions "the giant's castle" that must be stormed to enter the "enchanted land." What does this metaphor represent about the journey and the landscape?
4. Identify and explain a key contrast presented in the text.
5. The author describes a wedding procession in detail. What does this passage reveal about the local customs and the role of community?
6. The narrative is told from the first-person perspective of a visitor. How does this point of view shape our understanding of the place and its people? What might a local person's perspective emphasize differently?
7. The description is rich with sensory details. How do these details enhance the reader's experience?



1. According to the text, what natural feature provides a "setting" for the beautiful spring scenery?

- a) a dense, dark forest      b) a vast, empty desert  
c) snow-capped mountains and a blue river      d) a single, towering volcano

a) a dragon's lair    b) a giant's castle    c) a fortified city    d) a sacred temple

a) around government buildings  
b) in royal gardens  
c) in the graveyards  
d) along the riverbanks

a) Mughal palaces  
b) Greek amphitheatres  
c) Buddhist monasteries and stupas  
d) Victorian mansions

a) a massive, modern factory      b) a great white mosque and a big hotel  
c) a crowded, noisy market      d) an ancient, ruined colosseum

a) the Swat River                      b) Medlar trees in full bloom  
c) the snowy mountain range      d) a wedding procession

a) on a decorated horse      b) in a doli (palanquin)  
c) in a modern car      d) on a flower-covered cart

a) spices and local foods      b) antique weapons  
c) Swat blankets and hats      d) Buddhist artifacts



## Vocabulary and Grammar

1. The text describes the view as a "picture that causes the visitor to *exclaim* with pleasure." What is the best synonym for "exclaim"?  
a) whisper      b) murmur      c) cry out      d) ponder
2. The author mentions the "*precipices*, the rocks, the road winding around the cliffs." What does "precipices" most likely refer to?  
a) gentle slopes    b) dense forests    c) very steep cliffs    d) shallow streams
3. The scene is described as "the giant's castle has to be *stormed*." In this context, what does "stormed" mean?  
a) admired from a distance      b) painted artistically  
c) attacked and captured by force    d) photographed carefully
4. The author notes that the graves were "often *surmounted* by sharp stones." What does "surmounted" mean?  
a) surrounded by    b) dug up from    c) placed on top of    d) hidden beneath
5. The botanists were excited by the "wild flowers by the road side and up the *slopes* of the hills." What does "slopes" refer to?  
a) the flat tops of the hills      b) the inclined sides of the hills  
c) the valleys between the hills    d) the rocky bases of the hills



## Oral Communication Skills

- A. H.P. Stewart describes the Swat Valley with vivid imagery. Listen carefully as your classmate reads a short descriptive passage aloud. After he finishes, can you share one specific image or sensory detail (something seen, heard, or felt) that stands out to you and explain why it is particularly effective or striking?
- B. Imagine Stewart's description of a specific landscape in Swat Valley (e.g., a river, a mountain pass) is a stanza from a poem. Working with a partner, paraphrase that description in your own words. Your goal is to capture the essence and beauty of the image without using Stewart's exact phrasing. Be prepared to share your paraphrased version with the class."
- C. Think about a modern travel blog or documentary about the same region. Based on Stewart's writing, how would his purpose and tone differ from that of a modern travel writer? What in his text makes you

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think that? Discuss the different goals of a 19th/early 20th-century travelogue versus contemporary travel media."



### Writing Skills

- A. H.P. Stewart describes the Swat Valley from the perspective of an outsider. Write a well-structured analytical paragraph (150-200 words) in which you: a) Paraphrase his overall impression of the valley and its people (e.g., "The author conveys a sense of..."). b) Critique his position by analysing how he, as a colonial-era British author, might distinguish his viewpoint from that of a local inhabitant. Consider his tone, word choice, and what he chooses to describe. c) Support your analysis with at least two specific textual references.
- B. Write a précis of the article "A Visit to the Swat Valley" by H.P. Stewart.