

## The Representation of Afghan Refugees in Pakistani Urdu and English Blogs: A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract

Afghan refugees are considered the largest refugee population, living across borders in countries like Pakistan, Iran, the United Kingdom, European Union countries, the United States, Canada, Gulf countries, and India. Pakistan and Iran have hosted the most enormous number of Afghan refugees since the Soviet invasion in 1979. Since their arrival in the host countries, their presence has always been the topic of debates and news reports. In this regard, the current study is designed to understand the behavior of Pakistani Urdu and English blogs to see how Afghan refugees have been represented. The current study offers insights into the image of Afghan refugees created in the third space of digital media following the technique of corpus-assisted discourse analysis by looking at the linguistic context, concordances, and collocates of the lemma “Afghan” in the collected corpus of online Pakistani blogs. Similarly, the current study has identified negativity associated with Afghan refugees using lemmas such as *HaramKhor*, *smugglers*, *drugs*, *burden*, and *terrorism*.

**Keywords:** Afghans, Refugees, Pakistan, Blogs, Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis

## Introduction

The history of Afghan wars and the destruction (in terms of casualties and displacements) caused by wars in the last five decades can be divided into three phases. After a long regime by King *Shah, Zahir* finally, political chaos started for the throne and *Dawood Khan* gained the throne of Afghanistan in 1973 until 1978, he was overthrown by *Nor Muhammad Tarakai* in 1978 (Collins, 1980). This internal conflict over the throne raised *Mujahideen* in the country which was enough for the Soviets to interfere and finally on 24 December 1979 the *USSR* forces invaded Afghanistan (Collins, 1980; Britannica, 2020). According to the study by Khan (2012) the Soviet invasion clinched more than one million human lives during the 10 years of war and forced more than six million people to cross the borders into the nearest countries. The second phase of the Afghan war started soon after the Soviets withdrew from Afghan soil. The newly elected government comprised mainly of minority groups such as Tajik, Hazara, and Parsis led to ethnic distress in the country and the *Mujahideen* under the leadership of Mullah Omar overthrew *Gulbuddin Hikmatyar* in 1996 formed Islamic Emirate which stood until the *NATO* intervention in 2002 (Khalidi, 1991; Griffin, 2001; Bhutta, 2002). The Afghan internal conflicts between the *Mujahideen* and other minorities again forced millions to leave the country or stopped the repatriation process of war refugees from the neighboring countries Pakistan and Iran (Mertz, 2001). Finally, the situation of Afghanistan post 9/11 and the *NATO* invasion of Afghanistan can be considered the third phase of Afghan conflicts. During the US-Afghan war, thousands of people died, and millions took refuge (Bhutta, 2002; Khan, 2012).

The conflicts in Afghanistan greatly affected the demography and economy of the neighboring countries (the countries that received Afghan refugees during the wars). Pakistan and Iran received millions of refugees during the above-mentioned phases of conflicts. The Afghan refugees are not only an addition to the existing population in their host countries but also a challenge to the economy and law and order for them, for example, in Pakistan (which is currently hosting more than 2.5 million Afghan refugees). As explained by Baloch et al. (2017) the flow of un-skilled refugee labor in the market has congested the market for skilled local labor and has left the locals unemployed, thus consequently creating distress. Furthermore, Pakistan's economy is already unstable and the current wave of inflation (Hayat et al. 2021) has raised more questions about the presence of Afghan refugees in the country. Thus, government policies are constantly discussed by social media users and broadcasting and print media. Moreover, the refugees' involvement in different law-avoiding activities is also the main theme of both national and international media debates as reported by the *Voice of America* (South and Central Asia):

Pakistan's government said it has reached its limit and cannot accept more Afghan refugees as the threat of violence looms in Afghanistan. There are fears that members of the banned terror outfits like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (the TTP or

Pakistani Taliban) might enter Pakistan from Afghanistan in the guise of refugees and create unrest in the country (VOA, 13 July 2021).

Such media debates and reporting have created a negative image of Afghan refugees in

Pakistan and created political tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Jehanghir, 2021). Thus, the current study is designed to see how Afghan refugees are being represented in online Pakistani Urdu and English Blogs. The current study provides insights into the behavior of Pakistani bloggers using Urdu and English languages to look for non-native linguistic variations (Latif et al. 2021) in their writing about Afghan refugees while shaping their image in third spaces. Hence, the current study looks for the difference in approach between the use of Urdu and English and metaphors used to represent Afghan refugees.

### **Methods and Materials**

The current study analyzed corpora of English and Urdu online Pakistani Blogs. The Cambridge Online Dictionary defines corpus (corpora: plural) as “a collection of written or spoken materials stored on a computer” to be used for language analysis. Moreover, the current study uses the technique of corpus-assisted discourse analysis to look at the language being used by bloggers. Corpus-assisted discourse analysis is a technique that came into being by combining the techniques of both corpus linguistics and discourse analysis enabling the corpus researchers to deal with a huge amount of data in less amount of time and to draw their results and conclusion accompanied by a theory and validated by the quantitative and statistical data (Jaworska, 2016).

### **Materials**

The data was collected from four Pakistani blogs: Siasat.pk (English), Hamariweb (Urdu), Parhlo (English), and Dawn Blogs (English). The data from these blogs was collected using *RASIM* (Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Immigrants) as search terms using the implied method described by Baker et al. (2008). For Urdu data words such as پناه گزین, مہاجرین, were used as search terms. All texts were saved using the standard method described by Baker (2006), Baker et al. (2008), and Partington et al. (2013). The texts were saved in txt. format and were stored in separate folders with their publication dates and years.

### **Analysis**

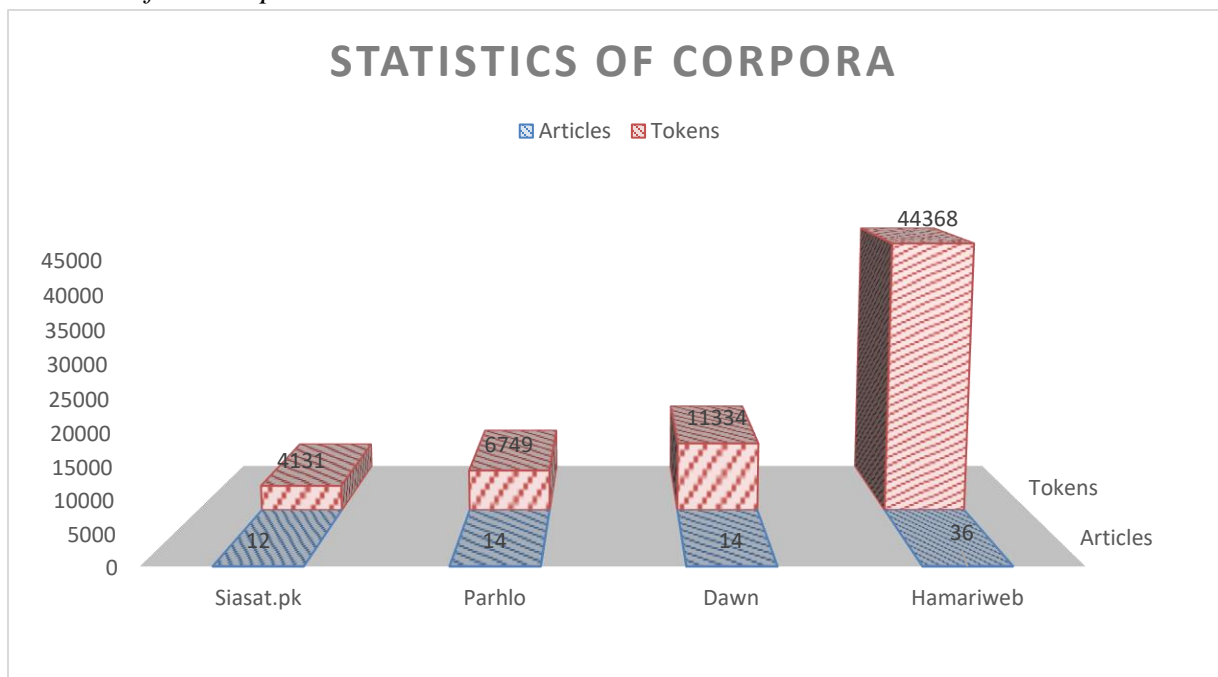
The current study used LancsBox 6.0 (Brezina et al. 2020) for the analysis of data. The LancsBox software has been developed by researchers from the University of Lancaster aiming to provide interesting features for text analysis. Certain features distinguish the said software from all other text-analyzing software. For example, the wizard feature can be used to compare

and analyze several keywords across different corpora at once and a printed report is published at the end that can also be used/quoted in research works (Brezina et al., 2020).

The lemma “Afghan” was used as a search term in the corpora. The results were mainly retrieved from the concordances of the lemma “Afghan” through the *WHELK* feature of the LancsBox software. For all English corpora, a separate English reference corpus has been used while for the Urdu corpus, a separate Urdu reference corpus has been created and used. The following figure shows the statistics of the tokens in each corpus:

**Figure 1**

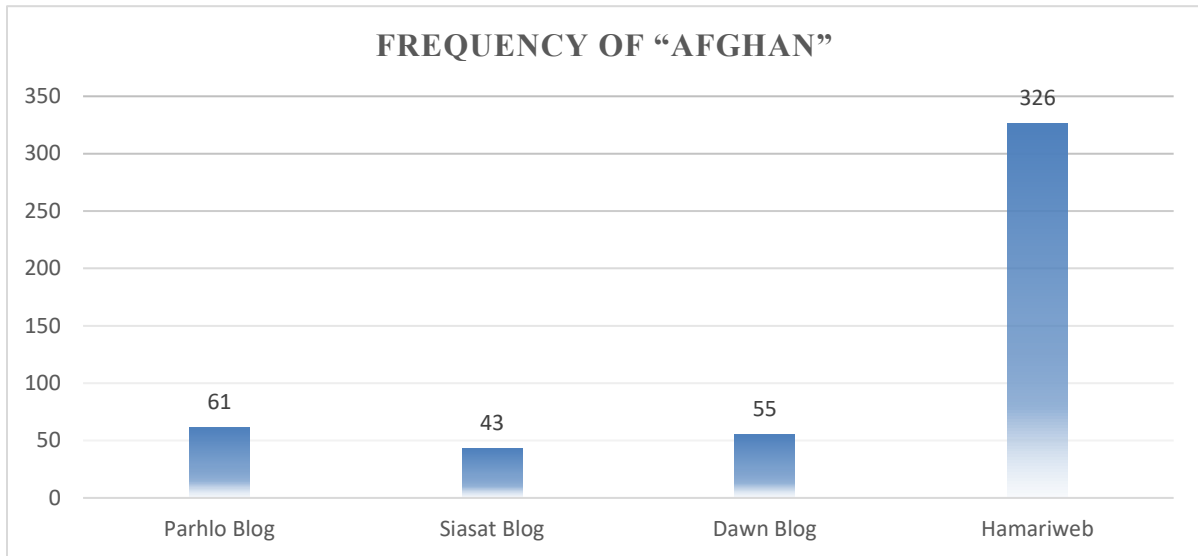
*Statistics of the Corpora*



## Results and Discussion

The lemma “Afghan” has been searched in the corpora. The concordance lines and the collocates  $\pm 5$  to both left and right were used as the linguistic context for the node word “Afghan”. The figure below shows the frequency of the lemma “Afghan” in each corpus:

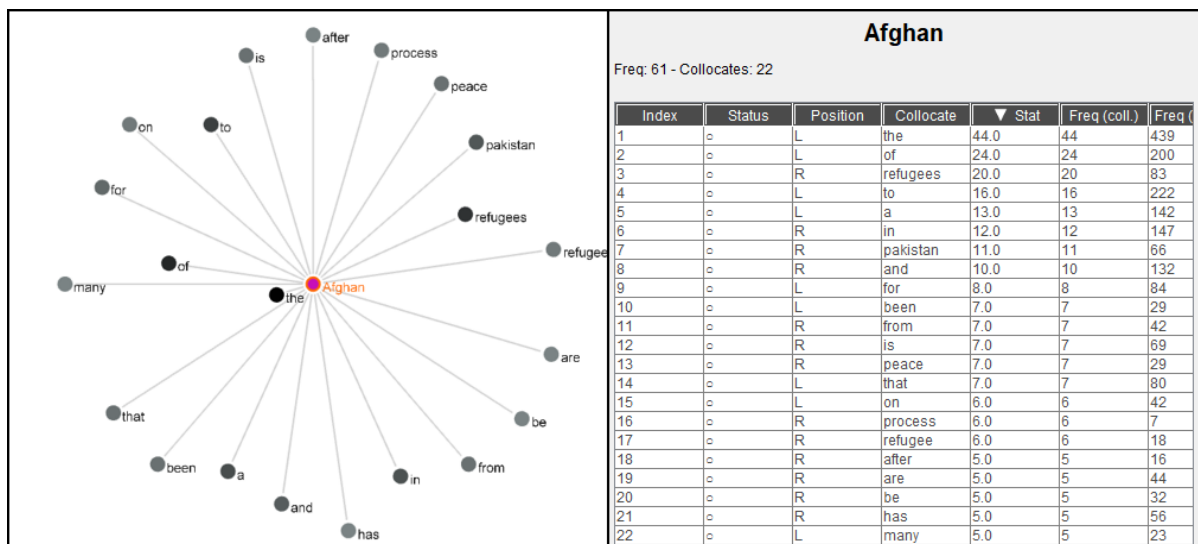
**Figure 2**  
Frequency of Lemma "Afghan" in each corpus



**Parhlo Blog**

The Parhlo<sup>1</sup> blog is an online Pakistani blog run by private bloggers publishing articles on current issues in the English language. In the corpus of Parhlo Blog, the most frequently occurring keywords were Afghan (61), refugees (20), Pakistan (17), process (15), and repatriation (12). Figure 3 shows the collocates ±5 for the lemma "Afghan":

**Figure 3**  
Collocates of Lemma Afghan



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.parhlo.com/>

As seen in Figure 3 above “refugees” is the most frequently occurring to the right of the lemma “Afghan”. The analysis of these collocates and their concordances reveal that bloggers who write in the Parlo Blog have shown harshness towards Afghan refugees by discussing their involvement in crimes and crossing the borders illegally:

K-P police prepare lists of Afghan refugees Allegedly Involved in serious crimes. At least a thousand of these refugees were involved in acts of terrorism while more than 3,000 were involved in acts of murder, attempted murder, robberies, and other crimes. (14 July 2014).

### **The metaphor of HaramKhor**

A blogger in his blog called Afghan refugees as *HaramKhor*. The term *HaramKhor* (*Haram*: forbidden, and *Khor*: to eat) is an Arabic (*Haram*)-Persian (*Khor*) used for those who eat things earned by illegal means, and consuming such things is forbidden in Islam<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, in the current context, the Afghani cricket team has been called *Haramkhor* and here *HaramKhor* mean means the players raised and trained in Pakistan are now showing hate towards it. The term *HaramKhor* could also possibly mean “coward” because another term *Markhor* (a brave animal who eats snakes and lives on the edges of mountains mainly in Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan) is used for a Pakistani cricketer *Shoaib Akhter* known for his brave comments and lifestyle. This term creates a negative image of Afghan refugees as cowards:

*Markhor* Shoaib Akhtar Calls Afghanistan Team *Haramkhor* (30 June 2019).

In addition, the use of numbers while discussing the population in Pakistan also adds negativity to their representation such as the use of collocates; number (12) and many (8) with “Afghan”. In addition, the use of negative clusters such as “Afghan terrorists” also lays a negative impact on the image of Afghan refugees in Pakistan:

11 Ways Afghan terrorists can be stopped from entering Pakistan (22 December 2021)

### **Siasat.pk**

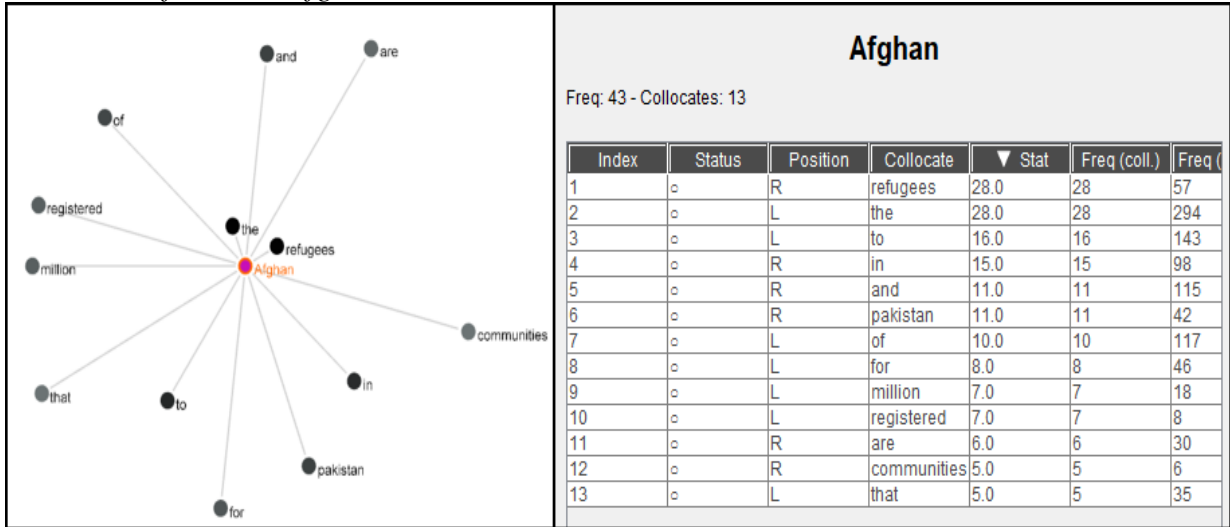
The Siasat famously known as Siasat.pk is an online Pakistani blog. It usually publishes blogs both in Urdu and English and shares daily national and international news updates. For the current study, the researcher has collected only English blogs about refugees and immigrants. The terms such as “Afghan” (43), “Pakistan” (42), “Rohingya” (23), “Million” (20), “Afghanistan” (18), and “education” (14) are frequently occurring keywords in the corpus of Siasat.pk blogs. The following Figure 4 presents the  $\pm 5$  collocates of the lemma “Afghan”:

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<sup>2</sup> The term is defined by [Urbandictionary.com](http://Urbandictionary.com). Accessed on 20/06/2022.

**Figure 4**

*Collocates of lemma "Afghan"*



As shown in Figure 4 the term with the most important collocates that appeared with the lemma “Afghan” are “refugees”, “Pakistan”, “million”, “registered”, and “communities”. It is clear from the figure 4 above that the Siasat.pk usually discusses the legal status of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the use of number words such as “million” (which appeared 7 times for Afghan refugees) and the impact of such a huge population of refugees on Pakistani population adds negativity to the process of representing Afghan refugees in the third spaces:

You would be surprised to know that Turkey hosted the largest refugee population, with 3.7 million, followed by Pakistan with 1.4 million refugees. (12 March 2019)

According to the inter-ministerial committee’s estimates (conveyed to the cabinet in its last meeting), 500,000 to 700,000 Afghan refugees might come to Pakistan after the new Taliban regime. The policy document showed the estimated cost for housing 700,000 Afghan refugees in secure and exclusive camps at \$2.2 billion for three years. (26 August 2021)

In addition, the blog also discusses other refugees living in Pakistan such as the Rohingyas:

After Myanmar and Bangladesh, the largest population of Rohingya Muslims, currently live in Karachi and they are estimated at about 400,000. (16 September 2021)

However, the Siasat. pk also highlights the cultural importance of these refugee

communities in Pakistani society and considers their arrival in Pakistan as an addition of new things to the existing culture of music, clothing, language, and food:

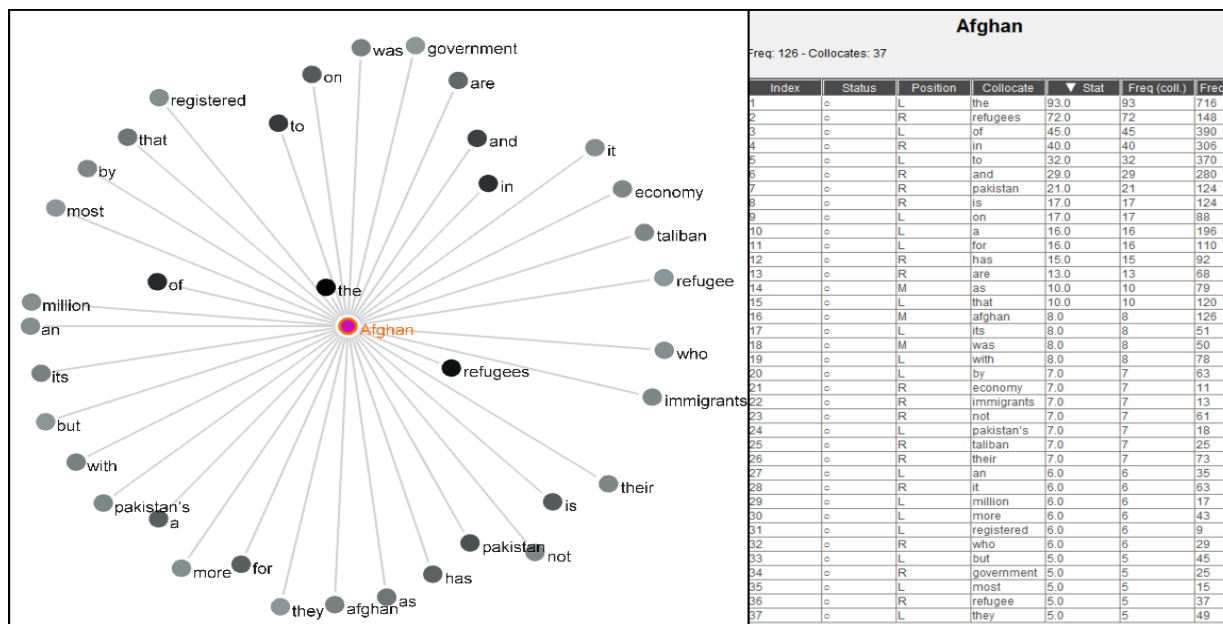
The Afghan refugees have created a long-lasting impact on Pakistani society and culture, specifically in KPK. Professor Zafar Khan from the Sociology Department of the University of Peshawar says that Pakistani women like Afghan dresses and men also like Afghani Shalwar Qamis. He says that the use of Afghani cuisines like Afghani Pulao, Qahwa, and Pati Teeki is widespread in Pakistan. He also says that several Afghan Pashto words have entered the local jargon of Peshawar. Such as *Kochanay Akhter mo Nekmargha instead of Eid Mubarak* (12/06/2016).

### Dawn Blogs

The Dawn blogs are associated with one of the largest circulating Pakistani national newspapers the Dawn founded in 1941/42 by the founder of Pakistan Muhammad Alia Jinnah (Long, 2009). The Dawn publishes current news about politics, sports, religion, business, and culture, among others. The current study has analyzed the blogs published in the online blogs section of the Dawn newspaper. The term ‘‘Afghan’’ appeared 126 times in the corpus of the Dawn blogs. The other important keywords are ‘‘Pakistan’’ (124), ‘‘country’’ (51), ‘‘population’’ (16), ‘‘smugglers’’ (9), ‘‘decades’’ (14), ‘‘Europe’’ (12), ‘‘million’’ (12), and ‘‘Taliban’’ (5). Shown in Figure 5 is the list of collocates ±5 to the left and right of the lemma ‘‘Afghan’’:

**Figure 5**

*Collocates of the lemma "Afghan"*





As can be seen in Figure 5 above the Afghan refugees discussed their status in Pakistan. The use of “smuggler” adds high negativity to the identity of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. In addition, the term “million” is used to discuss the number of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan:

As it is, Pakistan has hosted millions of Afghans seeking refuge on its soil for the past four decades.” (07 July 2021)

An increasing number of Afghans have been amassing at the Pakistani border. Since the Taliban takeover, an increasing number of Afghans have been amassing at the Pakistani border, with the number of people crossing the Balochistan border going up from 6,000 to 20,000 daily (02 September 2021).

Furthermore, the increasing Afghan population in Pakistan is considered a problem for the economy of Pakistan:

Lack of resources notwithstanding, an additional wave of refugees would create several serious social, economic, and political challenges in Pakistan” (09 September 2021).

This stream of refugees will imperceptibly swell the number of people seeking protection in Pakistan posing both short-term and long-term problems regarding financing from domestic funds as the West is unlikely to offer much help.” (02 September 2021)

The two examples above represent two different metaphors: “stream” and “wave” are used to describe the unknown number of Afghan refugees approaching Pakistani borders after the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan. Their insurgency is considered a threat to the Pakistani economy and Pakistan's political and social situation.

## Hamariweb

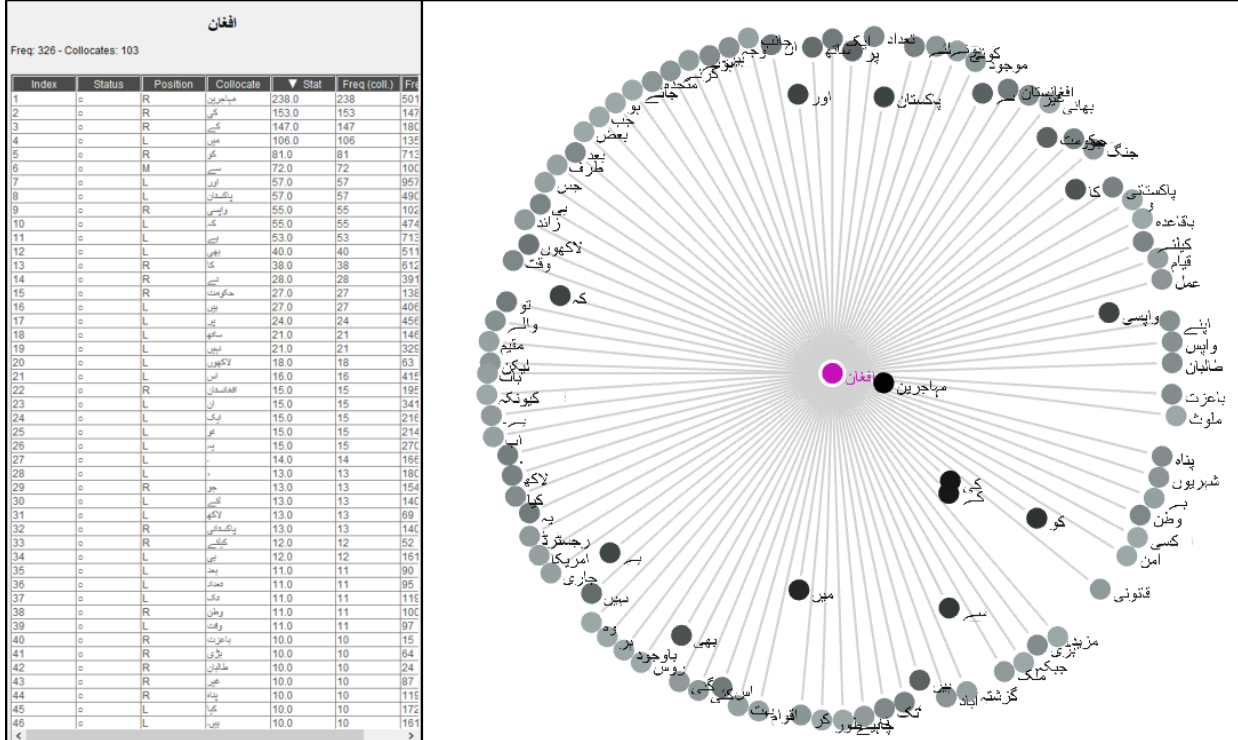
Hamariweb is an online Urdu language blog run by private bloggers. It has a list of options from where different contents of one’s interest can be accessed. It usually covers news about the daily news update, sports, culture, film and magazines, cooking and recipes, online shopping, and beauty tips.<sup>3</sup> The term “افغان” appeared 326 times in the corpus of Hamariweb. The other terms that appeared in the Hamariweb corpus are “پاکستان” (490), “ملک” (147), and 195) افغانستان. Figure 6 illustrates the collocates of the lemma “افغان”:

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<sup>3</sup> This blog can be accessed using the link: <https://hamariweb.com/#>

Figure 6

Collocates of lemma “افغان”



### The Introduction of Drugs and Kalashnikov Culture

Hamariweb blog seems more negative towards Afghan refugees and publishes articles mostly about their involvement in crimes and the impacts of their presence on Pakistani Culture:

یہ مہاجرین صرف کیمپوں تک محدود نہیں تھے بلکہ شہروں کے اندر بھی ہر جگہ نظر آتے رہے دکانوں بازاروں حتیٰ کہ ٹرانسپورٹ میں بھی ہر جگہ یہ افغان نظر آنے لگے اس میں کوئی شک نہیں کہ بیرونی امداد کے ساتھ ساتھ انہوں نے ہر قسم کی محنت مزدوری اور مشقت بھی کی لیکن ان مہاجرین کے ساتھ کچھ ایسی خرابیاں میں معاشرے میں در آئیں جن سے ہم آج تک چھٹکارا حاصل نہیں کر پائے مثلاً منشیات اور کلاشنکوف کلچر لیکن ان مہاجروں کو پھر بھی خندہ پیشانی سے پاکستان میں رہنے دیا گیا۔ روس تو افغانستان سے چلا گیا لیکن یہ مہاجرین افغانستان واپس نہیں گئے اور ان کی اولادیں بھی یہاں پیدا ہوئیں پلی بڑھیں لیکن انہوں نے اپنے ملک سے بھی رابطہ نہیں توڑا اور بڑی آزادی سے جب چاہا افغانستان پلی بڑھیں اور جب چاہا پاکستان آئے۔

(01 March 2015)

These refugees were not only confined to the camps but were also seen everywhere in the cities, shops, bazaars, and even in transport. Undoubtedly, these Afghans, along with foreign aid, did all kinds of hard labor. They worked hard, but with these refugees came into society some of the problems that people have not been able to get rid of, such as drugs and Kalashnikov culture, but these refugees were still allowed to stay in Pakistan with a smile on their faces. Russia left Afghanistan but these refugees did not return to Afghanistan and their children were born and raised there; they did not lose touch with their country and went to Afghanistan whenever they wanted and came to Pakistan whenever they wanted.

### **Afghan refugees as a Burden**

کئی برس سے وطن عزیز تن تنہا ان مہاجرین کا بوجھ اٹھائے ہوئے ہے، ان کی موجودگی کی وجہ سے پاکستان اپنی اقتصادی صورت حال پر کس قسم کے منفی اثرات پڑے ہیں۔ یہ کوئی ڈھکی چھپی بات نہیں (02 May 2016)

In the beginning, the international community continued to provide all kinds of assistance to the refugees, but for the last several years, the beloved homeland has been carrying the burden of these refugees alone. Their presence in Pakistan has badly affected the economy of the country.

### **Pakistanis' role as Ansar-e-Madinah**

افغان روس جنگ شروع ہوتے ہی افغان مہاجرین کی پاکستان آمد شروع ہو گئی اور قریباً پچاس سے ساٹھ لاکھ مہاجرین نے پاکستان میں پناہ لی۔ پاکستان نے انصار مدینہ کا کردار ادا کرتے ہوئے مہاجرین کو گلے سے لگایا اور ان کو اپنے کاروبار، رہائش اور خوراک میں برابر کا حصہ بنایا۔ (02 May 2016)

As soon as the Afghan-Russian war started, Afghan refugees started arriving in Pakistan and about five to six million refugees took refuge in Pakistan. Playing the role of Ansar-e-Madinah, Pakistan embraced the refugees and made them an equal part of its business, housing, and food.

### **Opportunists**

افسوس تب ہوتا ہے جب یہ لوگ پاکستان کو گالیاں دیتے ہیں پاکستان کا سب کچھ کھا پی کر اس پر تھوکتے ہیں۔ پاکستان سمیت، خلیجی ممالک میں کتنے افغانی ہیں جن کے پاس پاکستانی نیشنلٹی ہے، لیکن یہ نیشنلٹی صرف اپنے مفاد کے لیے انہوں نے رکھی ہے (11 August 2016)

It hurts when these people abuse Pakistan. They eat and drink everything from Pakistan and spit on it. Many Afghans in the Gulf countries, including Pakistan, have Pakistani nationality, but they have kept this nationality only for their benefit.

### **Terrorism followed their footsteps**

یہ حقیقت ہے کہ ان میں زیادہ تر لوگ پُر امن تھے لیکن انہی کی اڑلے کر دہشت گردوں نے پاکستان میں قدم رکھا اور آج بھی اپنی کاروائیوں کو کسی نہ کسی طرح جاری رکھے ہوئے ہی (16 June 2019).

It is a fact that most of them were peaceful but under their cover, the terrorists set foot in Pakistan and are continuing their operations in one way or another.

اکستان مہاجرین کو پناہ دینے والا دنیا کا سب سے بڑا ملک بن چکا ہے جہاں 30 لاکھ سے زائد افغان، ازبک اور نائیجرین مہاجرین میں مقیم ہیں جو ملک میں جاری انتہا پسندی، دہشتگردی، سمیت امن وامان کی خراب صورتحال کا موجب بن رہے ہیں (17 July 2015).

Pakistan has become the world's largest refugee-sheltering country, home to more than three million Afghan, Uzbek, and Nigerian refugees, contributing to the country's ongoing lawlessness, including extremism and terrorism.

### Conclusion

This study was designed to observe the behavior of the Pakistan online blogs while representing Afghan refugees. The results retrieved from the current study concluded that the Pakistani digital media usually blame Afghan refugees to be one of the causes of the economic and social problems in Pakistan such that they are blamed for the introduction of Kalashnikov and drug culture and terrorism in Pakistan.

The media used number games (*Million*, لاکھ, *thousands*, *Many*, etc.) to create fear of refugees (Baker et al. 2008). Also, the current study found two metaphors; *stream* and *wave* used to represent the unknown number of Afghan refugees (Baker et al. 2008). In addition, the bloggers used other metaphors such as *HaramKhor*, and *Burden* (بوجھ) to create a negative image of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. Adding further negativity, the bloggers employed certain negative slang or phrases to represent Afghan refugees such as (پاکستان کا سب کچھ کھا پی) (کر اس پر تھوکتے ہیں). Notably, the linguistic context of “them” in “ان میں زیادہ تر” *most of them*, “These” in “یہ لوگ” *these people*, and many other uses of such terms indicate that Afghan refugees are considered outsiders making troubles in their host country.

However, the metaphors of Islamic brotherhood and Ansaar-e-Medinah (انصارِ مدینہ) and the discussion of the cultural and lingual richness Afghan refugees brought with them showed some positive stances of bloggers to promote peace between the hosts and the refugees. The bloggers constantly praised the role of Pakistani people in facilitating the Afghan refugees and criticized them for not being grateful in return.

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