

The Effects of War on Terror on Pakhtun Nationalistic Identity in Pakhtu Poetry

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Abstract

The Pakhtuns have always been known as powerful, unruly marshal nation. But on the other hand they are also a highly poeticized nation with a rich store of literature. Applying the Reflection theory we can say that the Pakhtun literature, especially poetry, is a reflection of their collective unconsciousness with the predominant theme of the assertion of their strong nationalistic identity. From Khushal Khan Khattak, to Khudai Khidmatgar, to the contemporary poets, all have used poetry as a means of establishing their identity. But this identity has been jeopardized by the 'War on Terror' ensuing the 9/11 U.S attacks and the Afghan invasion by U.S. The subject matter of the Pakhtun poetic works post 9/11 has greatly changed. They deal mostly with the lamentation and dejection in the aftermath of the war. The theme of identity is lost in the shock of the terrorism and bellowing of the drone attacks. Moreover Pakhtun nation as a whole are being labelled in the wake of current terrorism as terrorists and extremists due to the rise of Taliban. Labelling theory states that the self-identity of individuals may be determined by the terms we use to classify them. In such social chaos the Pakhtuns stand at the peril of losing their true nationalistic identity and the contemporary poets now need more than ever to reassert that identity and show themselves as a brave nation that is standing resolute against the antagonistic waves.

Keywords: Pakhtuns, Nationalistic Identity, Pakhtu poetry, War on terror, Khudai khidmatgar, 9/11

Introduction

'Trust a snake before a harlot, and a harlot before a Pathan...'

(Kipling, 1960 [1901], p. 252)

Pakhtun is one of the most misunderstood people. The world in general carries a very biased view of the Pakhtun society because of their conservative culture and strict customs. They were only seen as brutes and associated merely with war fare activities.

'The Pathan is warlike and lives hard. He goes about armed, usually carrying a rifle with which he is a dead shot. In a pair of rope-soled shoes he is as agile as a cat and will cross steep mountain ranges as easily as other men walk along metalled roads' (Feldman, 1958, p. 48).

What they fail to realize is that the Pakhtuns are a highly poeticized nation. They have a rich store of literature, which is the product of their strong culture. If they carry gun in one hand, they hold roses in the other. The two basic elements run throughout its history of literature. A couplet from Seamus Heaney's poem "The Digging", taken in isolation, can be used to describe a Pakhtun writer very well;

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun

The Pakhtuns living on both sides of the Durand Line have had a turbulent history. From numerous internal clashes of different clans to defending themselves from western insurgencies, they have suffered all. That's why their literature mostly reflects cultural realities and social influences than having the luxury of indulging in "*art for art's sake*". Their literary expression ranges from social commentary to ideological revolutions to nationalistic determination of identity. But that is not to say that their literature is completely devoid of aesthetical creations, we have writers like Rahman Baba whose spiritual poetry "*in marked contrast to nationalistic and war-like poetry /.../ stands like a quiet oasis in the turmoil of violent struggle*" (Sampson, 2010, p. 126).

This paper seeks to show that the cultural mentality of Pakhtuns through 'Reflection Theory', as recorded from the resistance poetry of Khushal Khan Khattak to the nationalistic poetry of the Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, to the contemporary poets, deals with the establishment of their unique identity as nation that has been time and again threatened by the foreign influences due to their geo-political position on the world map. That's why Pakhtun literature has always served a strong political function along with the aesthetic function. At present that identity is at risk from the ever damaging effects of talibanization, as using through 'Labelling Theory' we see that after war on terror Pakhtuns were associated with Taliban because Afghan Taliban essentially are Pakhtuns. The article examines the delineation of the Pakhtun poetry highlighting the gradual changes in its predominant themes after the war on terror, with regards to the poetry of the contemporary Pakhtun literary canons and the need of using poetry in re-asserting the Pakhtun nationalistic identity.

Literature as a reflection of society

Literature and art are two important dimensions of the society by which a historian can take a measure of a particular time. In this regard literature of any society becomes its fictional history. Literature and society are both closely related and interdependent. Milton C. Albrecht in an article in *'The American Journal of Sociology'* explains this relationship of Literature and Society through '*Reflection Theory*'. According to the author it "emphasizes social and historical determinism instead of personal aspiration". The phrases "*expression of society*" or "mirror held up to society" all are synonymous to this idea.

According to DeVoto, *“Literature is a record of social experience, an embodiment of social myths and ideals and aims, and organization of social beliefs and sanctions.”* Thus literature is portraiture of society and all its ongoing elements.

Literature in general is the most influential way of understanding human lives and existence, and their experiences in relation to the society. *“Only the weak minded refuse to be influenced by literature and poetry”* (Clare, 2010). Though it is often dismissed by the society as the idle past time of lethargic people, literature continues to exert its force in creating, destroying and moulding societies. *“Because while truncheons may be used in lieu of conversation, words will always retain their power. Words offer the means to meaning, and for those who will listen, the enunciation of truth”* (V for Vendetta, 2006).

Thus through Reflection Theory we can argue that Pakhtun poetry reiterates the elements of its nation and society. It not only clarifies their aesthetic refinement but also highlights their “ideals and aims” and “social beliefs” as explained by DeVoto about the role of any literature. The Pakhtun poetry shows the “ideals and aims” of this nation to establish themselves as a free independent nation living a peaceful life in which their nation can thrive within their cultural norms.

Pakhtun poetry pre 9/11

In the early twentieth century when the subcontinent disintegrated into two nations, a Khudai Khidmatgar foundation was founded by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan to promote the ‘Pakhtunistan’ movement. In this period we see a highly politicized literature that reinforces the Pakhtun nationalistic identity laid bare by Khushal Khan Khattak (Kamil, D., M., 1988) that; *“All Pakhtuns, from Kandahar to Attock are one and the same overtly and covertly in respect of Nang (sense of honor).”* Literature here was used to raise the Pakhtun consciousness that demanded their freedom which in the face of the new emerging Pakistan felt threatened.

‘Pashtun nationalism, with its dual goal of freedom and development, was the hallmark of Pashtun political thinking at the turn of the century. A nationalist literary movement emerged advocating reassessment of the role of poets and intellectuals in the society, and the adaptation of old literary forms to new circumstances and audiences. Along with other literary forms, poetry was consciously employed to promote social and political goals. Poets felt an obligation to use their literary talent to present social and political ideas, to enlighten and inspire their readers with visions of human potential in a new age and a New World’ (Marwat, 2007).

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan led a non-violent movement. He published a Journal ‘Pukhtun’ with the aim to rouse the political, social, educational and cultural consciousness of the nation. *‘Literature thus became a principal means to promote modernization, communicate*

liberal and political ideas, and expose the atrocities of authoritarian regimes. The notion that poetry should only be taken as an aesthetic exercise, an art devoid of political advocacy, was rejected by a number of Pashtun poets' (Marwat, 2007).

A literary canon of this era is Abdul Ghani Khan, the son of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Ghani Khan imbibed the importance of Pakhtun nationalistic identity within himself from his father, *'he was a passionate devotee of freedom to whom the slavery of foreign domination was an anathema'* (Shahibzada, 2014). His poems exude the philosophy of Khudai Khidmatgars and are forever a source of inspiration for all freedom fighters. One of his most memorable poems *"The Will"* (Wasiat) is etched on a monument that's erected on the Pakistan's side of Wagha Border, it is a most eloquent expression of freedom and its struggle above all;

Though tombstones fine of bluish slate
Should ornament, adorn, my grave,
But I were to have died a slave,
Come, spit on and defile them!

His famous works includes *'De Panjray Chaghar'* (Chirpings of the Cage) which includes poems written during his incarceration (Oct 1950 – 1953), *'Palwashay'* (Beams of Light) and *'Panoos'* (Chandelier). His poetry is the poetry of the resistance and nationalistic individuality.

Ajmal Khattak,(2007) another literary giant of the era, also shows a courageous revolt against the despotic regime and incites youth to rebellion;

In my beautiful land
For the Pashtuns I want a love of life
Of beauty and fraternity
That alone is my destination
That alone is my Heaven
That alone I will pursue
For I do not like
The Mullah or the Khan
(Our Destiny)

Apart from Ghani Khan and Ajmal Khattak, other great literary products of this age who spoke against tyranny and conservatism are; Qalandar Momand, Hamish Khalil, and Abdur Raheem Majzoob to name a few. All these writers and poets raised their voice to defend the Pakhtuns and to safeguard its future and assert its nationalistic importance against the suppression of either 'the Mullah or the Khan'. They rose to be the vanguards of Pakhtun's identity.

The Soviet invasion in Afghanistan was a blow to the Pakhtuns as a foreign country directly came to conquer and subdue them. To fight off this insurgency the local militant groups, funded by U.S, Iran and China emerged. They were called the *Mujahideens*. This developing situation of survival of the Pakhtuns against Soviets brought new themes into the poetry of the Pakhtuns across the Durand Line. Kalashnikov became a motif in the arts and literature of the time.

‘After waiting and waiting for long, I can wait no more,
I think tomorrow I will take a Kalashnikov.
I have no respect even in my own house,
Now, with the Kalashnikov, I become chief in the area’ (Khan, N., M., 2001)

‘During this period, most writers diverted their attention from Islamabad to Kabul, and little or no space was left for others to talk about peace or democracy. Among the positive fallouts of the Afghan crisis were the cultural, economic and ideological osmosis of Afghan/Pashtun elements with other nationalities of Pakistan. Among the negative consequences were the growing tendencies towards *Mullahism*, extremism, militancy, sectarianism, the drug Mafia and the spread of the Kalashnikov culture in the entire country’ (Marwat, 2007).

Thus after the defeat of the Soviet invasion and the subsequent rise of Taliban in Afghanistan, the Pakhtun identity got lost in the quagmire of war and politics. The poetry of this era grappled with the sense of confusion and displacement. The themes of nationalism evaporated from the Pakhtun literature. The lamentation, resignation, and hopelessness seeps out of the poetry of this era;

‘It is not the same meadow it used to be,
Not the same homeland of old times,
It is not the same flower garden anymore,
Not the familiar verdant plain or the old musky land.
.....
There are corpses, funerals, and graves everywhere,
Killings, burials and wailing all over,
The love affairs have been forgotten,
Instead, there are floods of tears and infinite grief’
(The Gentle Breeze by Abdul Bari Jehani)

But the hardest challenge to the entire essence of the Pakhtun being was yet to come.

Pakhtun poetry post 9/11 incident

On 11th September, 2001, the whole world saw the destruction of World Trade Centre of United States of America. The responsibility of attack was accepted by Osama Bin Ladin as the head of Al-Qaida. It led to the attack on Afghanistan by American troops. Apart from political consequences of these attacks, the Pakhtun national identity was badly

damaged by the 9/11 attacks and the heinous acts of both U.S and Taliban. The Pakhtuns were censored worldwide because the Taliban were essentially identified as Pakhtuns and the Pakhtun nation itself from centuries has been known as warriors. Therefore, it was portrayed that the Pakhtun culture has violence within their basic schema.

The Pakhtun identity is an amalgamation of Pakhtun as a nationalist, Pakhtun as a Muslim, Pakhtun as a Pakistani. But after the rise of Taliban and subsequent terrorism initiated by them on the lands of Pakistan and Afghanistan, a new identity mark was added to them and that was of the Pakhtun as a terrorist. This was a shock to the Pakhtun nation as their very core was being distorted, the reliability of the Pakhtun's unwritten code of life; "Pakhtunwali" was put to question by the actions of the upstarts of Taliban and the political powers of the abroad. The Pakhtuns, though being a warrior nation, are principled and peaceful.

'The code of life of the Pashtuns shows that they are peace loving people. The ingredients of the Pashtun code are called Pashtunwali in tribal Pashtun setup and unwritten constitution by the orientalist. The basic elements of that particular unwritten constitution are Pashtunwali that calls for hospitality, brotherhood, cooperation and sacrifice. Pashtunwali played a vital role to create an atmosphere of peace and harmony in Pashtun society' (Khalil, 2012).

In sociology 'Labelling theory' states that self-identity and behaviour of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them. It engenders stereotyping. The Pakhtuns are being labelled terrorist and violent and unruly. By constant application of this label, they are expected to react that way. All that Pakhtuns stood for was being tested. Therefore the confusion and chaos is evident in the poetry of the time.

'If we are to understand the nature of war, and the impact it has on people, then we must examine other approaches to understanding, through, for example, literature... Any psychologist who tells you that they can only learn about human nature from reading a psychology journal article or textbook, without considering the contribution of a good novel, play or poem, is naïve' (Hunt, 2010, p. 3).

The world labelled the Pakhtuns across the Durand Lines; terrorists. But what they fail to understand is that if the Taliban, the perpetrators, are terrorists, then the victims of their terror are also Pakhtuns. From the first suicide bomb till present the lives lost have been mostly are of the Pakhtuns and in the Pakhtun lands. They are victimized. Thus, they recorded their indignation and condemnation through literature. The poetry of the modern times is testament to this fact.

According to a renowned Pakhtun poet, Rehmat Shah Sail (2012), "Poets are inspired by what is happening in the outside world. Their imagination absorbs it", he further adds; "That is why Pashto poets are writing about violence in one way or another." He expresses

his great dismay over the violence engulfing the city of Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in his beautifully heartfelt poem ‘City of Flowers’

When your pretty flesh is plucked like the petals of a flower
I watch in silence, for I have no power
When your precious blood is turned to drizzling rain
I perform your funeral rites with tears, for I have no power
O’ Peshawar! Our love is ancestral
I would never let you turn to smoke while I watch
O’ Peshawar! We share the blood of life, you and I
I’d never let you disappear while I watch
We are witnessing the force of history
O’ Peshawar! Bombs don’t suit you

Sorrow, dejection and helplessness is evident within the above poem. The poet says twice ‘I have no power’. The sadness is there but there is also condemnation of the reason of this prevailing sadness. Along with the wish ‘I would never let you turn to smoke’, ‘I would never let you disappear’. Here the Pakhtun is no longer acting as this strong marshal self, rather is shedding tears while his land and people are ripped apart. Instead of rising for the land that gave him his identity he laments and is stunned in the shock of the bombs. The very same is evident in the following poem by Ali Akbar Sayal;

Don’t snatch the pen from our hand
With which we make the picture of our dreams
Don’t create violence in our village
Don’t bring mayhem to our village
Don’t turn this ancient playground
Into a blood-red ammo dump

Here is a plea to the perpetrators to stop bringing violence and terror in their lands. It does not show action, it is a plea to power to stop suppressing them and depriving them of a beautiful life. The title of the poem ‘Don’t Create War in My Country’ says all.

Ali Akbar Syal, another famous contemporary poet, has written profusely about Pakhtuns ill fate with regards to the Afghan wars and U.S invasion after 9/11 attacks. His poetry portrays the voice of every affected Pakhtun and narrates that the Pakhtuns are not complacent with the current situation, they want peace and tranquillity. His most famous collections are “*Pa Jung de Oor Olagee*” (To Hell with War) published in October 2000, “*Da Perharoona Gundal Ghwaree*” (These Wounds Need to Be Stitched- 2005), “*Okhki Okhki Muskitub*” (Tear Torn Smile- 2008), “*Zamung Pa Kali k Fasad Ma Joravaye*” (Do not Create War in Our Country - 2009).

Along with lamentation, hatred has also strongly entered the contemporary poetry. Durwaish Durrani, poet and professor from Quetta, is of the view that; "It is not the poets' choice to write about war and violence, they are compelled to do so - to express their reaction and hatred to bloodshed". Quetta is also Pakhtun populated city and has suffered immensely from bomb blast to sectarian killings. Durrani shows his scorching hatred in the following lines;

When you motivate others, mostly youngsters,
you give them oath for their loyalty but you corner and spare yourself in this good cause.
When we are about to win the war you create a clash, a tussle between me and my brother and the rival escapes unharmed.
News of miseries and wounds are showered and Durwish is praying
God evacuate these red birds from my country

Hatred and chaos taking over the theme of nationality, identity in the Pakhtu poetry as Durrani's poem portrays and the same is evident in the following poem by Ameer Sadiq Jalbi Wal, a poet from Swabi, which presents a horrific picture of the city in the light of the blasts;

Black smoke has overspread and the atmosphere is of mourning
The country is being destroyed, there are problems and tribulations
The streets are hushed, no happiness anymore
Where should one go, the whole place is ablaze
It seems the city has suffered another bomb blast
For whom are these bombs made for, who are their targets

With the growing inhumane violations of the Taliban against the men, women and children of the state, the need to dissuade from the association of the masses from the Taliban as Pakhtun brothers has grown stronger and stronger. Ahmad Lamay (2009) has shown staunch revolt in his poem, 'To a Suicide Attacker', in which a victim of the suicide bombs confronts his attacker;

I'll ask you in the presence of God,
That in order to go to heaven
Why did you orphan my children?
Why did you widow a sick woman?
Why did you kill the son of an old lady?
Why did you kill the only brother of a weak girl?

The massacre of children at Army Public School on 16th Dec, 2014, was the deadliest and terror striking attack by the Taliban in which young defenceless children were targeted. It elicited extreme response from the masses and the masses and the literati raised their voices in unison against this violence.

Iqbal Shakir (2014), an emerging poet from Malakand, writes; “How can we fall silent during such a tragedy”, he further adds, “Peshawar is the cultural centre of Pukhtuns. No matter where we are in the world, our love for the city will not fade away. In fact, a massacre of this nature only brings them together.” A response like this from the Pakhtuns asserts this fact that Pakhtuns as a nation are not violence propagating vessels rather they want peace and stability in their region. Such events have completely changed the conventional symbols and cultural metaphors in poetry and given them new meanings. In the following poem the poet Shakir, has given reference of a famous Pakhtu song in which a beloved asks her lover to bring her *khol* from Peshawar. The poet shows that those peaceful times are gone where the only heartbreak presented in the poetry would be of separation of lovers.

I could not manage to bring *khol*
for your eyes from Peshawar
I am getting fed up of Peshawar
Last night, a mother asked her son in angst
Forget education and return from Peshawar

Using the imagery from the famous poetic scenes from Pakhtu poetry, the poets are trying to show the disparity and contrast of situation, thus highlighting the current anguish. A Pakhtun female poet living in America writes with a pseudonym Orbala (2014). She also takes the images from famous Pakhtu song in her poem;

My heart breaks, Mother, that it's raining death/
Today in Peshawar, Pashtuns' blood is being shed/
The tor kamis (shirt)
is now our coffin/
Beloved, come home – the fresh flowers have wilted and died/
The flower (child) has turned into ashes, every sound heaves a sigh/
Look at that mother over there; she'll yearn eternally for her child

Pakhtu poetry now needs a total rejection of political manipulations and needs to stop being the silent watchmen of the destruction of their identity. They need strong voices that would wake the government from their deep sleep by looking them in the eye and calling spade a spade. Israr Atal (2014), a famous and influential contemporary poet, in his following poem outlines that our government is corrupted, they are in league with foreign forces who are killing us through the hands of our own brothers;

A father's turbine, a brother's robe and a sister's veil is on sale,
Today for money, instead of us, our dignity is on sale
Even though it spills like water yet it's not cheap
For a dollar, the blood of my nation's child is on sale
They sold their dignity but the lust for wealth is not quenched
Our heads are ransomed, our leaders are on sale
We are battered sometimes in the name of Islam or in the name of peace

Our watchmen, our *Mulla*, our Member is on sale
We buy it for our brother and the brother for us
The weapons are of death and the merchant today takes our head on sale
Atal who do we look for to give us justice?
Our law, our court, our ruler is on sale.

The contemporary Pakhtun poetry therefore urges the authorities to become responsible towards their citizens and at the same time spreads the message of peace among their brethren as enough blood has been bled, enough lives have been lost.

The sorrow and grief, these black evenings,
Eyes full of tears and times full of sadness,
These burnt hearts, the killing of youths,
These unfulfilled expectations and unmet hopes of brides,
With a hatred for war, I call time and again,
I wait for peace for the grief-stricken Pashtuns
(Waiting for Peace by Zarlisht Hafeez)

The effects of war on terror on Pakhtu language

Language is an arbitrary and fluid medium which is very easily affected by the changes within that language community. In the wake of the aftermath of 9/11 attacks and the subsequent wave of terrorism and violence, Pakhtu language has acquired the vocabulary of those articles of violence because bomb blasts, suicide bombers, killings and drones have become part of day to day experiences of an average Pakhtun. The popular contemporary Pakhtu songs, absorb the violent vocabulary within their lyrics. Like the song sung by famous singer Sitara Younis (2014) says; "*The touch of my lips sweeten words. Intoxicating as wine are my looks. My gaze is as fatal as a drone attack*". Her another hit songs chastises a man with a darker vocabulary; "*Don't chase me, I'm a trick, I'm a suicide bomb.*" One of the songs by Nazia Iqbal (2014) shows the helplessness of a beloved in the following terms; "*My love, you are far away from me, and these drones will target you. I am helpless and can't stop them, and my tears are dropping from my eyes as if water is dropping from a spring.*" Another song by a contemporary singer relates; "*Your eyes are no less than a drone, they turned me into ashes, as I was facing them like a member of the Taliban.*"

Language is a means of establishing collective identity. Anderson (1985, p.207) noted that; 'Pakhtun speech is liberally sprinkled with *landay matluna* (proverbs), passages from Quran and references from hadith which punctuate ordinary discourse and discussion.' But the beauty of the Pakhtu language is blasted away by the bombs and drones. Now the Pakhtun identity and its language are standing at a perilous precipice of a cliff which caters nothing but annihilation and total destruction of all values in its abyss. There is dire need of eliminating the vocabulary of terror and producing poetry and literature that preserves our language and nationalistic identity for the future generations to come.

Conclusion

The Pakhtu poetry has always served as an avenue to establish the Pakhtun identity, both on macrocosmic level and microcosmic level. On macrocosmic level it has always strived to strengthen the nationalistic identity and on microcosmic level it has worked to nourish the individual self. Its predominant theme has always been reinforcement of its nationalistic self as the Pakhtuns always encountered adversary from the other nationalities. But after the commencement of War on Terror, the question of identity has been lost somewhere. There appears to be a chasm of loss of identity as the forces to be, keeps pushing Pakhtuns into becoming nothing but militants. The collective identity the Pakhtuns strived for centuries is blown to smithereens by the drone attacks where the individual Pakhtun looks around in dust at the chaos and bemoans only.

Excerpts from Pakhtun poetry over the years, ranging from the Khudai Khidmatgar till present, has been presented in the paper to show the change in poetic themes and poetic language. Pakhtun poetry has condemned terrorism, drone attacks and violence throughout but there is a need for Pakhtuns to re-assert themselves as a strong nation that has braved many adversaries and is ready to rebuild itself from the blown away scattered pieces of its nationalistic identity, which is the hallmark of its brilliance. Poetry has the capacity to re-determine the Pakhtun themes back into the atmosphere to be breathed by every man. The need of the time does not just demand condemnation and anger, rather it demands to channel that anger to make a statement that the Pakhtun nationalistic bulwark stands undeterred against the crashing waves.

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The War on Terror, also known as the Global War on Terrorism, is an international military campaign that was launched by the United States government after the September 11 attacks against the United States. The targets of the campaign are primarily Sunni Islamist fundamentalist armed groups located throughout the Muslim world, with the most prominent groups being Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, the Taliban, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, and the various franchise groups of the former two organizations. The 3) The Effects of War on Terror on Pakhtun Nationalistic Identity in Pakhtu Poetry. Author(s):Hina Habib and Jamil Ahmed Chitrali. Abstract : The Pakhtuns have always been known as powerful, unruly marshal nation. But on the other hand they are also a highly poeticized nation with a rich store of literature. Applying the Reflection theory we can say that the Pakhtun literature, especially poetry, is a reflection of their collective unconsciousness with the predominant theme of the assertion of their strong nationalistic identity. From Khushal Khan Khattak, to Khudai Khidmatgar, to the contempo