

## The popular Misconceptions about *Pashtunwali*

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### Abstract:

This paper is intended to discuss and articulate the popular misconceptions about the Pashtun code of life, "Pashtunwali" commonly known as "The way of Pashtuns". The established perspective is generated through the narratives and accounts of the orientalist and local Pashtun writers with substantial limitation of the historical and cultural process that ultimately describe Pashtunwali as a derivative of the Islam. The paper also narrates the limitations in the approach of the orientalist that lack the casual link of the cultural relativism. It strongly concludes with some of the suggestions and future action points for the scholars and researchers to understand and articulate Pashtunwali in totality.

**Key words:** Misconceptions, Pashtunwali, code of life, Islam, orientalist

The discourse on the origin of Pashtun and Pashtu has long been resonated in the annals of history. There are various theories [mostly] based on assumptions and hypothetical narrations. These theories are mutually contradicted. Dr. Habibullah Tazai, in his historical account. "Pashtanah" has simplified this phenomenon. "There are various theories mostly stemmed in assumptions and oral tradition that binds Pashtunas ZS lineage to the Mughals, Hebrews, Qubties, Haptalies, Sakans, Greeks, Jatts, Turkish, Arabs, Arminians, Tataries and so on"(1)

The origin of a nation has a direct connection to the language and culture. Charles Lindholm, the famous scholar and anthropologist writes that "Pashtun constitute the largest segmentary tribal system in the world."(2). The presentation of Pashtun culture, history and overall tradition in a typical stereotypical pattern has generated a dichotomy.

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At popular level, the theory of Pashtun as Israelites (Hebrews) by origin is highly famous. This version also inherits the hypothesis that, Pashtun as a nation was voluntarily converted into Islam. The meeting of the Pashtun forefather Qais with prophet of Islam, Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is considered as an objective historical reality that automatically condenses the history of Pashtuns.

“...the key point for the Pathans of the frontier is that they came into contact with Muslims during the life of the prophet, whom their original ancestor, Qais, sought out at Madina. He embraced the faith and was awarded the name Abdur Rashid, and his people thereafter were known as ‘Pathans.’”(3).

In this way the lineage of Pashtun is squeezed to the inception of Islam. This theory also negates the historical process through which the Pashtun culture was nurtured, diversified and groomed.

Analysis of most of the scholarly works and superficial assumptions regarding Pashtunwali unveils a dichotomous pattern. It is interesting to note that the indigenous and external scholars [orientalists and other non-Pashtuns], narrators, ethnographers, journalists, researchers and critiques have presented and interpreted Pashtunwali as a code of life that is stemmed solely in the teachings, customs and rituals of Islam. Most of the Pashtun writers presume this dichotomy as an objective reality and have supported the notions in their accounts. It is interesting to note that the initial writers and poets like Khushal Khan Khattak had presented spontaneous version of the Pashtun culture and people.

Pashtunwali is defined by various scholars; one of the most comprehensive definitions is phrased by J.W Spain, The Pashtu Word Pashtunwali translates well into English as “the way of Pathans” is universally agreed”(4). According to literature, Pakhtunwali is a distinctive code of ethics and behavior, dating back more than a thousand years, which is founded on several interrelated\_ Institutions and concepts.(5) According to Akber Ahmed “Pakhtunwali as essentially code of honor”(6). Similarly Fredrik Barth define Pakhtunwali as a practical code of life, he phrase it as “Doing Pashtu”.

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### **The Pashtun Scholar's Perspective:**

Analysis of Pashtun culture and literature shows that classical poets predominantly Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1689) has projected a strong self-image of Pashtun that boosted up their image as courageous, confident and owners of their own land and life. In his land marking account, "Dastarnama" he has elaborated twenty traits/abilities and twenty virtues of an Ideal Pashtun. His Ideal conditions for a single Pashtun to impart twenty abilities (Hunaroon) and twenty virtues (Khaslatoon). "Dastarnama literally means the book of turban, hence for the first time Khushal Khan sketched a Pashtun of his time that was importantly able to know the worth and respect of the Dastar or symbol of Pashtunwali"(7). This historical account was written by great Khan during his detention by Mughal in the prison of Ranthambor. Reckoned Pashtun scholar, Zulmai Hewad Mall writes that it was completed by Khan in 1645. He has further elaborated that Khan was not provided with the literary stuff and he has written all the account with the help of his strong memory"(8)

In this account, there are two chapters. The prelude of first chapter comprises Dasthaar (turban) and its significance similarly the prelude of second chapter uncovers the politics and in the context of Pashtunwali. In the first chapter Khan has put forward twenty abilities including behaviors, skills and knowledge. It includes Understanding the self, knowledge, literacy, poetry, war skills, swimming, riding horse, Hunting, Bravery, generosity, child training, research, livelihood means and skills, agriculture, wisdom of domestic affairs. About Political Leadership, the second chapter of "Dastarnama" caters, Consultation (Salah), Determination

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(Azam), Calmness (Khamoshi) , Righteousness (Rasthi), Virtue of modesty (Sharam wa Haya), courtesy (Murawath), Forgiveness (Afo wa Karam), Sense of good and bad (Thameez), Justice and equity (Adal wa Insaaf), Trust in God (Tawakal), Favor of close relatives, Modesty (Sahram), Fear and hope (Khowf wa Rija), Administrative sense, Courage(Himmat),Humility (Halam), Honor (Ghairat), farsightedness (Hazam), Alertness (Ahtiath), Obedience of the leader (Attath) and Seeking Forgiveness from Allah (Asthaghfaar)<sup>3</sup>.

Restoring the political and social dignity of Afghans (Pashtuns) was one of the highest motives and determination of Khushal Khan Khattak. A sense of the revival of Pashtunwali is cross cutting, both in his poetry and prose. Although Khan did not use the term “Pashtunwali” but the abilities and virtues shared are ascribed to the ordinary Pashtun.

The Khan’s perspective of Ideal Pashtun is stemmed in secularism and the concrete socio-cultural, political and economic realities. In the twenty abilities, skills and virtues are of universal nature and there are no particular religious duties ascribed by Khan for an Ideal Pashtun.

The glimpses of Ideal Pashtun as warriors, courageous, patient, independent, free, loving, caring, insightful, enduring and above all committed to the collective code of Pashtun way of life is even reflected in the poetry of classical poet of Rahman Baba (1650-1715), Hameed Mashokhail(1735death), Kazim Khan Shaida (1727-1780) Particularly Khushal Khan and Hameed Mashokhail have established “Mughulwala<sup>4</sup>” as an anti-culture of the “Pashtunwali”.

The Pashtun/Afghan writers after the classical period have come with another version of the description of Pashtunwali. It is

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composed of the description of mutually contradicted practices, traits and values through a peculiar subjective fashion.

The Pashtun writers of the 20th century have particularly used the term “Pashtunwali”. We find an exclusive account of the scholar Qayamuddin Khadim on the subject of “Pashtunwali”.

This account interestingly starts from war and Pashtuns. The oral quotes and some of the stories regarding wars are presented in a romantic fashion. The first chapter starts with the title; “Sword” then is followed by “Rules of War” and “Daarah<sup>5</sup>”. It is interesting to note that at one stage Pashtunwali is connected to Islam, the social spirit of Pashtun is stemmed violence/martial activities, Pashtunwali has rules of war but the practices like “Daarah” (Attack on enemy during the night time) are there that violates these rules practically.

According to Khadim’s account, “Pashtunwali is a composite term that encompasses the collective national spirit, historical pride and all customs of Pashtuns”(9).

The account reflects social and familial life, Gender roles, relations and importantly the response of Pashtun towards non Pashtun. The social institutions of Jirga, consultations and family unit are discussed in detailed. The second chapter comprises the laws and rights that mainly describe the essence of Jirga and the traditional mechanism of conflict resolution.

This account in general has no critical comments about the traditional ways of Pashtuns. The connotation is mainly definite and romantic with respect to the traits, customs, laws and rules. It has neglected the contradiction within the culture regarding injustices and violence on the neglected factions of the society particularly women, children, minorities and social minorities.

Gul Muhammad Mohmand, another Afghan scholar and literary activist has described Pashtunwali as inevitably present in

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every event of the Pashtun national, social and individual's life. His paper published by 'Kabul Amoomi Muthbooa' in a booklet shape presents Pashtunwali in an idealistic pattern. It is described in the short statements like, Pashtu is freedom"(10). Pashtu is strength"(11). Pashtu is resistance"(12). Pashtu is ruling" (13). Pashtu is dignity "(14). ...Pashtu is faith"(15). Pashtu is motherland" (16)

This account is written under the influence of writer's deep emotional connection to the people, culture and land of Pashtun. Therefore, the overall account has a selective and preconceived interpretation that is rooted in the adore, inspiration and admiration of Pashtu and Pashtunwali. The account is written in a conformist pattern and has no objectivity with reference to Pashtun culture in totality.

Abdul Hai Habibi (1910-1984) the reckoned Pashtun scholar has viewed the matter of Pashtunwali in a pure scholastic lens. In this account,"Pashto and Pashstuwali" his conscious efforts are reflected to remain objective. He has strived to understand and articulate Pashtunwali on the basis of its collective psychology. In his research paper published in a booklet form has elaborated that collective psychology is further studied under the themes of virtues (Akhlaq) and rationality (Aqliyat)(17).

In this account he has discussed the ways of Pashtuns in totality. In this connection analysis of language, poetry, folk quotes, folk stories and the oral tradition in general has been discussed. He narrates that a particular culture prospers and nurtures through the two leading factors Inheritance (Warasat) and the geography/physical surrounding (Muheeth). Habibi's approach is objective and based on the scholastic evidences through an in-depth analysis of the cultural and anthropological stock.

The non-Pashutn writers and scholars in this regards have viewed the Pashtun and their way of living through a tunnel vision of orientalism and careerism. Due to the missing links of cultural relativism, a contrast has been observed across the board in their accounts. Charles Lindholm has deeply studied the contrast in the

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reports, memoirs, journals and books written by the British colonial administrators, spies, anthropologists etc. “Contrasts in the British colonial view of Pathan character are the norm rather than the exception. In official reports they were viewed either as brave and honorable, or as treacherous scoundrels, as the quotes demonstrate.”(18).

This contrast is perpetuated down from the initial writers like Mount Stuart Elphinstone, Mason, Kipling, and Lady Sale to the cadres of the mid era and orientalist of the later days in the British India. It includes Winston Churchle, Major Roveri, Dr. Value, Isac Bruce, Potinger, J.W Spain, Sir Olaf Caroe that have articulated Pashtun ways of living through their individual interaction in peculiar time and space. Like the interaction of Winston Curchile and Lady Sale and that of the J.W Spain and Sir Olaf Caroe has a definite contrast in terms of their interaction canvas, context and the mode of relationship.

### **Reconstructing the Frame:**

The study of Pashtun’s way of life has been diversely interpreted and perceived. There are some common features amongst the writers and researchers that confirm some of the traits, practices and activities as integral parts of the Pashtunwali. It includes the customs of hospitality, retaliation, revenge, collective violent action against the external invaders and egalitarian values that are practiced and endorsed by the Pashtuns of different parts. The overall discourse revolves around the way Pashtun react and act. There are little scholastic endeavors that can deeply analyze the Pashtun tradition beyond symptomatic level. As the local scholars reduce the history and evolution of Psthun culture through connecting it to the inception of Islam and conversion of the Pashtun imaginary forefather Qais Abdul Rasheed. The young archeologist Rafi Ullah has precisely defined it in a relatively holistic context. “As a matter of fact, Pakhtunwali has evolved from the phenomenal historical developments in terms of religion, politics and culture in the Pakhtun land. The fact is supported by Aryan, Zoroastrian, Hindu, Buddhist and Graeco-Roman remnants in the Pakhtun culture. Philosopher-poet Ghani Khan, son of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, observes, "Each race has contributed something to

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his virtues and vices, looks and beliefs, religion and love-songs." This fact clearly dichotomies the religion of Islam and Pashtunwali and, thus, all efforts of devising compatibility between the two lose weight"(19).

It is important to note that, the Pashtun code of life should be studied in holistic socio-political, religious, secular, economic, legal and educational contexts. The psyche of the contemporary Pashtun society is evolved in the wake of historical process, the evolution has added a lot to the learning and wisdom of this nation. The study of the Pashtunwali through an objective, factual and research paradigm is the need of the time. The paradigm that can go beyond the available text in terms of memoirs, histories, reports, war diaries, fiction, films and books written. An objective analysis of the folk cultural romance narratives, folk poetry especially folk feminist poetry will unveil the secular, tolerant, egalitarian and practical frame of Pashtunwali. The Pashtun people and societies have always been used as object research repositories; the aliens have always interpreted them through their tools that most of the time ineffective due to the cultural contrast, technical aberrations, time and resource constraints.

As Pashtun land host the most disastrous and complex war on terror, and the accounts of the political scientists and journalists, while using the historical accounts about Pashtun and their culture once again connect a violent version of political Islam with Pashtunwali.

An in-depth anthropological study will nullify the myths like declaring Pashtun as a martial race and violence is imbedded in the Pashtun blood and they are warriors by birth.

At this stage, anthropologists, ethnographers, journalists, researchers and scholars are required to understand and articulate the realities through the eyes, ears and hearts of the people and societies that have been made irrelevant and are always silent about their history, tradition, knowledge and wisdom, that help them in living ordinary human being on the face of earth.

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