

Understanding Pashtunwali and the Manifestation of Pashtun Nationalism in Pakistan: A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract

This paper describes the key elements of Pashtunwali and the manifestation of Pashtun nationalism, especially in Pakistan. This study on Pashtun nationalism finds that Pashtunwali is a centuries-old primordial customary code of life and it is important in the context of nationalism as it strengthens the sentiments and feelings of closeness and affinity; central to the phenomenon of nationalism, among the Pashtuns. This paper also highlights two different aspects of Pashtun nationalism in Pakistan. In

Key Words

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the formative phase of Pakistan's independence, the stance of Pashtun nationalists was more inclined towards the idea of a separate state for the Pashtuns. However, as a result of various factors; including state policies, currently the manifestation of Pashtun nationalism has adopted the internal dimension of highlighting and struggling for the rights of the Pashtuns in the ambit of the Pakistani constitution and by remaining an integral and constitutional part of the country.

Introduction

This paper describes the key elements of Pashtunwali generally and the manifestation of Pashtun nationalism particularly in the context of Pakistan. To understand the subjective and value-laden nature of the term, the paper provides a conceptual and historical base to introduce the different dimensions of nationalism. This study on Pashtun nationalism finds that *Pashtunwali* is a centuries-old primordial customary code of life of the Pashtuns and it is important in the context of nationalism as it strengthens the sentiments and feelings of oneness; central to the phenomenon of nationalism among the Pashtuns. In the context of Pakistan, this paper highlights two different aspects and the manifestation of Pashtun nationalism. In the formative phases of independence, the stance of Pashtun nationalists was more inclined towards the idea of a separate state for the Pashtuns. However, with the passage of time and as a result of various factors; including state policies, currently, the manifestation of Pashtun nationalism has adopted the internal dimension of highlighting and struggling for the rights of the Pashtuns in the ambit of the Pakistani constitution and by remaining an integral and constitutional part of the country. This paper has been divided into four sub-sections: 1.1) Understanding the Conceptual Base of Nationalism; 1.2) The Key Elements of *Pashtunwali*; 1.3) The External and Internal Manifestation of Pashtun Nationalism in Pakistan and 1.4) Conclusion.

Understanding the Conceptual base of Nationalism

Theories help in making complex phenomena understandable, by creating causal relationships among various variables. A good theory needs to perform three main functions regarding a phenomenon and these are description, explanation, and prediction. It means that first, the phenomenon under investigation is described and introduced. After the description, a detailed explanation is provided by analyzing the various aspects of it comprehensively. Then, based on the given explanation some predictions are also made regarding the future trends of the phenomenon. Keeping in view the complexity of human society, a single theory cannot explain all aspects of social phenomena. Due to this reason, theories need to be applied according to the demand of the situation and suitability of time. Stephen Walt believes that “No single approach can capture all the complexity of contemporary world politics. Therefore, we are better off with a diverse array of competing ideas rather than a single theoretical orthodoxy.” (Walt, 1988). Broadly, there are two main schools of thought in social sciences regarding the formation of theories which are:

- i) Objectivist School of thought
- ii) Subjectivist School of thought

The Objectivist school of thought advocates that; like exact sciences, the social realities can also be described, explained and predicted scientifically and objectively. They believe in the objectivity of reality and therefore emphasize the application of scientific methods to follow the objective truth. On the other hand, the subjectivist school of thought advocates that theory and the phenomenon that it investigates, cannot be separated from one another. The belief system and the socialization of a theoretician and researcher have an impact on his preferences regarding a specific subject. These theoretical debates need to be noted to follow the forthcoming portions of the paper on nationalism generally and the manifestation of Pashtun nationalism specifically in the context of Pakistan.

Despite the lack of clear and concrete definitions, the forces of nationalism have always been very important in shaping the nature of national and international politics. The academic use of the term nationalism is a recent practice. Its use mainly started in the backdrop of the important Treaty of Westphalia of 1648. This Treaty provided the main principles and foundations for the establishment of a system of sovereign states in Europe and the same system then spread to other parts of the world as a result of European colonialism supported by technological advancements and industrial revolution. The treaty of Westphalia was then followed by the other two important developments in Europe in the 18th century: the French Revolution and the American War of Independence.

With both the aforementioned developments, the academic use of the term nationalism started. For instance, the French Revolution advocated the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity for the people of France based on shared national symbols in response to a totalitarian system of absolute monarchy organized around the idea of Divine right to rule. Consequently, the ideas of a shared national identity and national symbols started promoting in Europe culminating in the strength of French Nationalism in Europe which is clear from the rapid and surprising victories of the French armies; having nationalist fervor, in the Napoleonic Wars, fought in the early 19th Century Europe. The ideas of the French Revolution had an impact on other states of Europe with which French Armies came in contact. Similarly, the American War of Independence; as a struggle against the colonial might of Britain, emphasized the ideas of popular sovereignty and representative form of government. With these developments, the Westphalian system of states got a new aspect of nation-states based on the assumption that people, living inside a state, share national identities and a sense of oneness among each other. Due to the dominant European position in world politics in the 19th century and immense European imperial interests in the rest of the world contributed to the spread of the ideas of nationalism linked with a nation-state.

The decolonization Movements of the 20th century in the colonies of the European states were also inspired by the emergence of nationalism in the native population of colonies for the demand of independence, based on the premises of the right to self-determination. In most of the colonies, there was a violent struggle between the native people aspiring for independence and in some cases; like Pakistan and India, the goal of independence was achieved through a constitutional and political struggle against the imperial power. Similarly, Vietnam had to pass through a long protracted war to attain unity, freedom, and independence first from its colonial master, France and then fighting against the United States of America. The Vietnamese guerrilla fighters, armed with nationalist commitment, finally succeeded in achieving unity and independence for their country.

In the post-Cold War era, new dimensions have been added to both national and international politics. The disintegration of the USSR resulted in ending the bipolar international order and consequently in its replacement by a single superpower i.e. the United States of America, thereby making the international system unipolar. To explain the complexities of the post-Cold War international society, scholars in the field of social sciences presented new paradigms to comprehend and predict the nature of international politics marked by the phenomena of globalization at international level and the emergence of ethno-nationalist movements inside the nation-states regarding its population to be a single nation. Samuel P. Huntington's famous work on "Clash of Civilizations" (Huntington, 1997) has been written in this backdrop in which the author has highlighted that in the post-Cold War era, cultural and religious identities would become more visible and conflicts and clashes would not be for ideologies rather conflicts among states would get cultural, nationalistic, and religious color.

In the context of the foregoing discussion, it is pertinent to have a look at the definitions of nationalism; from different angles, provided by different scholars in their classic works. Through this analysis, it is aimed to come up with a relatively agreed definition of nationalism for this study on Pashtun nationalism in Pakistan.

Prof. Anthony Smith has defined nationalism as an ideological movement aimed at attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity for a population that deems itself to be a nation (Smith, 2001). This definition highlights the political aspect of nationalism by emphasizing three key indicators: autonomy, unity, and identity. He believes that, for nationalism, it is necessary that members of that group strive for

political autonomy and at the same time they need to have unity and a feeling of common identity among themselves. For Prof. Smith, a nation-state is a state, claiming to be a nation. Similarly, Ernest Gellner believes that nationalism is a principle according to which the political and national units should be congruent. (Gellner, 2006) It means that it is necessary that a political unit, like a state, should have a single cohesive national unit i.e. one nation. These definitions, point towards the political aspects of nationalism.

On the other hand, nationalism can also be defined as an intense feeling of pride for one's nation. This pride is a result of shared history and other socio-cultural commonalities. It suggests that even in a single political unit; like state, there can be different nations, provided if these different groups have a strong feeling of attachment with their respective group. Such definitions of nationalism are helpful in understanding ethnic nationalism i.e. a shared sense of pride in an ethnic group within a state claiming itself to be a nation-state. This ethnic nationalism can become violent if the ethnic group aspires to carve out a separate state for itself from the state in which they are currently placed. For instance, in the case of Pakistan, different ethnic groups: Baluchs, Sindhis, and Pashtuns believe in their versions of ethnic nationalism. However, it does not mean that ethnic nationalism always leads to violent political movements rather it can be limited only to a shared feeling of pride among the members of the group.

In addition to the definitions of nationalism, it is also pertinent that the two main theories of nationalism are briefly discussed which are: Modernism, and Primordialism.

The theory of modernism argues that nationalism is a recent/modern phenomenon that has its roots in developments such as the Industrial Revolution in Europe, the French Revolution and the American War of Independence. Ernest Gellner is the main proponent of this school of thought. He believes that to achieve economic success, societies need to have cultural homogeneity. As a result, in response to the rapid changes being posed by the Industrial revolution, different nationalistic symbols were created in European societies through top-down control. Similarly, Benedict D. Anderson believes that nations are "imagined communities"(Anderson, 2006) which means that a nation is, in reality, a mental construct created through social construction. This school of thought ignores the importance of historical ethnic and cultural roots that is one of the main criticisms of this theory.

On the other hand, the primordial school of thought of Antony D. Smith argues that the phenomenon of nationalism has its roots in pre-modern times and for the factors such as common language, history and even place of birth have importance in the creation of affinity among a segment of the population. Ethno-symbolists among the primordialists emphasize the importance of common ethnic symbols, like traditions, myths and customs of a community. Smith believes that ethnic belonging has strong roots and it has contributed to the phenomenon of nation formation (Smith, 2001. P.2). Ethno-symbolism is sometimes considered as a middle ground between modernism and primordialism.

The Key Elements and of *Pashtunwali*

Pashtunwali refers to the code of conduct, according to which the Pashtuns behave and act in their society. It is not a strict legal code rather it has a customary nature. As a result of living together in their homeland for centuries, the Pashtuns have developed these practices, habits, and ways of life which are collectively referred to as *Pashtunwali*. Pashto is not merely a language that the Pashtuns speak rather doing Pashto also means leading one's life according to the requirements and principles of *Pashtunwali*. This feature signifies the uniqueness of Pashto language that it acts as a language and a code of conduct simultaneously. The roots and development of *Pashtunwali*, date back to centuries and its even pre-Islamic. With the advent of Islam to the Pashtun region, the Pashtuns adopted Islam as their religion and since then there has been an overlap between the Islamic teachings and the Pashtun culture. The main pillars of *Pashtunwali* are *Melmastya* (hospitality), *Badal* (revenge), *Nanawatay* (providing asylum), *Tarboorwali* (agnatic rivalry), *Siyali* (competition within an extended family), *Nang* (honor), *Namus* (chastity of women) and *Jirga* (council of the elders). To understand the dynamics of the problems related to the Pashtuns and the region in which the Pashtuns live, it is pertinent that the complexities of *Pashtunwali* are carefully understood. The research of the western authors about the Pashtuns has helped in the reinforcement of the stereotypes regarding the Pashtuns. The forthcoming discussion highlights the various aspects of *Pashtunwali*.

Melmastya (hospitality) has been derived from the word *melma* which means a guest in Pashto. It is one of the central and essential elements of *Pashtunwali*. It means that the Pashtuns treat their guests with hospitality. The concept of *Melmastia* is broader than the concept of hospitality in the western world. The hospitality of the Pashtuns is irrespective of the economic status, religion, and race of the guest. Even if the enemy of a Pashtun comes to his home for the refuge, it becomes obligatory upon the host to offer protection to the enemy at that time which means that even *melmastya* takes precedence over *badal* (revenge), another

important aspect of *Pashtunwali*. For instance, Elphinstone once remarked, in the early 19th century that “The most remarkable characteristic of the Afghans is their hospitality. The practice of this virtue is so much a point of national honor that their reproach to an inhospitable man is that he has no *Pashtunwali*” (Ali, 2013).

Badal (reciprocity, revenge) is another important pillar of the customary code of *Pashtunwali*. It means that the Pashtuns never forget any insult or harm inflicted upon them. They respond at the opportune time to take their *badal*. The *badal* is often based on the principle of reciprocity. It means that an insult can be reciprocated with the same kind of insult. Similarly, the revenge of a murder is to be reciprocated with a murder. It means that *badal* can only be ended with a *badal*. However, at the same time, *Pashtunwali* also has a value of *Nanawatey* (sanctuary) forgiveness. It means when the offending person accepts his mistake and genuinely asks for forgiveness. There have been numerous instances where the offended family/tribe has forgiven the wrong deeds of a wrongdoing person if he has genuinely asked for forgiveness.

Besides *melmastya* and *badal*, *Tura and zrawartya* (bravery and courage) are other important aspects of *Pashtunwali*. It means that a Pashtun needs to be brave and courageous. He needs to manifest his bravery and courage in times of war and turmoil. The folk literature of the Pashtuns has beautifully highlighted this tenet of *Pashtunwali*. Such literature in the form of various folk songs and poetry manifests that in a Pashtun society not only men are brave and courageous but the Pashtun women are also brave, courageous and strong.

Jirga (Council of elders) is the conflict resolution mechanism of Pashtun society. The elders of the *Jirga* are the prominent people of the tribe who are well versed in the local ways of life, often regarded as *Narkh* (local customs). The institution of *Jirga* is common among all the Pashtuns living in different areas, whereas, the *Narkh* of every tribe is different, depending upon the local customs and traditions of that specific Pashtun tribe. This assembly of elders has been instrumental in the resolution of disputes among the Pashtun. The main reason for the relevance and importance of *Jirga* has been due to the inefficiency of state institutions to respond to these people mostly living in tribal settings on both sides of the Durand Line in the states of Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the absence of efficient state institutions of conflict resolution, the informal institution of *Jirga* has been very important in the resolution of the disputes of the tribal Pashtuns.

Tarborwali (agnatic rivalry) and *Siyali* (competition in the extended family) are other important aspects of *Pashtunwali*. These tenets make the Pashtun society often very much competitive. The term *Tarborwali* is derived from the word *Tarbor* which means the first cousin. In the Pashtun context, *Tarborwali* is a philosophy for engagement among the cousins in a family. The negative aspect of *Tarborwali* is a relationship based on hatred and jealousy whereas on the positive side for external threats, the cousins are united and they are a strength of each other. *Siyali* refers to the positive emotions of competition in Pashtun society.

Nang and Namus (honor and the protection of the chastity of women) are also considered as important principles of *Pashtunwali*. A Pashtun never compromises on his honor and pride. In terms of wealth, he might be poor but in terms of honor and pride, he considers himself to be equal to the wealthiest person of the society. An important aspect of a Pashtun's honor, is the protection of the chastity of women of his family, thereby generally making it obligatory for the Pashtuns to be respectful to women in society.

Though this discussion has not highlighted all the aspects of *Pashtunwali* yet it has given an idea about the central values that the Pashtuns adhere to in their tribal settings. The next sub-section of the paper deals with the external and internal manifestation of Pashtun Nationalism.

The External and Internal Manifestation of Pashtun Nationalism in Pakistan

This section focuses on understanding the manifestation of the phenomenon of nationalism in the Pashtuns of Pakistan. Pashtun Nationalism in Pakistan mainly has had two dimensions: internal and external. In the first phase, after independence, the then Pashtun leadership under the influence of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan favored, having a separate homeland for the Pashtuns of Pakistan. With the Passage of time, this struggle of the Pashtun leadership for a separate state for the Pashtuns of Pakistan transformed into that of integration in the state structure. The forthcoming discussion analyzes the factors responsible for this transformation.

Pashtun nationalism in the areas of Pakistan is a pre-partition phenomenon which mainly started as a result of the anti-colonial struggle of the Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his movement of *Khudai Khidmatgar*, a peasant movement, which aspired for the awakening of the Pashtuns, revival of their lost glory and bringing social reforms in the Pashtun society. The nationalist project initiated in Afghanistan by Amir Abdurrahman (1880-1901) and kept continued by his successors Habibullah (1901-1929) and Amanullah Khan (1919-1929) also had an impact on the Pashtuns of Pakistan (Khan, 2003). This project mainly aimed at bringing a collective national consciousness in the people of Afghanistan thereby attempting to form a collective national identity. To achieve this goal such national symbols as: Pashto as national language, national anthem,

Bozkashi as national sport and *Attan* as national dance was re-imagined to give the Pashtuns of Afghanistan their own national identity, as some advocates of nationalism believe that for nationalism, the presence of national history is not necessary rather the creation of new national history is needed. This project proved successful to a greater extent but it was hampered by the divisive resistance of the landlords, backed by Britain, in response to the Centralization policies of King Aman Ullah Khan whereby he tried to have centralized control over the state's revenue. The creation of Ghaffar Khan's *Khudai Khidmatgar* in 1929 was a consequence of these developments which had been happening across the Durand Line.

This secular and social movement attempted to raise consciousness among the Pashtun masses about anti-colonialism, education, equality, and non-violence. Additionally, it also sought for the redistribution of the lands held by the rich landlords as a result of their loyalty with the British colonial masters. The message of this movement was well-received among the Pashtun masses and, as a result, in the areas of N.W.F.P, the Congress Party allied with the *Khudai Khidmatgar* won both the elections of 1937 and 1946. At the Political Front, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, also dubbed as the Frontier Gandhi, had an alliance with the All India National Congress in N.W.F.P and he also agreed with and believed in the anti-colonial and anti-partition stance of the Congress under the leadership of Gandhi. After winning elections in 1946, Dr. Khan Sahib, brother of Ghaffar Khan, became the Chief Minister of the N.W.F.P. The performance of the Muslim League in the elections was not satisfactory. As a result of the *Khudai Khidmatgar* threat, most of the powerful landlords, desiring to maintain their status quo and position of strength, had joined the All India Muslim League, a party backed by the colonial masters who had finalized the plan of partition. The Muslim League, as a political party struggled for the partition of the sub-continent in the form of a separate state for the Muslims of the sub-continent.

The Congress leadership of the Pashtuns could not correctly judge the broader political developments occurring in the sub-continent. They were taken by surprise when the All India Congress agreed to the program/plan of the partition of India. The N.W.F.P did not automatically become part of the newly independent Muslim state of Pakistan. It became a province of Pakistan through a referendum whereby a majority of the inhabitants voted in favor of living in Pakistan instead of India. The Pashtun leadership of N.W.F.P under Ghaffar Khan, already anti-partition, had reservations about the choice being given to the Pashtuns in the referendum. They believed that the Pashtuns should have been given the choice of whether they wanted to be in Pakistan or they wanted a separate state of their own with the name of *Pashtunistan*, land of the Pashtuns.

After the independence of Pakistan, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his brother the Saheb Khan, the Chief Minister of N.W.F.P softened their stance of *Pashtunistan* by giving it a domestic perspective which meant that the Pashtuns, constituting the majority of the Province, should be given provincial autonomy. In 1948, Ghaffar Khan took the oath of allegiance to the state of Pakistan. However, the nationalist idea of *Pashtunistan* was perceived as a serious threat by the newly formed state of Pakistan due to two main reasons. Firstly, it was based on arousing and appealing the national consciousness of the Pashtun masses of the province and secondly, it was supported by the neighboring state of Afghanistan with the Pashtun majority and already having an irredentist claim on the Pashtun majority areas now forming part of Pakistan. Due to this reason, Afghanistan voted against the admission of Pakistan into the United Nations as a sovereign state. Afghanistan does not recognize the Durand Line as an international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The newly established state of Pakistan, confronted with the challenge of Pashtun nationalism and Afghan hostility, had to make strategies to overcome these two main challenges with domestic and international roots.

Consequently, the decision-makers of the newly formed state adopted a strict centralized approach towards this threat with little room for provincial autonomy particularly for a province of strategic importance bordering the tribal areas of Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan. This approach led to the dismissal of the Congress government in the N.W.F.P and installing the government of the Muslim League, a party that represented the rich local landlords. Additionally, the Muslim League attempted to weaken the nationalist appeal by engaging the *Mullah*, clerics, for propagating against Congress and in favor of the new state created in the name of Islam. Furthermore, Ghaffar Khan's property was confiscated in 1956 and kept in imprisonment and house arrest until his death in 1978. Similarly, at the international and diplomatic front in 1970s, Pakistan tried to counter the stance of Afghanistan about Durand Line and the issue of *Pashtunistan*. These efforts helped in weakening the external manifestation of Pashtun nationalism in the province of N.W.F.P. However, the struggle of the Pashtun nationalist parties such as Awami National Party (A.N.P) and Pakhtunkhwa Mili Awami Party (PkMAP) has been going on after the death of Ghaffar Khan and continue till date.

Conclusion

The study concludes that *Pashtunwali* and Pashto language play an important role in helping the Pashtuns of Pakistan to have a sense of shared values and as a result, it is a cementing force for Pashtun nationalism. Pashtun nationalism; in the context of Pakistan, has manifested itself in two different dimensions. In the initial and formative phases of the country, the Pashtun nationalist parties were more inclined towards the struggle of having a separate sovereign state for the Pashtuns. However, with the passage of time, this stance has diluted to that of struggling and highlighting the rights of the Pashtuns in the framework of the Pakistani Constitution. The struggles of Pashtun nationalists in this regard continue until today in various shades and colors.

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