

Identity of Pashtuns and Orientalist Generalizations: A Critical Study of Husseni's *The Kite Runner* and Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone*



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Abstract: *The representation of Pashtuns has been a subject of media discourses and scholarly debates. Their identity is generally caricatured and stereotyped by the interested sections for their vested interest and they are depicted as violent, savage, warmongers and uncivilized people. The present study critically analyzes such stereotyped image and essentialized identity of Pashtuns in Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone* (2014) and Khaled Husseni's *The Kite Runner* (2003). The study contends that the image of Pashtuns created in the novels is caricatured and stereotyped. The study is qualitative and conducted under the theoretical framework of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and supported by the cultural and historical materials about Pashtuns. The study concludes that the representation in the novels is an attempt of the racial profiling of Pashtuns and constructing their stereotyped identity which is based on the orientalist generalizations about them.*

Keywords: Identity, Pashtuns, Orientalism, Stereotypes and Racial Profiling

Pashtuns' Ambivalent Identity Construction: An Historical Overview

As an ethnic group with a rich cultural legacy and history, Pashtuns have frequently been the target of stereotypes and generalized identity that oversimplify them. They have been represented differently by different powers whose interest linked with them. These interested sections used a variety of narratives and discourses along with other deceitful tactics to portray Pashtuns as an uncivilized, barbaric, and violent people in order to justify their designs and realize their ends. Pashtuns' identity has been ambivalent and changed through the different periods of their history, each power gave its own version keeping in view its aims and objectives. For instance, during the Cold War era, as Malik (2016) holds, paradoxically,

the United States of America and its allies were projecting the good perception of Pashtuns, emphasizing their hospitality and bravery in particular. They were commonly represented as Mujahideen and liberation warriors in their resistance campaign against the USSR. However, they were portrayed by Russian the other way round (p. 29). Understanding the historical background that has influenced attitudes towards Pashtuns is essential to understanding the origins of such stereotyping. The history of Pashtuns is complicated, characterized by both great cultural accomplishments and resistance against several outside influences. Misrepresented and simplistic portrayals have been exacerbated by outside narratives that are shaped by regional conflicts and geopolitical events. Deconstructing the layers of deception that have

come to define Pashtun identity in the eyes of the outside world requires an understanding of this historical context.

Scott (1995) believes that the British practice of "state simplification" is historically responsible for the negative stereotyping and racial profiling of Pashtuns. Their "rigid categorization of various groups (such as settled areas vs. tribal areas) was created on the one hand," and a policy of negatively portraying the Pashtun on the other (Rasul, 2019, p. 57). According to Hanifi (2016), colonial knowledge shaped Pashtun identity for its own benefit. The purpose of colonial knowledge forms is political expediency. Colonialism, like other forms of knowledge, gave rise to some significant new fields of study. Take historical linguistics as an example. However, it frequently rests on oversimplifications and little, occasionally contradicting, evidence due to the political expediencies imposed by colonialism. (p. 395). Winston Churchill's prejudiced and unfavorable opinions about Pashtuns are shown in his accounts during his participation in multiple colonial expeditions into Pashtun territories. He writes about the Pashtuns during the Malakand siege, "tribe wars with tribe. Every man's hand is against the other and all are against the stranger... the state of continual tumult has produced a habit of mind which holds life cheap and embarks on war with careless levity." (Churchill, 1939, p.164). In order to defend their deeds and create space for themselves, Churchill, who participated in colonial expeditions that included the murder, torture, and looting of the natives, paints a terrible picture of Pashtuns. He notes the Pashtuns tribes are never without conflict, either in secret or in public. Every man is a politician, a theologian, and a fighter. Every big mansion feels like a true stronghold from feudalism. Every clan has a rivalry, every family a personal grudge. Not much is ever forgotten, and almost all debts are settled (p. 10). The colonial mind-set and Orientalist literature contributed to this type of essentialized identity. Hanifi (2016) writes that, "It was Mountstuart Elphinstone and the twentieth-century American specialist Louis Dupree whose works played a major role in the

persistence of an Orientalist picture of the Pashtuns" (p. 2). Such racist othering and stereotypical portrayal of Pashtuns can be seen in colonial archives and British propaganda materials. Yousaf (2021) adds that one discovers recurring themes and words used to characterise and identify Pashtuns when searching through colonial records on Pashtuns and British missions in the Pashtun areas. "Noble savages," "primitive," "thievish," "untrustworthy," and "violent" are a few of these phrases. A strong sense of "superiority" in terms of culture is also invoked in many colonial texts, which British writers and officers believed they possessed in contrast to the "primitive" Pashtuns (p. 2).

Edward Oliver (1890) describes Pashtuns on borderland as, "most lawless and savage of Pathan (Pashtuns)" (p. 183). Warburton (1900) in his account of Pashtuns territories describes them as, "brought up as kids to distrust all mankind" (p. 342). Similarly, colonial administrator Richard Temple writes that Pashtuns are, "noble savages ... who are absolutely barbarian nevertheless" (Wylly, 1912, pp. 5-6). Mills (1897) in his description of Pashtuns writes that Pashtuns are the, "most savage and warlike of the frontier tribesmen" (p. 8). Ibbetson (2018) writes that Pathan is the most barbaric and violent of all races, "he is bloodthirsty, cruel and vindictive to the highest degree; he does not know what truth or faith is. . . as the proverb says, the Pathan in one moment is a saint, and the next a devil" (p. 58). This kind of portrayal is purposefully fabricated for political ends and is predicated on factual deception. Consequently, it is self-contradictory (Machida, 2017, p. 173). But such inaccurate and conflicting portrayal of Pashtuns, has been give widespread propagation in order to serve their interests.

Interestingly Pashtuns' portrayal changed in discourses during the Cold War, when the Western Bloc's priorities shifted to Pashtun-populated areas. To inspire the Pashtuns in the tribal belt to provide refuge to foreign warriors and take part in the anti-Soviet battle as a sacred cause, the qualities of Pashtunwali, such as hospitality, asylum, and bravery, were extolled. Yousef (2021) is of the view that, "the military,

with the help of the USA and Saudi Arabia, trained Mujahedeen and encouraged locals to welcome, host, and establish family ties with 'foreign' militants, who were fighting God's war against the 'infidel' Soviets in Afghanistan "(p. 2)

Malik (2016) holds that to suit their interests, the Western Block transformed the unfavourable portrayal of Pashtuns into a positive image. During the anti-Soviet resistance, when Pashtun society was once again mostly perceived as masculinized and homogenous, such deeply held beliefs were undoubtedly beneficial. Paradoxically the tribal customs were glorified as a noble quality that inspired people to take up weapons against the USSR. (p. 30). The West views Pashtuns and their representation in particular is a reflection of their conscious efforts to categorise and take an interest-based approach to them and their culture. Such an approach is predicated on fabrication and oriental constructs, which underwent a transformation when world politics changed with the collapse of the New York twin towers.

Following the events of 9/11, the interest of the imperial powers switched to Afghanistan and the Pakistani tribal belt and brought Pashtuns under world scrutiny. In order to learn more about the Pashtuns' social and cultural framework, US military strategies involved reading imperialist literature. (Yousaf, 2019, p. 3) Bashir and Crews (2012) note that this tactic further compelled Pashtuns to be classified as a race and categorised them as "wild tribes," much like the Oriental writers had done under the British Raj. (Kakar, 2012) notes that several works have been written that link Pashtuns with violence due to the unstable law and order conditions in Pakistan's tribal area (p. 24). This kind of portrayal is reminiscent of the works written by orientalist during the colonial era. The Pashtuns were also beginning to be portrayed similarly in the foreign media. The Irish Times mentions Pashtuns, "steeped in a political culture of guns and violence" (Meet The Pashtuns, 2001) whereas Kronstadt (2003) in his report to the American Congress writes that all Pashtuns are collaborators with Al-Qaida in terrorist activities. Not only is this kind of

depiction is common in academic circles and media worldwide, but it is also ingrained in Pakistan's entertainment industry, media, and social fabric. Even in the Cold War era, Pakistani national discourse and media coverage primarily highlighted Pashtuns and ignored the identities of the other groups in anti-Soviet fighting which included Arabs and other foreign fighters like Punjabi Taliban from Pakistan. (Khattak, 2020). In Pakistan's drama industry, Pashtuns are likewise portrayed in a way that is inconsistent with reality on the ground—that is, as violent, belligerent, and primitive even the traditional clothing of the Pashtuns is linked to brutality and terrorism. (Ishaq et al., 2021, p.1)

The aforementioned studies and perspectives demonstrate that the identity of Pashtuns has been defined and propagated by the international powers in accordance with their needs and requirements. Such representation is biased and partial and runs counters to the Pashtuns way of life, Pashtunwali and their cultural and historical background. Huseeni (2003) and Shamsie (2014) have depicted Pashtuns in the similar fashion which is a continuation of the Orientalist representation.

Theoretical Framework

The study is carried out under the theoretical frameworks of Edward Said's Orientalism (1978). Edward Said argues that the West, Europe and the US look at the peoples of the Middle East through a lens called Orientalism. Orientalism is the sum of the West's representation of Orient. This lens distorts reality of these peoples. Peoples of the Middle East are shown as a threat to peace of the world. The Orientals are represented in order to sustain authority over them. Their image is constructed on assumptions and stereotypes. The relationship of the Orient and the Occident is based on power and domination, "There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated". (p. 36). Said claims that "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient" does so by authorising viewpoints about it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, and exercising authority over it. Put another way, Orientalism is a Western tactic for controlling, reorganizing, and

exerting dominance over the Orient. The Occident is represented as everything which the Orient is not and the description of the Orient is couched into negative terms with a view to drive the strength and superiority of the west out of it. If West is assumed as seat of scholarship and learning the Orient is put into contrast as a source of ignorance and backwardness. New constructions of representation characterize Pashtuns with dehumanized traits such as violence, barbarity, uncivility and terrorism.

Research Methodology

The methodology of the study is qualitative approach based on the textual interpretation of the two novels with a special focus on the relevant structures, expressions and passages which take into account the Pashtun characters. The study is based on Khaled Husseni's *The Kite Runner* (2003) and Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone* (2014). The analysis is developed round the theoretical framework of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and supported by the different historical and cultural materials about Pashtuns as well as Pashto folk lore and Pashtuns' way of life, Pashtunwali. The analysis is divided into two sections. The first deals with Shamsie's depiction of Pashtuns with their stereotyped identity and image building, the second section focuses on Husseni's work with a focus on the racial profiling and representation of Pashtuns.

***A God in Every Stone* (2014)**

The colonial endeavors included a number of different strategic pillars. To achieve their goals, they used both power and discourses. Their ability to exert authority over people and regions outside of their empires was based on their deft use of power in combination with knowledge. "Despite having more modern weapons and more advanced warfare techniques, It is not the military might but the colonial discourses which helped the British Empire take its roots" (Inam Ullah et al., 2020, p. 1). According to McLoead (2010), the use of force and physical coercion was essential to colonialism, but without a set of ideas that are upheld to support the acquisition and ongoing occupation of other people's lands, it would not be possible for it to happen. These

ideologies are ingrained in the language used by colonizers and understood by those who are colonized (p. 37).

By drawing comparisons between the social and cultural practices of the British and the Pashtuns, Shamsie's (2014) portrayal of the Pashtuns echoes the ideology of colonialism. Throughout the Second World War, Qayyum Gul, a Pashtun soldier serving in the 40th Pathan, is portrayed as despising his own social customs and culture:

Qayyum Gul raised the buttered bread to his nose, the scent of it a confirmation that Allah himself loved the French more than the Pashtuns... everything else here was better than the world they had left behind- the cows sleeker, the building grander, the men more dignified, the women. what to think about the women? (p. 44)

Since Gul is a Pashtun, he is seen promoting the superiority of white men's culture. Gul is seen defending colonialist ideologies and mind-set by contrasting his people's culture with that of white men in social mores and cultural practices. Despite being a part of the Empire in war which is a manifestation of savagery and brutality, he regards white people as more honourable than members of his own ethnic group. The colonisers always deemed their initiatives as civilising missions which were calculated to conceal their true intentions i.e. to use the colonies for their own political and economic advantages. Bhaba (1994) holds in this regard that, "the objective of the colonial discourses is to construe the colonised as a group of degraded types on the basis of racial origin (p. 70). Shamsie (2014) presented Pashtuns in binary opposition to the British, with an intent to maintain colonialism. Such depiction is always a strategy of the colonizers for keeping the natives colonized (Said, 1978). Gul is shown satisfied with his colonial status and inferior social standing. Gul expresses his opinions about the Empire when garrisoned amongst other wounded soldiers at a palace:

The King-Emperor himself had sent strict instructions that no one should treat a black –and this word included Pathan- soldier as lesser man. The thought of the king Emperor made Qayyum

rest a hand against his chest and bowed his head. He has given his own palace to wounded Indian soldiers. What Nawab or Maharaja would do as much? This thought came to him when he looked at the great chandelier in Ward 1, its immensity hanging from the claw of a silver dragon. Was it beautiful or ugly, he couldn't decide. But he knew that this one chandelier had more grandeur than all of Peshawar. (p. 54)

Gul is seen praising the king and seemed content with his position as a colonised subject. He praises the king's orders for temporarily better treatment, disregarding the fact that he is an inferior colonial subject. In comparison with the Emperor, he regards his own kings as being less generous and unkind. Gul believes that the British social and political structure is superior to that of the Indian. When drawing the comparisons between his people and the British, he even goes to the extent that Peshawar, his hometown, is inferior to the chandelier, the emblem of the Empire. His unwavering allegiance to the British and his satisfaction with colonisation are made very clear. Every time a guest visited the garrison, he would be asked to express his opinions about the Empire. "He repeats this to one of the English doctors and thereafter he was called upon whenever there were important visitors to explain that when he looked at the chandelier he gazed upon the glory of the king." (p. 54). Shamsie attempts to portray Pashtuns as socially and politically inferior people who need civility. Such portrayal of the Pashtuns is an attempt to support the continuation of colonisation.

In spite of Gul's allegiance and his generalised beliefs of the Empire's kindness and impartial treatment, the colonisers' discriminatory mind-set that regards the native as sub humans is reflected. When a nurse is observed talking to Gul, the inspection team objects with seriousness. , "Tell them a fifty-six year-old widow was seen giving sings of favour to a Pathan boy. Let the Empire tremble at that." (p. 57). Pashtuns are seen as Other who cannot interact with the British. Ullah (2018) opines that such approach "shows an extremely mean and degraded view the British would take about the Indians, especially the Pashtun people." (p.

46)

When Vivian Rose passes through the streets of Peshawar, she describes the Pashtuns' way of life and culture in a very derogatory and humiliating way:

carpets draped over balconies and branches, clothes lines strung between top-floor windows with men clothes hanging form them. Native men of all ages could be seen craning their necks in the hope some female garment might have accidentally or –why not believe this? – deliberately been placed in view. (p. 79)

Pashtunwali, the Pashtuns way of life, provides for *Nung wa Namus*. It is the collective responsibility of Pashtuns to uphold the dignity and respect of women. While young people of the opposite gender observe the idea of Pardah, as they get older, they stop doing so. There are no restrictions on the movement or entry into each other's homes for elderly men and women. They are well-liked and respected members of the society who sit in Hujra and educate the youth, participate in the Jirga and settle conflicts, and spend time in mosques. Shamsie (2014) presents a dehumanising and disparaging image of the Pashtun people. *Native males of all ages* have been depicted as being raucous, lustful, and finding some joy and fulfilment in looking at the women's garments. Such depiction of Pashtuns is a purposeful attempt to reinforce the colonial mind-set that viewed the colonised as odd creatures. In addition, Najib Gul, Qayyum's younger brother, is depicted as believing in white supremacy and demeaning his own culture. Najib prefers white man's teaching to that of Mulvi:

I come here after school to read, when I am supposed to at the mosque with the mulvi. Only my brother knows. Mr. Dicken is my favorite. the mulvi does not care, as long as I take him his money every month. I don't like to waste my father's money but my brother says as long as I use that time to learn it isn't wrong, and I don't learn anything form the mulvi he's so boring. (p. 87)

Two institutions are used by Pashtuns to socialise their youth: the mosque and the community centre, or *Hujra aw Jumat*. These

two institutions have combined into a single compound word because of their roles in socialisation, teaching the fundamentals of faiths and ethics, passing down traditions and customs, and imparting values. In addition to the aforementioned purposes, Hujra hosts traditional music and folktales, and mulvi instructs people in the fundamentals of ethics, morality, discipline, and religion. Every youngster in the community is required to attend mulvi, for his early education. Najib substitutes a white man for Mulvi, believing that the former is superior to his own cultural teacher. Gul further charges him with corruption for failing to fulfil his obligations and failing to notify his family of his absence. His only focus is money; he doesn't really care about doing his job well. The white man's instructions are as convincing and cogent. By comparing the two cultures and its educator in this way, they are placing them in opposition to one another. as Said, (1978) holds, "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (p. 3). Portraying the indigenous Pashtun ways as inferior, outdated, and illogical, and the culture and ways of the colonists as superior, alluring, and compelling is an attempt of justifying the colonization. The concept of racial and cultural superiority is shown in the interactions between Pashtuns and the white people. When the Political Agent Remmick learns about Viv's relationship with Najib, he gives her instructions regarding Pashtuns and their culture:

I hear you've found yourself a civilizing mission... I still think it would be better if you were at Dean's. ... will he come here for lessons? Your civilizing mission. A Pathan is a Pathan at any age, I hope you remember that. They're not accustomed to the company of women. (p. 90)

In exchange for Viv teaching him English language, Najib guides Viv in her archaeological projects in Peshawar. Shamsie terms this interaction as a "civilizing mission." English language is shown as the standard, and people who don't know the language and culture of the British are socially and culturally backward.

Pashtuns are shown associated with violence, lust and cruelty irrespective of their age and therefore Najib, even being a teenager, is not deemed suitable for contact with a white woman. It is shown that Pashtuns are not used to the company of women. They are barbaric and a danger to the honor and respect of women. Said (1978) asserts that the West always defines itself in reference to the Orient "as its contrasting image, idea, personality and experience" (p. 2). Whereas Pashtunwali upholds the concept of *Nang wa Namus*, which rigorously protects the sanctity and protection of women. The way Pashtuns are portrayed is supporting orientalist stereotypes about them and their way of life. Remmick goes on:

But this is Peshawar. Pathan men don't much like the idea of women. – don't like the idea of women doing what? - don't much like the idea of women. ... Are the English in India in the habit of having our behavior dictated by the Natives? –Ha well expressed. (p. 98)

Remmick's treatment of Pashtuns and Peshawar is blatantly orientalist. It is depicted that Pashtuns are a race that despises women and is intolerable to their presence. In Pashtun culture, women are entitled to a respectable position, and it is apparent that British and Pashtun cultures differ in how society views women. Remmick, however, denigrates and mocks the way Pashtun women are treated in their culture. Viv supports the same colonial perspective by pointing out that white men have the duty of carrying out the *civilizing mission*. The British should force them to accept their methods instead of allowing them to give in to the customs and ways of the native people. This approach reflects the colonial mentality that dehumanizes the indigenous Pashtun people, who are viewed as inferior and in need of education and the civilized ways of the white people. Pashtunwali provides for *Nang wa Namus* which secures the social position of women. Viv's concern reflects her assumed higher social standing on the basis of which she arrogates herself the authority to speak for them. She hints at the kind of rights of rights which the British culture provides to women and makes it a yardstick for women rights. The approach is shows Pashtuns culturally inferior, backward

and reluctant to women rights.

Shamsie's (2014) depiction of the indigenous anti-colonial movements and political awareness is negative and paradoxical. The prominent Pashtun leaders Haji of Turangzai and Ghaffar Khan and their movements are shown in the novel. Ghaffar Khan, often referred to as Bacha Khan, was founder of the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement aiming at the social reformation, education and political awareness along with Turangzai, but ended up in nonviolence and unarmed resistance against the British Raj. Turangzai, who began his movement for the educational advancement and social uplift of the Pashtuns, ended up in armed resistance against the British due to a number reasons. Shamsie (2014) only discusses the period he engaged in armed resistance and leaving out the background events that gave rise to this strategy. Whereas Ghaffar Khan's nonviolent and unarmed resistance is satirized and ridiculed for its use of nonviolence and passive posture.

Shamsie depicts Turangzai as a violent, savage and warmonger who fights from the tribal areas against the British without highlighting his background circumstances and his movement which forced him to take up arms:

There is a fanatic up there, name of Haji Turangzai, with a band of bloodthirsty followers. You must not worry about it- we are accustomed to dealing with these hotheads. But I would advise against travelling outside the city, and certainly against venturing to the Khyber Pass, without clearing it with me first. (p. 84)

Turangzai was a well-known religious and social figure among the Pashtun people. His followers had a strong emotional bond with his cause and the Ottoman Empire, he was neither a bigot nor a zealot. He was in favour of both modern and religious education and his movement focused it. But when, "increasing popularity of his struggle earned him hostility of the British rulers because they considered him a threat to their rule. In order to stifle his voice, they forced him to move to tribal area" (Khan et al., 2015, p. 303). Shamsie does not mention the background circumstances which forced him to

escape to the tribal areas and take up arms instead, but they have been portrayed as a bunch of deviant, violent and bloodthirsty. The reason for such representation is that he had challenged the status of the Empire and given them tough time. Religious attachment apart, his stance on the inclusion of India in the War was a principled and democratic one. No country has the authority to declare another country as part of war and Britain declaration was no exception in this regard. Shamsie (2014) seems as securing the interest of the British and covering their illegal occupation of the Indian Subcontinent. Those who oppose the Empire are termed as fanatic, violent and blood- thirsty.

Shamsie next mentions Ghaffar Khan alias Bacha Khan, a towering figure in the nonviolent resistance against the Empire in the Indian subcontinent. Shamsie ridicules his approach and terms it weakness on his part. Shamsie's depiction of the nonviolent disposition and peaceful posture of the Pashtun freedom fighters is ironic and humiliating. Though the nonviolent strategy acclaimed universal fame and won the appreciation of many but Shamsie puts it:

When men become women and approach an enemy armed with nothing but chants then it falls to a woman to take the role of Malala of Maiwand and walk into the battlefield to show you what a warrior looks like. She was down with the men, and there was more of a man's fire in her than in all of you. (p. 215)

The strategy of nonviolence is criticized and ridiculed through the Pashtun woman in the wake of the atrocities committed by the British forces against the unarmed followers of Bacha Khan on April, 23, 1930 at Peshawar. The unarmed Pashtuns are compared with women who cannot fight in the battleground. Such depiction of Pashtuns' indigenous movements is calculated to belittle their attempts of political ownership and self-rule, because the writer believes that Pashtuns are more in need of social and cultural changes. They are shown not capable of self-rule due to their social and cultural backwardness in comparison with the British and the depiction hereby buttresses Edward Said's views of Orientalism.

The Kite Runner (2003)

Hossen (2003) portrays Pashtuns as the oppressors and exploiters of Afghanistan's other ethnic groups. However, the social fabric of Afghanistan did not normally include ethnic conflict or the persecution of one community by another. There was harmony and mutual respect among the various ethnic groups. Ali (2015) states that though the Afghanistan was ruled by Pashtuns, nevertheless, ethnic conflicts were scarce and tensions were low. It was in late 1970s, when war broke out, and tension was instrumentalized. There had been harmony and tranquilly between the ethnic groups. Although Pashtuns make up a large portion of Afghanistan's ruling elite, there were no conflicts or acts of persecution against one community by another. Amir recalls his routine of school days and relationship with Hassan:

During the school year, we had daily routine. By the time I dragged myself out of bed to the bathroom, Hassan had already washed up, prayed the morning namaz with Ali, and prepared my breakfast...all neatly placed on the dining table. ... Hassan made my bed, polished my shoes, ironed my outfit for the day, packed my books and pencil. (p.23)

It has been shown that Amir and Hassan have a master-servant relationship. Despite the fact that they both are of the same age group, Hassan's has to serve Amir. Because Amir belonged to Pashtun, "in the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara... and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing" (p.22). Inferiority and superiority have been shown as the foundation of their relationship. The Pashtuns oppress the Hazara, and the Hazara are expected to submit to them without question. As noted by Ali (2015), Hossen's (2003) description of the interethnic interaction between Pashtuns and the Hazara minority is at variance with the historical reality. This portrayal of Pashtuns is an intentional attempt to defame them and create certain stereotypes that support the oriental generalization about Pashtuns. The narrator then switches to another Pashtun character Assef. Assef's identity and depiction have been associated with violence, hostility, and a disdain for the idea of other ethnic communities in

Afghanistan coexisting peacefully, particularly the Hazra. Assef is introduced as follows: "... if you were a kid living in the Wazir Akbar Khan section of Kabul, you knew about Assef and his famous stainless brass knuckles. ... Assef towered over other kids" (p. 33). Assef's character has badly grown and his identity has been shaped in a stereotyped way. The means of assault and violence are associated with his character. His "brass knuckle" has been described as a crucial and distinctive aspect of his character. He has a tendency to dominate and tame people, especially the weaker ones (kids). The narrator further adds:

His well-earned reputation for savagery preceded him on the streets. Flanked by his obeying friends, he walked the neighbourhood like a Khan ... His word was law, and if you needed a little legal education, then those brass knuckles were just the right teaching tool. I saw him use those knuckles once on a kid from the Karteh-Char district. I will never forget how Assef's blue eyes glinted with a light not entirely sane and how he grinned, how he grinned, as he pummeled that poor kid unconscious. (pp. 33-34)

Assef (Pashtun) has been linked with stereotypes of savagery, brutality, warmongering, and inhumane treatment of the weaker people. He's been portrayed as someone who doesn't know how to be polite. His demeanour shows lack of formal manners and forms of engagement, as well as an inability to listen to and get to know others. The statement, "His word was law," indicates that he behaved like an animal, without being acclimated to any laws or civilization. People would be met with violence and aggression through his "brass knuckle" in the event of defiance. Furthermore, children are always the targets of his aggressiveness and violence, as they are the weaker ones. The abuse never ends and is used until the victim loses the ability to reply or enters an "unconscious" state.

An accurate portrayal of Pashtuns (Assef) is at odds with Pashtunwali, which is based on the peaceful and nonviolent resolution of disputes. Two central tenets of Pashtunwali are the establishment of the *Jirga* (dispute resolution

council) and the *Hujra* (community centre). Pashtuns have a long history of avoiding conflict and preferring to settle disputes through negotiation; the existence of the *Jirga* is testament to this fact. The *Jirga* strives to maintain peace by carefully weighing all available choices and gives a careful consideration to each member's recommendations. They provide room for opposing viewpoints. The defining rules of *Jirga* are differences in opinion, tolerance, and mutual respect. As a result, most *Jirgas* extend for months in order to include all of the members and take into account their opinions. The novel only builds a stereotype of the Pashtuns as being intolerant and belligerent by having Assef respond to disagreement with a "brass knuckle."

The attempt is made to portray Assef as being unaware of laws, decency, and politeness norms by using the description "His word was law." Here, his character is akin to that of an animal. But in reality, Pashtuns live by their own set of customs that govern every part of their lives. These laws shape their upbringing and birth, and they eventually become ingrained in their personalities. Well-known Pashtun scholar Ghani Khan comments on Pashtunwali in his work *The Pathan* that people save it in large books and refer to it as law. Pashtuns store it in their wife's treasure chest and refer to it as custom. To be knowledgeable about your law, you must be a judge or a criminal. But before a Pashtun learns how to eat, he already understands his customs. He was born with it. It operates in his liver and is combined with his bones. He can find out the law he broke without having to consult a wise person wearing a wig. As soon as he does it, he realises it. He is the judge and jailer of himself. It is what his forefathers have made sure to happen. (Khan, 1990, p. 24)

"Years later I learned an English word for the creature that Assef was, a word for which a good Farsi equivalent does not exist: 'sociopath'" (p. 34). Assef lacks morals and courteous manners of communication. His demeanour conveys the idea that he is unaware of social graces and appropriate behaviour. Husseni (2003) has labelled him a "sociopath" because he doesn't

deserve to be among humans (2003). "Good morning, Kunis! Assef exclaimed, waving. Fag, that was another of his favourite insult (p. 34). In Pashto, the word "Kuni" (fag) is a severe insult that has strong negative connotations in Pashtun culture. It has always been reacted angrily. It is intended to present Assef as both warmongering and uncivilised by linking such phrases to him as though these are a part of his morning greetings. Because the word is intended to incite others, which will lead to violence. The narrator's main goal is to depict Assef as an aggressive, belligerent man who seeks to incite others to commit violent acts.:

Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our watan, they dirty our blood... Afghanistan for Pashtuns, I say. That's my vision. (p. 35)

Assef is an extremely cynical individual who cannot stand other people and holds tremendous contempt for them. It has been demonstrated that he rejects the idea of harmonious coexistence in a multicultural and multiethnic society such as Afghanistan. Because of the many characteristics of Pashtunwali, which encourages communion and the idea of coexistence, Pashtuns are social and democratic people. In Pashtun culture, the institution of *Hujra* has two purposes: on the one hand, it socialises young people and, on the other, it instils the idea of coexistence and communal life. (Wasai et al., 2020). The concept of *Gudar* (The stream used in communion for fetching water) and *Ashar* (Synergy or working in unison) indicate Pashtuns' liking for coexistence (Ullah & Ahmad, 2019, p. 198). Simonsen, (2004) maintains that collaboration and tolerance are reflected throughout Afghanistan's past. He states, "In Afghanistan, interethnic relations have historically been marked by equal opportunities as well as coexistence, tolerance, and pride in diversity. (p. 708)

A popular wintertime tradition in Afghanistan is the kite-fighting occasion. Assef spoils even this festival for Hassan and Amir. When talking with a Hindu boy who had recently moved into their

neighbourhood, Amir gives a generalized statement when asked what the kite-fighting rules are, Amir replies:

The Hindi kid would soon learn what the British learned earlier in the century, and what the Russians would eventually learn by the late 1980s: that Afghans are an independent people. Afghans cherish custom but abhor rules. And so it was with kite fighting. The rules were simple: no rules. Fly your kite. Cut the opponents. Good luck. (p. 45)

Pashtuns are shown as being steadfast in their adherence to customs and detesting laws and regulations. They appear to be in a chaotic and anarchic state. In such a state, oppression and violence are the norm and continue to define the people who live there. He believes that the only law is that there is no law; everyone must follow their own path, regardless of the risk to others. A portrayal of Assef's people in this way goes against Pashtun customs and Pashtunwali. According to Pashtunwali one must act honourably and share responsibility for preserving the life and limb of others. Pashtunwali provides for *Nang* & *Namus*. "Nang means honour and shame" (Galtzer, 2021, p. 04) and *Namus*, as Khan (2018) puts, "refers to the man's responsibility of protecting his woman's honour." (p. 10). In case of deviation from the laws of Pashtunwali, *Jirga* decides its nature and declares its decision accordingly. The purpose of these institutions is to restrain lawlessness within the Pashtun society. People who break the law are punished by Lashkar. (a community force)

Assef knelt behind Hassan, put his hand on Hassan's hips and lifted his bare buttocks. He kept one hand on Hassan's back and undid his own belt buckle with his free hand. He unzipped his jeans. Dropped his underwear. He positioned himself behind Hassan. Hassan didn't struggle. Didn't even whimper. He moved his head slightly and I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb. (p. 66)

It's clear that Assef's harshness and ruthless treatment of Hassan had reached an extreme level when he sodomises him in public. Such

behaviour is against Pashtun traditional norms and public standards. Pashtuns follow strict moral guidelines, and having sex in public is never tolerated. This portrayal of Assef suggests that he is a lustful, uncivilised, and savage individual who acts impulsively and disregards morality and ethics. Assef's differentiation is an oriental construct rather than a reality in the context of Pashtun culture and civilization, as Said (1973) puts that Orientalism is never, "an inert fact of nature" (p.4) but is always, "mad-made" (p. 5).

Amir creates the caricatures of Assef, who is linked to acts of violence, barbarism, and inhumanity. Assef is still the same person who was torturing Hassan, and his cruelty has not changed. He is currently mistreating and torturing Sohrab, Hassan's son. His depraved disposition and narrow-minded outlook appear to have become even more rooted.:

Afghanistan is like beautiful mansion littered with garbage, and some has to take out the garbage... in the west, they have an expression for that, I said they call it ethnic cleansing. Do they? Assef's face brightened. Ethnic cleansing. I like it. I like the sound of it. (p. 249)

After joining the Taliban, Assef adopts a more bigoted and ethnocentric viewpoint. He has demonstrated an aspirational and restless spirit striving for the total annihilation of the other ethnic groups that make up Afghanistan's social fabric. For him, eradicating the other ethnic groups would make Afghanistan a safe place. The existence of ethnic groups other than Pashtuns, in his opinion, is the main obstacle to Afghanistan's stability. Assef is depicted abusing children; he continued to treat Hassan as a child and is now going to torture his son Sohrab as a youngster. It has been demonstrated that Assef's social intolerance, cruelty, violence, and cruel treatment of the lesser people are what characterize him.

By using specific preconceptions, Hosseini (2003) tries to give Assef (Pashtuns) a rigid and essentialized identity. Amir's character is given the opportunity to develop, alter his perspective, and improve as a person. It is demonstrated that Western culture and civilization have the ability

to transform people's behaviour and make them more compassionate, humane, and civilised. As a result, Amir starts to realise his past and the wrongs he did to Hassan., "it was my past of unatoned sins" (p. 1). Thus, he sets out on a path of self-purification., "There is a way to be good again" (p. 2). In contrast, Assef doesn't change. His viciousness, depravity, brutal demeanour, and aggressive disposition only deepen. He treated Hassan's young son Sohrab in the same manner that he had treated Hassan. Amir informs Sohrab that his violent and nasty personality has not changed. "That there are bad people in this world, and sometimes bad people stay bad. Sometimes you have to stand up to them." (p. 292)

Conclusion

Shamsie's (2014) depiction of Pashtun culture and practices, particularly in comparison with British, is an attempt to place them in a binary opposition, as Said (1978) maintains. The Pashtuns are depicted as primitive, inferior, and backward, while the British are shown as having a superior, sophisticated, and advanced culture. While the Pashtuns are linked with violence, barbarism, and a community of degenerates who need to be taught manners and decency, the positive traits of the British Empire are shown as a favour to the Pashtuns. Shamsie presents an inconsistent and prejudiced picture of Indian political consciousness and uprising, particularly with regard to Pashtun involvement in the struggle of independence. She mocks Haji of Turangzai for resisting the Empire with force. He is associated with the violent, vicious, and illogical stereotypes by taking his armed battle out of context. Ghaffar Khan is also not spared who had launched the movement of nonviolent resistance. When the British forces brutally react to the nonviolent workers on April, 23, 1930, Shamsie terms them as men becoming women and a childish protest. Shamsie's portrayal perpetuates colonial discourses and orientalist generalisations that support the colonisation of Pashtuns and provide legitimacy to the idea of the *white man's burden*. Hosseini (2003) depicted the racial profiling of Pashtuns by attaching negative stereotypes to them, which has placed them in a state of essentialized and

fixed identity. Pashtuns have been portrayed as violent, uncivilised, lusty, primitive, unruly, and unaccustomed to coexisting through the character of Assef. Westernization or Americanisation has been shown as a standard for civility and Pashtun culture is reflected as an obstacle to modernity and advancement. (Khan, 2018, p. 30). Such depiction of Pashtuns is the continuation of colonial discourses and imperial ideology and lends credence to the binary division by Othering orients as theorized by Said (1973).

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