

**Kipling, Khan, and Hosseini: An Analysis of Perceptions and Misperceptions
in their Works regarding Pashtun Identity before and after 9/11**

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The term "Pashtun" is an ethnonym, idealized for its association with bravery, dignity, love of honour, and hospitality. However, the term began to lose its ideal shades after 9/11. The cause has its connection with violence, misogynist attitude, suicide, and terrorism erroneously attributed to it in the print and non-print media of the West. This paper is an attempt to analyze the pictures as presented in the works of three literary writers: Rudyard Kipling, Ghani Khan and Khaled Hosseini. Both Kipling and Khan are drawn to the positive aspects of the ethnonym with their focus on the concepts of heroism, hospitality, sense of honour, dignity, and other socially productive constructs. However, the picture in Hosseini's novels: *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2005), *And the Mountains Echoed* (2014) is dark and discouraging, prompting one to study both as social or environmental constructs that change their meanings under the influence of the forces controlled by the media, politics, and socio-economic conditions. The focal objective of the research is to strike a balance between the pre and- post 9/11scenarios, in search of reinventing a new and objective image, one may say.

Keywords: Islam, Pashtunwali, Mujahidin, imperialism, identity.

This research focuses on the socially or environmentally constructed identity of the ethnonym "Pashtuns" before and after 9/11 scenario. Before 9/11, they are idealized for their association with bravery, hospitality, dignity, reverence and love of honour. They have started losing their socially constructed identity after 9/11. This dichotomous identity has resulted in the incompatible portrayal of the Pashtuns. The two identities misinterpret their status, which needs to be reinvented and reconstructed. Hence the paper attempts to analyze their identity as presented in the works of the three literary writers: Kipling, Khan, and Hosseini. Kipling and Khan are positive about the ethnoym 'Pashtuns', focusing on their heroism, honesty and socially productive constructs. Hosseini, on the other hand, represents their dark and heinous pictures, prompting us to study the ethnonym from both perspectives: social or environmental constructs.

Identity is a question of reservation of cultural and social values; it has no concern with objective reality. Social identity and reality is different for everyone as identity is socially or environmentally constructed, which may vary from culture to culture. It depicts one's affiliations with

one's values, culture and social norms. If the affiliation with social or productive constructs finishes, the identity also diminishes/dies. However, the question props up when other communities distort someone's identity; and the community whose existing and socially constructed identity is snatched from them, stop fighting for their social existence/acceptance.

Identity of people is constructed; some of them associate it with their cultural norms, some connect it with the countries where they live. Hence, one point is clear that identity is socially constructed, which may lie on the surface. It is a product of the way the social community is seen, observed and judged by others based on their ethnicity, life style, social norms, cultural values and language structures etc. Therefore, Pashtuns' identity is also constructed as a brave, hospitable, peace loving and active community before 9/11. However, their heroic qualities are kept in the back burner under the influence of the forces controlled by the media, politics, and socio-economic conditions.

Pashtuns' identity has been kept on changing since the event of 9/11. The above event has overshadowed their productive constructs. The event leads to declare Pashtuns as terrorists, extremists, murderers, misogynists, insurgents, culprits and violent. An unending war has been on track in the west against the ethnonym in the name of Islam and extremism. Hence, the objective image has been kept hidden from the other communities around the globe. The dual identities represent their status as Mujahidin and Taliban under the influence of the imperial powers, presented in the social media and literary works. Therefore, the present study aims at analyzing identity of Pashtuns by striking a balance between their pre and-post 9/11 identities.

Literature Review

In the views of Centlivres and Demont (2000), identity and national awareness indicate the inner experience of a community. However, the Afghan identity process is a very long and complex procedure, which is related to the experience of exile and diaspora. We can see ethnic, religious and cultural diversity in Afghan people. The Pashtuns Afghan state is a positive sense of 'being Afghans,' a strong identity.

Kfir (2009) reviews the nature and structure of Pashtuns' society and critically analyzes the Pashtuns' conditions in Afghanistan after 9/11. The review also focuses on the stubborn attitudes of the Pashtuns, who would never cooperate with other ethnic group in Afghanistan for the sake of peaceful coexistence in Afghanistan. For many centuries, the Pashtuns had dominated the political system in Afghanistan. They have still some religious issues with the Hazaras, which are still unresolved.

Tarzi and Lamb (2011) in their report state their views about the Pashtuns, their culture, religion, beliefs and historical background. They identify the variety of perceptions and misperceptions of Pashtuns among policy makers, political leaders, historians, experts and the common mass. Social media has presented the Pashtuns as violent, misogynists and culprits. Tarzi and Lamb (2011) are of the view that "Pashtuns were most commonly characterized as proud, victimized, sectarian, tribal, and hospitable; they were not stereotyped as warlike, misogynous, illiterate, conservative, or medieval. Pashtuns' diversity was generally acknowledged, as were the changes Pashtuns have experienced in recent decades" (p. 4). The above quote shows the perceptions and misperceptions about the Pashtuns.

Punjani (2002) declares the Pashtuns as the dominant ethnic group in Afghanistan, migrate to urban areas in search of employments. Most of them live in refugees' camps in Peshawar while the Hazara community avoids living in the camps. Punjani (2002) focuses on the humanitarian assistance provided to both communities, and how the relief efforts in Pakistan try to mitigate their ethno-religious conflicts and identity.

Method

This research is qualitative in nature and follows data-driven approach. The study is based on close textual analysis of the popular literary works. To represent the Pashtuns as true Muslims, great warriors and peace-loving nation, the poems written by Kipling have been contextualized for detailed analysis. His poems: "The Ballads of East and West" and "Arithmetic on the Frontier" portray the positive image of the Pashtuns before 9/11, while Hosseini's novels written after 9/11: *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2005), and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2014) provide the negative image of the Pashtuns, which somehow is also constructed as one may say.

Results and Discussion

Perceptions about Pashtuns' identity before 9/11

Pashtuns, one of the largest ethno-cultural communities in Pakistan and Afghanistan, are known for their unique characteristics of *Pashtunwali*, Jirga system and monolingual identity. The tenets of *Pashtunwali* are the essence of Pashtuns' cultural norms, which incorporates the concepts of hospitality, giving refuge to others, revenge, bravery, righteousness, persistence, honor and dignity. They have worked on constructing their identities through ages as the bravest and simplest nation in the world, famous for their loyalty in their dealings with others. They are the staunch believers in their cultural/traditional values and norms as stated in the following paragraph:

The Pathan has a tender heart but tries to hide it under rough and gruff exterior. He is too good a fighter to leave his weakest parts uncovered. 'Don't be so sweet,' he says, 'that people may swallow you up, nor so bitter that people may spit you out.' So, he covers his sweetness with bitterness, self-preservation pure and simple. His violent nature, strong body, and tender heart make a very unstable combination for living but an ideal one for poetry and color. He keeps a rough face because he does not want you to see his soft eyes. He would rather you thought he was a rogue than let you see him weep out for his wife (Khan, 1947, p. 12)

Khan highlights in the above quote that the Pathans may be hard at times but they are very tender/soft hearted. They may keep guns and knives, but these things symbolize their bravery and manliness as depicted through their heroic actions. They use the guns not for shooting others but for preserving their honor and dignity, and to maintain their bravery by fighting back with their enemies. They are brave enough to investigate the eyes of others without a single blink. Allen quoted in Ahmad (1979) praises the bravery of the Pathans:

There was among the Pathans something that called to the Englishman or the Scotsman - partly that the people looked you straight in the eye, that there was no equivocation and that you couldn't browbeat them even if you wished to. When we crossed the bridge at Attock we felt we'd come home (p. 7).

The Pashtuns have a long history as fierce fighters, resisted against the foreign invaders and militants and never showed cowardice. Taimur, Alexander the Great, and Babur, who were the bravest warriors and conquerors, were unable to trap the Pashtuns. They tried their level best to subjugate the Pashtuns, but they never succeeded in their planning against the Pashtuns community. Most of the conquerors got defeated at the hands of Pashtuns in Khyber Pass at KP. The Pashtuns fought with them very courageously and succeeded in defeating them at every field, for example, Farid Khan known as Sher Shah Suri defeated the Mogul king, Humayun in 1508-1556 and ruled over India from 1540 to 1545 (Rahman, 1995).

In 1942, the British army had been wiped out from India by the Pashtuns. Similarly, in 1991, they defeated the Soviet Union's soldiers. They destroyed their imperialistic powers and vanity. This is the reason the Russian General commented on the Pashtuns in 1987 that "Pathans are the bravest people ever born on the earth, and these can't be defeated by force" (Khan, 1994, p. 2). They are also regarded as rocks that cannot be broken. Likewise, in Siachen war, the Indian General said, "If there were no NWFP in Pakistan, I'm sure that at least Kashmir was ours" (Khan, 1994, p. 2).

Pashtuns, in the words of Olaf Caroe are people of matchless qualities. Caroe (1958) praises Pashtuns, "The force of Pathan character, the bravery of the soldier, the shrewdness of Pathan assessments of political realism, once carried the forbears of this people to high positions of authority outside their own country." He argues that though the Pashtuns are less educated as compared to British and USSR soldiers, they are more realistic, active and authoritative in their own nature. They have powerful features and they are famous all around the world for their bravery and shrewdness. It is rightly observed about the honor and dignity of the Pashtuns:

The mystification of the Frontier encounter created a mythical tribesman worthy of the honour to play opposite the British in the Frontier Game and popularized a universal image of the Pathan embodying the finest qualities of loyalty, courage and honour that transcend race, colour and creed and one that approximated to the Pathan's own notions of an ideal Path, a behaviour as understood in terms of his code (Ahmad, 1979, p. 8).

Likewise, Kipling's most popular stories also feature the Pathan characters like Mahboob Ali in his novel, *Kim* and even enter children's stories like Sher Khan in *The Jungle Books*. Kipling reflects sympathy for the Pashtuns and his ethnic references are not willfully hateful. Kipling's poems are written about the second Anglo-Afghan war, which describe the conflict between the highly educated British soldiers and the poor Pashtuns tribesmen. In his poem, "The Arithmetic on the Frontiers," he praises the Frontier and its people, the Pashtuns. He seems sympathetic towards the poor Pashtuns in his poems irrespective of their low educations (Ahmad, 1979).

In the above poem, Kipling appreciates the bravery of the two tribes of the Pashtuns: the Yousafzai and Afridi. He talks about the two sides of the Pashtuns: the one is appreciation for their nobleness, democratic thoughts, frankness and sense of humor and the other is showing disgust for their savagery and treachery at times due to their lack of education. This also focuses on the social construction of the reality that Pashtuns have invented their identity themselves both as great warriors and coward nation at times. Kipling's poem, "The Ballad of East and West" is the best example of his imperial poems. In this poem, we see a meeting of two races on equal footing, reflecting a mutual admiration and acceptance of each other's ways: "But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth" (Ahmad, 1979).

Hence, the above discussion gives a positive image of the Pashtuns' identity construction. Caroe's, Khan's, Kipling's and Allen's books are written before the incident of 9/11, where the Pashtuns are represented as heroes and freedom fighters. Their writings show the positive traits of the Pashtuns' code of conduct, known as *Pashtunwali*. Though, they are hard, rough and tough, which is not negative connotation; they rather show their manliness, courage and self-esteem, representing their socially invented identity.

Misperceptions about Pashtuns' identity after 9/11

The 9/11 scenario leads to an identity's crisis of Pashtuns. Many literary writers such as Hosseini have shaped the gloomy and discouraging picture of Pashtuns' identity. This is evident from his three novels: *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2005) and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2014). In the above three novels, the Pashtuns are represented as misogynists, terrorists, villains and cowardice. Their jealousy, pride, inequality, class difference, disloyalty misshape their true characteristics.

Their past identity as a brave nation has been kept in the back burner. In all the three novels, women are misrepresented as disobedient, unchaste and dishonest, while men are the owners of the body and soul of women. Men need to control women's desires and legal rights. Women are not allowed to go away of the threshold of patriarchal systems. Hence, it is important to mention that Hosseini is an Afghan born American writer, who spent his childhood in Afghanistan, and then he had shifted to America when he was of 15 years, almost. He met many Pashtuns in America, observed their attitudes and criticized them for their behaviors. Therefore, the subsequent paragraphs aim at contextualizing the negative image of Pashtuns in his novels, side by side.

Amir is the protagonist of *The Kite Runner* (2003) and represents Pashtuns ethnic community. He is portrayed as a Muslim, representing Sunni sects and its beliefs. He betrays his childhood friend, Hassan, who comes from the Hazara community, representing Shia sects. Hence, the religious differences are aggravated by the ethnic differences between the two, which portrays Hassan as an innocent Hazara and Amir as a cheater Pashtun.

Amir's character is based on cowardliness throughout the novel. He does not move forward when Hassan needs his help. He prefers to run away from the alley where Hassan is surrounded by three Pashtuns to rape him. Hosseini depicts his cowardliness. The following passage from the novel, *The Kite Runner* makes it clear, "I could step into that alley, stand for Hassan- the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past- and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run. In the end, I ran. I ran because I was a coward" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 72).

The above passage also depicts the positive picture of Hassan who represents the Hazara ethnic group. Amir himself appreciates the bravery and loyalty of Hassan in front of Sohrab, Hassan's son. He tells Sohrab that his father always stood up for him. He tells Sohrab that how his father became a scapegoat for fulfilling the selfish desires of Amir, in his childhood. He always saved him from another Pashtun character, Assef. *The Kite Runner* (2003) says about Assef, "He (Assef)... tried to hurt me once when I was your age, but your father saved me. Your father was very brave, and he was always rescuing me from trouble, standing up for me. So, one day the bad man hurt your father instead. He hurt him in a very bad way, and I ... I couldn't save your father the way he had saved me" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 292).

The above passage also depicts the positive traits of Hassan, the Hazara, who is represented as weak and loyal. On the other hand, Assef, the Pashtun, is misrepresented as a powerful, villain and terrorist, responsible for the violent and chaotic situation in Afghanistan. He is portrayed as a man representing devilish traits. Hosseini calls him a sociopath and a personification of an evil. Hosseini (2003) says:

His well-earned reputation for savagery preceded him on the streets. Flanked by his obeying friends, he walked the neighborhood like a Khan strolling through his land with his eager-to-please entourage. 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. 35-36).

Similarly, the character of Baba, Amir's father is also negatively depicted as a hypocrite who says one thing and does the other. His words contradict his action. Hosseini depicts him as a rapist who keeps illegal relations with his maid. He is represented as a thief, a liar and a betrayer, who cheats on his own wife, sons and friend. As Amir says, "I was learning that Baba had been a thief. And a thief of the worst kind, because the things he'd stolen had been sacred: from me the right to know I had a brother, from Hassan his identity, and from Ali his honor. His *nang* [respect]. His *namoos* [dignity and honor]" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 18).

Now we turn to the second novel of Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2005), which follows the same line of discouraging depiction. Rasheed is the main character who is from Pashtun ethnic community. He has been portrayed as a villain and a misogynist. He represents patriarchal system who likes to beat Mariam, his wife, without any reason. He treats her like an object and does not allow her to live a life of her own desires. She encounters a different social life in her husband's home. Her husband demands her to wear complete veil by warning. Hosseini says about Rashid, "But I'm a different breed of man, Mariam. Where I come from, one wrong look, one improper word, and blood is spilled. Where I come from, a woman's face is her husband's business only. I want you to remember that. Do you understand" (Hosseini, 2005, p. 70)?

Hosseini has also portrayed Rasheed as an immoral and a hypocrite Pashtun. He asks Mariam to remain at home and never allows her to talk to a stranger. On the one hand, he advises his wife to be chaste and loyal to him, but on the other hand, he himself keeps magazines of naked women in his shop. Mariam finds one of such magazines in his room when she enters the room for cleaning it. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2005) describes that situation in the words that follow:

On every page were women, beautiful women, who wore no shirts, no trousers, no socks or underpants. They wore nothing at all. They lay in beds amid tumbled sheets and gazed back at Mariam with half-lidded eyes. In most of the pictures, their legs were apart, and Mariam had a full view of the dark place between. In some, the women were prostrated as if- God forbid this thought- in *sujda* for prayer. They looked back over their shoulders with a look of bored contempt (p. 82).

Further, Rashid has been depicted as a man who intends to control his wife. Mariam lives in fear of Rashid's varying moods and his impulsive temperament that often resolves into contempt, ridicule, violence, and beating. One instance of his brutality is well displayed in his violent treatment of Mariam when he forces her to chew handful of pebbles as a punishment for not preparing the food

to his taste, as Hosseini says about him: "He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it, urged her to chew it" (Hosseini, 2005, p. 104). Hence, Mariam also silently objectifies herself, accepts her plight, and surrenders herself to the fate imposed on her by her husband without any protest.

Hence, the depiction of Pashtuns is negative in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2005). The men are represented as inhuman, immoral and misogynists. They cross all the limits while having relations with women. They beat women when they are unable to cook well for their men. They even do not hesitate to torture women when they are unable to produce children for them. They expect their wives to be chaste when they themselves keep illicit relations with others' wives.

Hosseini's third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed* (2014) focuses on Nila Wahdati, a Pashtun character and daughter of King Amanullah of Afghanistan. She does not have any positive quality. All the pessimistic traits are associated with her. She seems to be a whore. Nabi, the driver of Nila Wahdati, describes her in the following way, "I stole a quick glance at the red polish on her toenails, at the gold-tinged sheen of her shaved calves, the high arch of her foot, and always at her full, perfectly shaped breasts. There were men walking this earth, I marveled, who had touched those breasts and kissed them as they had made to love her. What was left to do in life once you had done that" (Hosseini, 2014, p. 96)?

Nila Wahdati responds to an interviewer, "And then I took to falling in love. Often, desperately, and, to my father's horror, with the wrong sort. A housekeeper's son once, another time a low-level civil servant who handled some business affairs for my father. I arranged clandestine rendezvous and stepped away from home ..." (Hosseini, 2014, p. 226). This shows her moral degradation that keeping lovers and running away with them is a western tradition and might be justified in the name of modernity and civilization.

Similarly, Nila Wahdati responds to the same interviewer about the status of women in the patriarchal society. She is of the view that women are mentally and physically weaker than men. They can easily fall victim to false temptations by men. Men can easily trap them, and women do not feel shy while keeping illicit relations with many men. They are hyper-sexual. Nila describes such characteristics of women: "And women, don't you know, are emotionally, morally, and intellectually immature. They lack self-control, you see, they're vulnerable to physical temptation. They are hyper-sexual beings who must be restrained lest they jump into bed with every Ahmad and Mahmood" (Hosseini, 2014, p. 231).

Conclusion

What we infer from the above discussions is that Pashtuns have shaped their cultural values and social setup themselves. The historical backdrop indicates that they are the losers and the sufferers; and they are still dealt with iron hands by the westerners. They always try to shape their objective identity when they feel it at stake. However, it is difficult for them to tackle the situations alone. They need other communities along taking affirmative steps for their social survival and cultural setups.

Pashtuns' identity might be a dynamic process, which keeps on changing as per their survival, growth and destination. Hence, they change it for their wellbeing and social construction, not for fulfilling the western propagandas against them. They are not the misogynists, terrorists and

culprits, which has been generalized against them, as misperceived in the works of Hosseini. They live distinct life and owe strange life styles at times, but they are propelling to adopt them so. Therefore, the research paper aims at highlighting the value of the Pashtuns' identity for social construction and cultural preservation. The study leaves a question to the Pashtuns to choose/construct their objective identity. They need to keep a balance between their socially constructed identity, invented pre or post 9/11 scenarios. Further, they need to focus on reinventing their positive and productive image, which they have lost after 9/11.

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