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Pashtoon Culture and their Love for Islam

Pashtoon Culture

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Abstract:

It is important to emphasize the importance of Pashtun culture in Afghan society, even if 'modern' Afghanistan is keen to demonstrate (both to itself and the outside world) its multi-ethnic self-image. Pashtuns have traditionally dominated Afghanistan, so the extent that the term 'Afghan' was originally used as a synonym of 'Pashtun'. Afghan emirs (referred to as 'kings' or 'shahs' since 1926) have all been members of the (Pashtun) Durrani 'tribe', whose geographical heartland surrounds the city of Kandahar.¹ This Pashtun element is essential to understanding Afghanistan's history, including the last fifteen years period, dominated by the rise, fall and steady resilience of the Taliban movement. The latter is, of course, perceived as an extremist movement belonging to the totalitarian end of the spectrum of political Islam, but reducing the Taliban simply to its religious driving forces would be shortsighted. Indeed, Pashtun nationalism is a key element of the Taliban movement (Sinno, 2008). Though this fact is well known, it is comparatively unacknowledged by global media coverage, whose main focus is factors that overlap with Al-Qaida, such as 'terrorism' and 'backwardness', thus amalgamating the two in the common perception.

Keywords: *backwardness, Al-Qaida, unacknowledged, terrorism*

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The Pashto language belongs to the Eastern subgroup of the Iranian subfamily of the Indo-European language family. It is believed to be the mother tongue of approximately 50 million people (Ethnologue, 2009). Although precise censuses are not available – and in spite of both the numerous native Pashto speakers whose ancestry is largely multi-ethnic (inter-ethnic marriage is frequent in the region) and non-Pashto speakers claiming Pashtun heritage – this number is likely to be a reasonable approximation of the size of the Pashtun ethnic group. Roughly two-thirds of Pashtuns live in Pakistan (known as ‘Pukhtuns’ or ‘Pathans’), where they constitute an important minority (15-20 per cent). One-third of Pashtuns live in Afghanistan, where they often claim to constitute the national majority, although data suggests that though they are the strongest group, they do not make up 50 per cent of the population. The remaining Pashtuns are dispersed in a wide diaspora, with communities in the United Arab Emirates (constituting a cheap source of labour), India and various Western countries (Monsutti, 2009).

Elements of Pashtun Culture

Pashtu culture is a very rich and colorful culture which is based on Pashtunwali (the code of ethics and life) and Islam. It has some values and standards for each and every kind of event that can happen in everyday life. It ranges from Islamic beliefs to the songs, dances, Gham-Khadi, Topak-thmacha, Hujra system etc. There is a clear upper hand for men over women in Pashtu society, but respecting a woman is its most important priority. Almost all of the men do outside-home businesses and the women are mostly house wives, but things are changing now in this regard. There are other many important aspects of Pashtu culture that can be brought under consideration to be discussed. I will go through some of those important aspects below.

This section provides a short overview of some of the main characteristics of Pashtun culture. These features give a more complete picture. Correspondingly, the traditions are discussed with respect to their relevance to cross-cultural interaction and especially negotiation. Some of these characteristics, such as the ‘tribal’ element, remain very much specific to the Pashtuns. Others, such as the jirga, influence Afghanistan to an extent that they may be seen as a ‘national institution’ (Wardak, 2003). Pashtun traditions are emulated, at least to some degree, by the non-Pashtun ethnic groups of Afghanistan (Carter and Connor, 1989).

Tribes

Pashtuns are often described in the academic literature as being the ‘world’s largest tribal society, and lineage elements do in fact play a key role in Pashtun identity and social organization. The English word ‘tribe’, however, connotes a certain primitiveness that does not resonate when used (in English) by the Pashtuns themselves (Glatzer, 2002, 265). Rather, the word (in Pashto: قوم; qawm and خېل; khel)³ is used with pride, and most educated Pashtuns are able to recite their patrilineal list of forebears back to a common Pashtun ancestor. It would, however, be simplistic to consider the tribal element to be the only significant normative parameter in Pashtun society. As German scholar Bernt Glatzer stresses:

‘The tribal system is usually not the only structural principle of a tribal society. The example of the Punjab (both Indian and Pakistani) makes it clear that tribe or tribal structure is only one guideline of social orientation in a complex network of different principles and patterns of the social landscape. The society or societies in which Pashtuns live are not much simpler. In Afghanistan which recently has sunk into chaos and turmoil and where tribes have gained considerably in importance, the tribal system is only one component within a much more complex social and political web. This is true as well for areas populated homogeneously by Pashtuns’ (2002, 266). Besides the tribal framework, two other elements play an absolutely central role in the Pashtun social order: Pashtunwali, a code of honour common to all Pashtun ‘tribes’, and Jirga, an important decision-making assembly.

Nearly five hundred linguists from around the world ate the bird for almost ten years, almost half of which were damaged or broken. After much deliberation, they all came together and were translated into some of the world's most powerful schools of thought, and have had a profound effect on 5,000 years of human history. Sosa provided useful information about the peoples of Central Asia and dispelled many speculations and speculations. The histories written in Pashto in particular proved to be the most mythical, from the time of Nematullah Herawi to the rise of Pakistan. (Sorry) or something like that, one has copied the other and our descendants will be confused about their origin and lineage and their lineage will cause some confusion and about us But some people have such ways too. We are not a nation, but it does not smell of contradictions and it also psychologically harms our sense of unity and passion. In any case, "Piston is blood?" He dropped it and questioned whether the Pashtuns were of Jewish or Israeli descent, as the Pashtuns had a single pen in the form of aloe vera dating from 3 to 6 BC, and in Central Asia this period The name of the period is Karaj Ogori Tarikh-e-Millal-e-Asiyan-e-Gharbi (meaning the period when the people worshiped the house of fire, ie fire-worshippers) and people of this religion were born The late Maulana Abu Al-Kalam Azad is also said to have preached monotheism

Pashtunwali

Pashtunwali (پښتونوالی) is an ethical-normative frame of reference that applies to all Pashtuns. The word can be translated as ‘pashtunness’ and is often referred to as ‘the way of the Pashtuns’ (Rzehak, 2011, 1). The specific term, unlike the concept, is not commonly used by Pashtuns (Glatzer, 2000, 93-102). Pashtunwali is sometimes described as legal system, sometimes as code of honour, and occasionally as the entire tradition (Janata and Hassass, 1975, 84).. Pashtunwali’s fundamental concepts all focus on the central notion of nang (ننگ), or honour. Pashtunwali is unwritten and comprised of a large set of tenets, rules and concepts, which may be understood as the ‘customary law of the Pashtuns’. As customary law, pashtunwali is designed around the narkhcomplex. Narkh (نرخ) is a Persian word meaning ‘price’, and the narkh system is based on a specific set of compensations to be paid to a victim, or his or her family, following any given offence. The unit compensation is the khun (خون; Persian for ‘blood’).

The legalistic definition of pashtunwali as customary law, however, is slightly too narrow, however, as pashtunwali comprises more than rules. Rather, it is a moral ‘grid of parallels and meridians’ to be used by Pashtuns, who, being devout Muslims,

attempt to make it compatible with Islam. As German Iranologist Lutz Rzehak points out, ‘...today the ideals of Pashtunwali compete with other value systems that gained influence [during the last three decades] ... but there is no doubt that among the competing value systems the ideals of Pashtunwali still continue to present an attractive and sometimes binding option today’ (2011, 2). Pashtunwali’s main aspects relate to *melmastia* (مېلمستيا; hospitality), *nanawatay* (ننواتي, forgiveness), *badal* (بدل; revenge), *tura* (توره; bravery), *musawat* (مساوات; equality), *bawar* (باور; trust) or *wisa* (ويسا; trust), *ghayrat* (غیرت; self-honour) and *namus* (ناموس; the honor of women).

1. Jirga

A *jirga* is an assembly of various dimensions, and thought to be ‘one of the least researched aspects of Afghan culture and society’ (Wardak, 2003, 3). The assembly can be convened at various levels of the community. An important feature of *jirga* is that its decision, once made, is authoritative and binding. A *jirga* takes decisions by consensus, not vote, creating a strong propensity for compromise (Labastie-Dadouh, 2004). A *jirga* is convened whenever a problem arises and, in principle, is open to all adult males. *Jirga* (جرگه) is a Pashto word derived from ‘*jirg*’ (جرگ), meaning ‘wrestling ring’. The interesting etymology of the word is worth noting; *jirg* is related to a very old Indo-European root (**sker*) that bears the idea of ‘turning; round’, illustrated by the Persian (چرخ, *charkh*) and Pashto (څرخ, *kharkh*) words meaning ‘wheel’ (Pokorny, 1959). The corresponding Latin *circus* (derived from Greek κίρκος) became the English ‘circle’ and originally referred to a ‘group of persons surrounding a center [sic] of interest’ (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2011), a meaning which closely approximates that of a *jirga*. This is relevant not only for the geometry it implies, but also for the symbolic value of the circular, equidistant arrangement in denoting the equivalence of all those (men) partaking in a *jirga*. This is linked to a core principle in Pashtun culture – *musawat* (مساوات), or equality. There is no chairman at *jirgas*, and all members of the *jirga* are equal. In the absence of a House of Elders to resolve the issue, the *Wani Jirga* will make every decision with fairness and respect. Most people in the cities now a days decision will be made in the government courts. In villages and tribal areas, the main decision-making *jirga* is held and the government also gives importance to the decision of the vein. Does Pashtuns believe that there is a limit to mercy?

2. Musawat: Equality in Pride and Dignity within a Hierarchical Power Structure

The principle of equality is highly significant to interacting with Pashtuns. Despite the persistence of social differentiation, understanding the centrality of the belief in the equality of all Pashtuns is critical. This is due to the fact that equality is linked to the idea of brotherhood, which, in turn, is a consequence of the genealogical pyramid (leading back to a common ancestor) that forms the ‘tribal’ structure (Rzehak, 2011, 12). Is it important to note, however, that this sense of equality born of common kinship does not necessarily imply Pashtun society is egalitarian in the Western sense of the term? In the survey of foreign workers with experience in Afghanistan, the overwhelming majority (14 out of 17) stated that they perceived Pashtuns to be hierarchical, rather than egalitarian.⁴ This finding seems to contradict the principle of *musawat*, and may be due to several reasons, some of them inherent to the (not strictly egalitarian) Pashtun social system, and others to recent shifts.

The equality conveyed by musawat should be considered an ideal rather than reflective of some 'really existing egalitarianism'. As stated by Rzehak, 'equality as conveyed in the concept of musawat is the equality of brothers, but it does not contradict social inequality, difference in age or differences by other hierarchical principles' (2011, 12). Equality in dignity (which relates to the right to preserve and defend one's personal honour (تنگ; nang) does not imply the absence of a power pyramid. Leadership in Pashtun society derives from seniority and experience. As in English, the term 'senior' (مشر; meshr) often has a connotation of age or prestige (Rzehak, 2011, 13). Pashtuns distinguish between two main groups of elders: a khan (خان) or malik (ملك) is a hereditary elder whose prestige stems from land ownership and economic strength, whereas a spinzhiray (سپنژيراي; a yllaretil; 'bearded') derives his position from personal, 'meritocratic' attributes such as knowledge, wisdom, bravery and rhetorical skills (Rzehak, 2011, 13). Respectful and honourable behaviour towards the elderly is mandatory. Other criteria for status differentiation include marital status, wealth, leadership skills and general nang (honour).

Gham-Khadi:

It is a pashtu phrase which means the times of happiness and sorrows. Gham-Khadi is one the most important entities of Pashtu culture. According to this tradition, every Pashtun person is supposed to help his other Pashtun fellow when he is facing some problem, and to attend his ceremonies at the time of happiness. This concept mostly refers to the times of Marriage ceremonies and the Funeral ceremonies. In the marriage ceremony, all the relatives are supposed to help the family financially and provide them with whatever they need. They have to attend all the guests along with them. During the funeral ceremonies, the family of the deceased is supposed to set aside in the Hujra to accept the people's condolences, and the relatives or tribal fellows are supposed to arrange everything they need. The mourning family don't have to cook anything for at least three days. The other fellow villagers will arrange for them as well as the the guests. In most of the regions, people from far away came physically to attend the funeral ceremony, and the mourning family has to select an open area with the capacity of at least 1000 people for the funeral prayers. This ceremony lasts for 40 days at the most. Now a days, there is a little shift being seen in such traditional values. With more and more modernization like mobile phone and cars, the ceremonies last for 1 or 2 days, or sometimes they send condolences through mobile phones which implies that the modernization has some negative effects over this beautiful concept of Pashtu tradition.

Surah سورہ :

Whenever a Pashtun is killed in a massacre, there are two ways to get rid of it. That the killer will marry his daughter or sister to a young man in the victim's family and such animosity will turn into a stubborn person. Due to the hole, there are two families, but most of the atrocities are committed against the girls in it. Whenever a man wants to do something which is in the hands of a benefactor, he invites his relatives, friends of Baran and the people of Cham neighborhood to do it for him and they do it for him without any charge. May Allah bless them and give them a good hospitality.

Taur نور :

If someone has been accused of committing heinous crimes against women and of having an affair between a man and a woman. Whenever someone is accused and the head can both be killed. If the head is caught and the family refuses to hand it over, the whole family can be blamed.

Hospitability میلمستیا:

It is also a special principle of the Pashtun nation that a person should take refuge in a house or cell of a Pashtun, even if he is not an enemy. And his protection will be like that of a member of his family. According to the decision of the elders, any family, even if it is illegal, will leave the Bell family and seek meaning.

Hujra حجره: The Pashtun cell is a spacious place in which they cherish sorrow and happiness. Everyone enters the cell unconditionally. There must be a cell in every Pashtun village. There can also be deaths, deaths and decisions.

Change : If one head rises and kills the other head, the family of the deceased will surely weigh the killer or one of his family members and will be changed.

Another factor contributing to less than egalitarian nature of Pashtun society is what may be described as the recent, widespread breakdown of traditional social structures in Afghanistan and in most areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan, primarily due to the ongoing conflict. As observed by Ruttig-

‘Traditional social and political relations have increasingly been weakened and dissolved. [...] As a result, the jirga as a major conflict-resolving mechanism of the Pashtuns has lost much of its authority. Might often trumps pashtunwali and even Islamic law. In many Pashtun tribes, the more permanent shura has replaced the jirga. [Most shuras] are convened by the new strongmen. This makes them hierarchical in structure, in contrast to the egalitarian Jirga where ideally all male members of a certain tribe find a consensus about a certain conflict’ (2010).

Last but not least, it is important to distinguish between in-group and out-group behavior. The survey respondents experienced Afghan/Pashtun society as hierarchical in its interaction (as an aggregate) with foreigners. The presence of outsiders is likely to give rise to behaviour distinct from that characterizing in-group interaction.

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