



SOUTH ASIA
CENTRE

OCCASIONAL PAPER 3

PASHTUN ALTERITY IN PAKISTAN

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January–April 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'PASHTUN', 'PUKHTOON', 'AFGHAN' OR 'PATHAN' IN AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN AND OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD HAVE BEEN HAUNTED BY STEREOTYPED IMAGES, SLURS, SLANGS AND PHRASES ONCE CREATED BY THE BRITISH RAJ IN THE 19TH–20TH CENTURIES. IN PAKISTAN, THESE ARE REPRODUCED BY INSTITUTIONS, PRINT AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA, SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL DISCOURSES. THIS PAPER UNPACKS THE DISCOURSE CREATED, RECREATED AND PERPETUATED BY MASS MEDIA, FILMS, DRAMAS AND EDUCATIONAL APPARATUS REGARDING PASHTUNS, WHICH HAS LED TO SOCIAL PROFILING, EXCLUSION, MASS DISPLACEMENT, AND DENIAL OF BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS TO PEOPLE WHO MATCH THE STEREOTYPED APPEARANCE.



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INTRODUCTION

From the climax of the Cold War till the emergence and end of the War on Terror, the terms ‘Pashtun’, ‘Pukhtoon’, ‘Afghan’ and, in some accounts ‘Pathan’, have been surfacing on global print and electronic media.

There are several contesting commentaries on the origin of Pashtuns; the validated opinion is of their Indo-Aryan origin. Specifically, Pashtuns belong to the Eastern Iranian ethnic group,¹ with a population of almost 60 million people around the world.²

An ethnolinguistic group, Pashtuns reside primarily in the region that lies between the Hindu Kush mountains in north-eastern Afghanistan and the northern stretch of the Indus River in Pakistan. They constitute the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, and exclusively carried the name ‘Afghan’ before any native of the present land area of Afghanistan.³

Language is one of the significant markers of Pashtun identity; Pashto is spoken by almost 60 million people in the world.⁴ It is the official language of Afghanistan, and more than 51 per cent of the population speak

¹ Richard Tapper, ‘Ethnic Identities and Social Categories in Iran and Afghanistan’, in Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald & Malcolm Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity*, London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 232–46.

² Shahid Javed Burki, ‘The Wandering Pashtuns’, *The Express Tribune*, 13 September 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2319894/the-wandering-pashtuns> (accessed on 10 September 2024).

³ Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. ‘Pashtun’, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pashtun> (accessed on 10 September 2024).

⁴ Walter Hakala, ‘Locating “Pashto” in Afghanistan: A Survey of Secondary Sources’, in Harold Schiffman (ed.), *Language Policy and Language Conflict in Afghanistan and Its Neighbors: The Changing Politics of Language Choice*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, p. 55.

Pashto.⁵ Although Pashtuns in Afghanistan make half of the pie chart, two-third of Pashtuns live in Pakistan, making them the second largest ethnic group in the country. As per the *Census Report* of 2017 (published by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics), Pashtuns constitute more than 16.1 per cent of the population of Pakistan.

In Pakistan, Pashto is the major language of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, is the second most-spoken language in Balochistan, and is spoken by 16 per cent of the population of Karachi. It is also spoken in Mianwali and Attock districts of Punjab, areas of Gilgit–Baltistan and in Islamabad. Due to largescale migration abroad, a sizable diaspora community has emerged over the last 50 years: more than 6 million Pashtuns live in the UAE, Iran, India, USA, UK, Germany, Canada and several other countries in Europe and Latin America.

This paper uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to theorise and conceptualise the arguments surrounding notions and narratives of the official, cultural and educational institutions of Pakistan with regards to the image of Pashtuns. It is validated through

- television dramas, films and advertisements
- narratives and public accounts of contemporary Pakistani politicians and officials
- critical reading of two stories from Urdu school textbooks of Years 8 and 10 (O-Level) respectively.

TO DEFINE IS TO CONTROL: CONCEPTUALISING ALTERITY

Various forms of social inequalities and hegemonies around us are shaped by the discourses created by structures in the service of dominant groups, institutions and classes. Discourse as a double-edged sword has a role in the (re)production and challenge of dominance. ‘Dominance’ is defined here as the exercise of social power by élites, institutions or groups that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial, and gender inequalities.⁶

CDA deconstructs the designs of narratives and discourses that render misery to the large spectrum of subordinate groups and maintains, rectifies, prolongs, and legitimises the dominance of the prosperous few. It draws upon the study of linguistics with a concealed relationship between language and society, and language and mind, recognising ways in which language is used to portray the incongruent distribution of power and to preserve these disparities.⁷

Fairclough defines CDA as ‘the concept of power in terms of how social structures and institutions influence discourse, how said discourse contributes to the creation of power relations in society, and how counter-discourses are also created to challenge these dominant structures of power.’⁸

⁵ Tariq Rahman, ‘The Pashto Language and Identity-Formation in Pakistan’, *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1995, pp. 151–70.

⁶ Teun A. van Dijk, ‘Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis’, *Discourse & Society*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1993, pp. 249–83.

⁷ Ruth Sanz Sabido, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in the British Press*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

⁸ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 3rd edn, London: Routledge, 2015.

The fluidity and omnipresence of the discourse creates, sustains and pedals power relations at all levels. The theorisation of ‘otherness’ and ‘alterity’ in the lens of CDA spin the constructed social realities and problematise the coercive situations to be altered and transformed. Alterity often implies ‘otherness’, that is, being underprivileged/marginalised. Scholars have theorised this concept especially in post-colonial studies analysing orientalist discourse.⁹

The (re)production process potentially involves different modes of discourse–power relations which may include the enactment, representation, legitimation, denial, mitigation or concealment of dominance, among others. More specifically, critical discourse analysts want to know what structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events play a role in these modes of reproduction.¹⁰

PASHTUNS IN COLONIAL IMAGINATION

Pashtuns, particularly on the North-Western frontiers of erstwhile British India have been at the margins of power both during colonial and post-colonial times. The fierce, expeditious and violent contact of British colonial power with Pashtuns emerged out of a peculiar colonial imagination and attitude that stemmed from romantic and demonic otherness.¹¹

The tropes once used by Mountstuart Elphinstone, the first person to design an investigative project of the Afghan people’s history, land and politics has long resonated in the narratives of its descendant orientalists of the 19th and 20th centuries. The story once told by Elphinstone as a diplomat was retold after the disastrous destiny of the East India Company in Khord-e-Kabul as a result of the First Anglo-Afghan War. The text of these narratives is vexed and narrators like Josiah Harlan, Charles Masson, Robert Warburton, Lady Sale, William Bryden, Winston Churchill, Rudyard Kipling, etc. have added their part to stereotype Afghans/Pashtuns.

Elphinstone presented Pashtuns as medieval, masculine, warlike, and violent;¹² in her *Journal*, Lady Florentia Sale repeatedly paints them as unclean, demon-like, cruel, and wicked;¹³ Robert Warburton defines each individual (Pathan) as stern, a thief, raider, and robber by birth.¹⁴ Taking cue, Winston Churchill, as well as the celebrity poet and novelist of the Empire in the 20th century, Rudyard Kipling, repeatedly described Pathans as barbaric, martial, uncivilised, ‘noble savages’, and the most turbulent race under the stars.¹⁵

⁹ Waqar A. Shah, ‘Nation, Alterity and Competing Discourses: Rethinking Textbooks as Ideological Apparatuses’, *Linguistics and Education*, vol. 78, 2023, 101250, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0898589823001092> (accessed 10 September 2024).

¹⁰ Teun A. van Dijk, ‘Aims of Critical Discourse Analysis’, *Japanese Discourse*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1995, pp. 17–28.

¹¹ Barkat S. Kakar, *Da Pashtano Pa Hakla da Kahateez Pohanao Andoona Anzoroona* (lit., ‘Perspectives and Images of Pashtuns in Orientalist Discourse’), Quetta: Pashto Academy, 2021, p. 11.

¹² Zubaida Jalalzai, ‘The West in Afghanistan: 18-19th century Colonial Ambassadors, Soldiers and Adventurers in Racialized “Free Land”’, in Elisabetta Marino and Tanfer E. Tunc (eds), *The West in Asia and Asia in the West: Essays on Transnational Interactions*, North Carolina: Macfarland & Co. Inc., 2015, pp. 20–33.

¹³ Lady Florentia W. Sale, *A Journal of the Disasters in Affghanistan, 1841-2*, 7th edn, Quetta: Sales and Services, rpt. 2009.

¹⁴ Colonel Sir Robert Warburton, *Eighteen Years in the Khyber, 1879-1898*, London: John Murray, 1900, p. 87.

¹⁵ Winston Churchill, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, 1916, rpt. Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2010.

In all colonial writings, Pashtuns are portrayed as masculine, warlike, barbaric, unruly, and exotic in otherness to the British.¹⁶

EMERGENCE OF PAKISTAN

As the British Empire expanded in India, identity politics played a pivotal role. The Hindu–Muslim divide surfaced at various points in the 20th century. The valourisation of Hindi over Urdu was one of the British Raj’s divisive instruments that intensified this politics of identity.

Colonial India abounds with its dichotomous division of secularism and communalism and/or secular nationalism and religious communalism, but this has been challenged and laid bare on many occasions in the last decade.¹⁷ Muslims in India comprised almost one-fifth of the population, and raising fear of Hindu majoritarian tyranny was used as a political weapon to organise and rally sentiment by the All-India Muslim League in the early 20th century, which finally led to the creation of Pakistan on the map of the world.

Pakistan came into being on 14 August 1947, and is proverbially the first modern state that emerged on the globe in the name of religion (Islam).¹⁸ The idea and ideology of Pakistan rides on the two-nation theory, that Hindus and Muslims in the Indian subcontinent were two distinct nations, with different religions, cultures and histories, and could not live together in a single nation state.

Pakistan annexed the majority of the Pashtun provinces through direct and indirect colonial rule. The western Punjab, Sindh and Bengal were already ceded to the British and had, consequently, a substantial colonial legacy; the erstwhile North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan, which were on the margins of the Empire, were annexed through political and military maneuvering, with limited colonial impact and inheritance. In the wake of communal riots, massacres and ethnic cleansing at the time of independence in 1947, millions of Hindus migrated to India, and Muslims in India moved in the reverse direction. The total movement of population represented the greatest forced migration of the 20th century.¹⁹

As an outcome of this identity politics and the fear of Hindu majoritarian tyranny, Pakistan’s educational, cultural, social, and economic policies were developed on principles of exclusion. Ethnic groups who had hitherto been claiming their status as exclusive communities — like Pashtun, Baloch, Sindhi, and Bengali — were denied the basic rights (language, culture) and equitable share in the state’s wealth, infrastructure and social development schemes.

Pakistan’s ruling élites viewed cultural and ethnic diversity as a challenge rather than opportunity. In the inaugural address of the first educational conference held on 27 November 1947, then Interior Minister Fazlur Rahman said:

‘We have been far too prone in the past to think in terms of Bengalis, Punjabis, Sindhis and Pathans and it is to be deeply regretted that our education has failed to extirpate this narrow and pernicious outlook of

¹⁶ Charles Lindholm, ‘Images of the Pathan: The Usefulness of Colonial Ethnography’, *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1980, pp. 350–61; Kakar, *Da Pashtano*, p. 76.

¹⁷ A. Raja, ‘Nations, Nation-state and Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 22, nos 1–2, 2002, pp. 53–58.

¹⁸ Khalid b. Sayeed, ‘Religion and Nation-building in Pakistan’, *Middle East Journal*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1963, pp. 279–91.

¹⁹ Ian Talbot, ‘The 1947 Partition of India’, in Dan Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of Genocide*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 420–37.

*provincial exclusiveness which, should it persist, will spell disaster for our new-born State. There cannot be a greater source of pride and a better object of undivided loyalty than the citizenship of Pakistan, no matter what political, religious or provincial label one may possess.*²⁰

PASHTUN NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS: A PERIL, NOT AN OPPORTUNITY

Although Pashtun territories were politically, culturally and administratively divided during the colonial period, two-thirds of the population of Pashtuns remained in areas sliced off from Afghanistan in the wake of the Gandamak Treaty (1879) and the Durand Line Agreement (1893). Resistance across the Pashtun frontiers was constant, not least because of their marginalisation due to the exclusivist, violent and dehumanising Closed Border and Forward policies of the Raj.

In the wake of anti-imperialist uprisings in the early 20th century, nationalist political movements emerged in Pashtun areas particularly in modern-day KPK and northern Balochistan (which is predominantly Pashtun). The non-violent socio-political Red Shirts, Khudai Khidmatgar (KK) Movement of Abdul Ghaffar Khan (alias Bacha Khan) infused a new sense of resistance and social reconstruction in Pashtun society, having been hostage to and divided by tribalism by the colonial system of appointing political agents. Similarly, Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai showed phenomenal resistance to the policies and incursion of colonial rule in the Pashtun parts of modern Balochistan province.

The Khudai Khidmatgar Movement was one of the most illuminating, non-violent, socio-political movements that created substantial political and civic sense in Pashtuns of the erstwhile NWFP. They had close connections with the Indian National Congress, and Bacha Khan was not aligned with the idea of a separate Pakistan; Pashtun land (which was either leased or taken from Afghanistan by the British) became part of independent Pakistan.

However, both Bacha Khan and Abdul Samad Khan took the oath of allegiance to the Pakistani Legislative Assembly and showed their loyalty to the nascent state formed in the name of Islam. The Khudai Khidmatgar Movement was forcibly crushed through massacre of the Red Shirts, harassment of its members in public, confiscation of their properties, and solitary imprisonment of Bacha Khan and other leaders. The Chief Minister of the Muslim League, Abdul Qayum Khan, patronised the mass killings of the peaceful Red Shirts' gathering on 12 August 1948. The scene of this brutal massacre is described by Rustam Shah Mohmand:

*'People, struck with bullets, began to fall to the ground. Women of the villages came out with copies of the Quran on their heads, crying and demanding an end to the firing. More than 600 people lay dead and about 1,500 were critically wounded.'*²¹

The secular nationalist parties and movements of Pashtuns have consistently been targeted in Pakistan. The Strategic Depth policy in Afghanistan has the same design: to weaken and subjugate the Afghan state, just as Pashtun nationalists could not assert their due rights guaranteed in the Constitution of Pakistan. Historically,

²⁰ Inaugural Address of Interior Minister Fazl-ur Rehman, 27 November 1947, *Proceedings of the Pakistan Educational Conference*, Karachi, Government of Pakistan, Ministry of the Interior (Educational Division), p. 11.

²¹ Rustam S. Mohmand, 'Babara Massacre of 1948', *Express Tribune*, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2033419/babara-massacre-1948> (accessed on 10 September 2024).

the Pashtun have been denied a contiguous province of their own based on ethno-cultural similarities (like, say, Punjabis have Punjab). Instead, they have been administered in four units of Pakistan: the former North-Western Frontier Province (NWFP); the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA); northern Balochistan, and the Pashtun-dominant districts of Attock and Mianwali (Punjab).

PASHTUNS IN PAKISTANI DISCOURSE

Contrary to the idea that the ideology of Islam is the cornerstone of Pakistan as a modern state, the administrative, judicial and legislative structures derive from its colonial past and are embedded in that framework. These structures also continued a colonial mindset and culture towards marginal identity communities in the country. The nation's languages (Baloch, Sindhi, Bengali, Pashtun, Seraiki and others) and associated cultures that shared the land were perceived as a challenge rather than opportunity by the dominant/majoritarian Urdu/Punjabi-speaking communities. In official narratives, these nations are reduced to 'ethnic groups' and their languages are tagged as local languages.

As the stereotyping and alterity of Afghans was not an exception but the rule in colonial ethnography,²² so has been the defining and identifying of Pashtun culture and people, and their weaknesses, stereotypes and atypical attributes have been (re)produced via a discourse governed by the country's political offices, cultural, social, and educational institutions.

Pashtun Images in Pakistani TV Dramas and Films

The atypical and demonic depiction of Pashtuns in Pakistani literature, academia, educational textbooks, newspapers, TV channels, films, and policy narratives has been present since the time the nation came into being in 1947. Prior to the advent of private TV channels, Pakistani theatre and films seldom presented Pashtun characters with modern attributes: their characterisation was always of low-wage earners, illiterate watchmen, gunmen, or naïve, funny idiots with no intelligence. In the last two decades, Urdu soap operas and late-night shows on private TV channels present content that paints Pashtuns as violent extremists, human traffickers, homosexuals, and Taliban sympathisers. Ghazal Yousafzai unpicks the depiction of Pashtuns in Pakistani dramas and films:

*'During the 1990s they [Pashtun], for the most part, filled in as chowkidars [watchmen] clad in Turkish petticoats with a weapon tied on their shoulders or as a nitwit who consistently would be the aim of the joke. If not really, they would only be seen on a shallow level, as strong brutal figures with thick facial hair. Each psychological militant appeared in the media in a post-9/11 world is quite often a Pashtun and that is a picture that is additionally sustained by the local Pakistani substance.'*²³

These imageries are not restricted to Pakistani dramas only; even TV commercials present Pashtuns as fruit-sellers, daily wage labourers and domestic servants. In 2009, a Ufone (Pakistan telecommunications network) advertisement showed the character of a Pashtun servant who bought a donkey instead of a

²² Lindholm, 'Images of the Pathan'.

²³ Ghazal Yousafzai, 'Stereotyping the Pashtuns in Mainstream Media', *Voice of Balochistan*, 19 August 2020, <https://voiceofbalochistan.pk/culture/stereotyping-the-pashtuns-in-mainstream-media/> (accessed on 12 November 2023).

mattress due to the bad telecommunication service since both words have a similar pronunciation in Urdu — *gadhâ* (donkey) and *gaddâ* (mattress).

Contemporary Pakistani Urdu dramas on television like ‘Sang-e-Mah’ (2022), ‘Sang-e-Marmar’ (2016) and ‘Meray Hamnasheen’ (2022) earned millions of views by peddling such distorted images of Pashtun culture, crafting their storylines on outdated stereotypes. They showed that violence, misogyny, drug abuse, rivalries between cousin lineages, use of guns, and brutal force have cultural and social legitimacy in contemporary Pashtun culture.

Presenting Pashtun characters as simpletons and naïve, always the butt of jokes, was another old motif adopted by current TV dramas and films and live Punjabi theatre shows especially in the 1980s–90s. More recently, these negative attributes have been intensified by adding drugs and trafficking of arms to the Pashtun profile in Pakistan. ‘Bulbulay’ (2009), a popular Urdu sitcom, ridicules a Pashtun character who offers a gift to Nabeel (the protagonist and producer). Nabeel’s reply is telling: ‘What could be his gift? Either a bomb or *naswar* [chewing tobacco]!’.

Similarly, Pakistani movies by established directors like Shoaib Mansoor single out Pashtun culture as the root cause of extremism and violence in Pakistan. Mansoor’s ‘Khuda kay Liye’ (2007), a trailblazing movie, rationalises the narrative that the waves of violent extremism in Pakistan are not the outcome of actions of extremist/terrorist organisations but Pashtun culture which, by design, is extremist, misogynist, violent, and uncivil. ‘Verna’ (2017) and ‘Bol’ (2011), also directed by Mansoor, contain similar content. Another movie, ‘Karachi se Lahore’ (2015), outrightly associates Pashtuns with homosexuality. Similar motifs are also found in 20th century (and contemporary) Urdu short stories, novels and travelogues.

Communal Politicians and Racialising Narratives

The discourse on Pashtuns’ alterity and otherness in Pakistani politics needs a thorough investigation. It ranges from appeasing Pashtuns through jokes, provoking them to violence or creating communal sentiments about them as smugglers, human traffickers, arms dealers, Afghan refugees, and land mafias.

While demonising Pashtun progressive–nationalist parties, the right-wing centrist and religio-political parties created and imposed a peculiar romantic image of Pashtuns and their culture infused with hyper-masculinity, medievalism, violence, and fatalism. Reducing Pashtuns solely to soldiers of God, saviours of the castle of Islam (Pakistan) and special people on Earth to defeat unlawful empires and enact the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan are routine commentaries on local TV channels, in the Parliament, in newspaper opinion pieces, Friday sermons and wide-loop Tablighi (Islamic preaching) gatherings. This cultivated image of Pashtuns has led to a racial profiling of Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand Line.

Former cricketer, founder of Pakistan’s Tehreek-e-Insaf party, and former Prime Minister Imran Khan said (at a political rally in October 2021) that Pashtuns are sympathisers of the Taliban.²⁴ Khan ignored the fact that the Pashtun community on both sides of the Pakistan–Afghanistan border are the prime victims of the good and bad Taliban. Further to this assertion, in April 2023, Khan (addressing a mass gathering) said: ‘Allah created two types of creatures in this world, Pathan (Pashtun) and Insaan (humans)’.²⁵ It was one of the most negative opinions aimed to provoke Khan’s Pashtun followers to incite violence against the state’s institutions.

²⁴ Abubakar Siddique, ‘Pakistan’s Imran Khan Under Fire For Claiming Pashtuns Are Taliban Sympathizers’, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 15 October 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/imran-khan-comments-pashtuns-taliban/31511322.html> (accessed on 10 September 2024).

²⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEE_Btplawo (accessed on 10 September 2024).

It is noteworthy that Pakistan's Permanent Representative at the United Nations Mr Munir Akram (re)produced this popular version of the narrative in February 2023. During a briefing on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, he claimed that 'from our perspective, the restrictions [on women] that have been put by the Afghan interim government flow not so much from a religious perspective as from a peculiar cultural perspective of the Pashtun culture, which requires women to be kept at home. And this is a peculiar, distinctive cultural reality of Afghanistan, which has not changed for hundreds if not thousands of years.'²⁶

On the one hand, political offices present Pashtun culture as misogynist; on the other hand, there are frequent assertions that tag Pashtuns as homosexuals. Fawad Chaudhry (leader of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party) said on a live TV program that he 'took a big risk going into the bathroom with a Pathan'.²⁷

Profiling, stereotyping and othering Pashtuns has been part of contemporary politics in Pakistan. It is certainly a structural issue that none of the people mentioned here were summoned by a court of law, letting them get away easily with their hate speeches, stereotypes and racialised narratives.

Identity Politics and Ideological Paradigm of School Textbooks

Inconsistencies are evident in the education policies of Pakistan from the time of its independence in 1947.²⁸ The ideological paradigm of learning and education is rooted in the distortion of history,²⁹ hate speeches and promotion of exclusivist narratives of Islam.³⁰ The representation the cultures, languages and histories of the people who lived in this part of the world for centuries has either been erased or misrepresented. The ideology of Pakistan which intertwined Urdu and Islam as the compulsory postulates of nationalism neglect and downplay the other cultures and identities of this land. Tariq Rahman illustrates this peculiar attitude:

*'The Pakistani ruling elite used Islam and Urdu to resist the challenge posed by fissiparous —Bengali, Sindhi, Pashtun, Baluchi, Seraiki [...] and textbooks were changed from the very beginning for that purpose.'*³¹

A glance at the education and culture policies in Pakistan validates the notion that language and culture are in essence the state's political, ideological and pedagogical agenda. Although education policies have changed with almost all political (democratic and military) tenures, notwithstanding consistent inconsistencies, the guiding principle of the curriculum has been nation-building through Urdu and Islam. A textual analysis of school textbooks by the historian K.K. Aziz in his landmark *The Murder of History in Pakistan* (1993), A. H. Nayyar and Ahmad Salim's *The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan – Urdu, English, Social Studies and Civics* (2003) and several others show how facts have been molded, reduced and fabricated in textbooks.

²⁶ Malala Yousafzai, 'Taliban Culture, Not Pashtun', *Dawn*, 5 February 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1735401> (accessed on 10 September 2024).

²⁷ 'PTI Senators walk out over Fawad's "Racist" Remarks against Pashtuns', *Express Tribune*, 7 October 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2380610/pti-senators-walk-out-over-fawads-racist-remarks-against-pashtuns> (accessed on 10 September 2023).

²⁸ K. Bengali, 'History of Educational Policy-making and Planning in Pakistan', Working Paper no. 40, 1999, Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute.

²⁹ Khurshid K. Aziz, *The Murder of History in Pakistan*, Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1993, p. 1; Abdul H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim, *The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan – Urdu, English, Social Studies and Civics*, University of Michigan: Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2003.

³⁰ Rubina Saigol, 'Enemies Within and Enemies Without: The Besieged Self in Pakistani Textbooks', *Futures*, vol. 37, no. 9, 2005, pp. 1005–1035.

³¹ Tariq Rahman, '12 Images of the "Other" in School Textbooks and Islamic Reading Material in Pakistan', in Lyn Yates and Madeleine Grumet (eds), *World Yearbook of Education 2011: Curriculum in Today's World: Configuring Knowledge, Identities, Work and Politics*, Milton Park: Routledge, 2011, pp. 181–98.

The general analysis of school textbooks reveals the peculiar ‘temporality’ of the people who resided in this part of the world for centuries. It begins either with the advent of Pakistan (1947) or the invasion of Arabs in the Sindh and later on the subcontinent (8th century). They present the formation of Pakistan as part of a divine scheme. The founder of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s statement in a speech he gave in March 1944 in Aligarh (India) that ‘Pakistan came into being the day when the first Hindu was converted to Islam’ has been produced and reproduced to root the foundations of Pakistani nationalism on Islam.³²

Analysis of textbooks published over the decades for the public sector and private schools of Pakistan shows an indifference to minority identities (Pashtun, Baloch, Sindhi, Seraiki, etc) even though the country is founded on the historical and national landscapes of these nations. The Punjabi community, being in majority, have seldom asserted language and culture since they occupy a hegemonic position in the state’s majoritarian federal structure,³³ power corridors and the perception that Urdu — the national language of Pakistan — is a dialect of Punjabi.³⁴

As schools rely mostly on textbooks, in critical discourse studies, the deconstruction of textbooks unveils the nexus of education as an instrument to foster the national policy, catering to messages, information, symbols, and metaphors that by design are part of the hidden agenda. While analysing Pakistani public school textbooks it is evident that they not only carry strong ideological positions but also perpetuate the discourse.

Pashtuns in Urdu School Textbooks

A review of the Urdu, Social Studies and History school textbooks published by the Balochistan and Punjab school textbooks Boards was carried out for this study. This segment comprises two parts: Part 1 throws light on some generic connotations about Pashtun identity, history and culture; and Part 2 deconstructs two stories published in Urdu textbooks for Years 8 and 10 (O-level) respectively.

A generic study of textbooks in Urdu, Social Studies and History shows that Pashtun culture, history, language, heroes, and geography are either missing or presented with an odd sense of indifference, temporality, tribalism, violence, and hypermasculinity. There is not a single lesson on their anti-imperialist movements or the non-violent and armed struggles of Pashtun heroes in different parts of Pashtun land. The books also show a reductionist approach to Pashtun culture and history: Pashtuns are denoted as ‘Pathans’³⁵ in most cases, which is a misnomer and a colonial inheritance.³⁶

Naturalising Pashtuns as a martial race is described in a lesson titled ‘Culture’. The lesson introduces six different cultural groups of Pakistan; ‘military services’ is the only attribute assigned to Pashtuns.³⁷ The text

³² Pervez A. Hoodbhoy and Abdul H. Nayyar, ‘Rewriting the History of Pakistan’, in Asghar Khan (ed.), *Islam, Politics and the State: The Pakistan Experience*, London: Zed Press, 1985, pp. 164–77.

³³ Rafiullah Kakar, ‘The Baloch Question After the Eighteenth Amendment’, in Ishtiaq Ahmed and Adnan Rafiq (eds), *Pakistan’s Democratic Transition: Change and Persistence*, Milton Park: Routledge, pp. 181–203.

³⁴ Tariq Rahman, ‘Language Policy and Education in Pakistan’, in Nancy H. Hornberger (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education, Volume 1: Language Policy and Political Issues in Education*, 2008, pp. 383–92.

³⁵ History Textbook for Year 7, Quetta: Balochistan Textbook Board, 2019, p. 73; Social Studies Textbook for Year 10 (O-level) Punjab, 2020, pp. 107, 109.

³⁶ Joseph A. Tainter and Donald G. MacGregor, ‘Pashtun Social Structure: Cultural Perceptions and Segmentary Lineage Organization — Understanding and Working within Pashtun Society’, *Social Science Research Network (SSRN)*, 3 August 2011, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1934940 (accessed on 10 September 2024).

³⁷ Although, since the creation of Pakistan, the Punjabi community comprises more than 65 per cent of Pakistan’s army while Pashtuns make only 15 per cent.

reads as follows: 'Along with trade, livestock and agriculture, Pashtuns serve the defense institutions in majority.'³⁸

Pashtuns are depicted as instinctively primordial; in the same textbook, the dress of Pashtuns in Balochistan is described as 'Posteen' the long overcoat made of the goat skin, when in fact it was part of the dress till the late 19th century. This shows an evolutionist and primitive sense of Pashtun culture.

'Inteqam': Imposing Tribal Codes

The ways in which the state perpetuates the production, organisation and distribution of social knowledge to construct particular images in the collective memory of the nation is important. A story from Pashto folklore titled 'Inteqam' (lit., 'Vengeance') is very important to understand Pashtun alterity. It is published in Urdu textbooks for Year 8, published by the Balochistan Textbook Board in Quetta in 2014. It revolves around crude tribal values of vengeance, sanctuary, hypermasculinity, and violence, and begins as follows:

*'Murad Khan was lying on the bed, he was bleeding, it looked like he had taken a bath in blood, and all his fellow villagers (men) gathered in his Hujra³⁹ around him. His wife and the young daughter were pale with grief. Due to excessive bleeding, his face had a yellowish pallor, he was barely able to say a single word, he cried and with utmost distress said: "The enemy has done what was meant for me, I am going to take the last breath ... the only unfulfilled desire I am taking to the grave is that I have no son who can pacify my soul while avenging me." His daughter Spin Gul wrapped herself around his feet and said: "Baba, you don't worry, I promise that until I don't avenge you, I will not sleep in peace." All the people standing there applauded and Murad Khan died peacefully.'*⁴⁰

As the story unfolds, Spin Gul is described as living with the pain of revenge but no one knew the murderer of her father. After two years, an injured young man knocked on the door at midnight. He was fatally wounded, yet Spin Gul and her mother nursed the injured, fed him and kept him in their house. They told their wounded guest about the tragic murder of Murad Khan. The news shocked him; he started crying, and then confessed that he was in fact the murderer of Murad Khan. He then asked Spin Gul to take her revenge; for a moment Spin Gul was overwhelmed by feelings of vengeance, she took her father's gun and aimed at him, but her mother taunted the daughter and said:

*'Girl! Are you sane? Although this young chap is our enemy, but he has taken refuge in our home. If any harm happens to him while being in our boundary we will not be able to show our faces to the people. Sweetheart! You better know our customs: even if an enemy takes refuge under our roof, it is our duty to protect him. We cannot even think of harming or killing a guest, even though he is our enemy, Spin Gul! For God's sake, throw your gun.'*⁴¹

The visuals accompanying this story are atypical: in the first picture, two guns along with a bullet bag are shown, while the second shows the dying Murad Khan, with two guns hanging criss-cross on the wall.

Her mother's reaction influenced the opinion of Spin Gul who threw away the gun and said to the injured young man: 'Would that I knew and found you outside the boundary of this home, I would have killed you with pleasure, but this time you are our guest, and I forgive you.'⁴²

³⁸ Social Studies textbook for Year 5, Quetta: Balochistan Textbook Board, 2019, p. 93.

³⁹ 'Hujra' refers to the guest room or place where menfolk sit, talk and eat; it is a characteristic feature of Pashtun households.

⁴⁰ Urdu textbook for Year 8, Quetta: Balochistan Textbook Board, 2018, p. 48; all translations mine.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴² *Ibid.*

As evident from the title, the story strongly emphasises the Pashtun's tribal sense of identity, simultaneously setting it in opposition to civility, civic laws and the state's governance system.

It presents a romantic and exotic alterity of Pashtuns. The frequent use of terms like honour, hospitality, customs, bravery, murder, gun, blood, femininity, masculinity, sanctuary, vehemence, etc are projected as defining features of Pashtunwali or traditional Pashtun code of life. It is a trigger to the retribalisation of Pashtuns and, on the other hand, creates Pashtun alterity and atypical cultural identity in the minds of non-Pashtun readers.

The story stands in stark contrast to the themes of citizenship, rule of law and citizen–state social contract. The hidden objectives behind such narratives is to 'naturalise' Pashtun ways of dealing with crimes and punishments, and nullifying the essence of civic and responsible citizenship.

How Does this Story Fit the War on Terror?

This story has been read, memorised and reproduced by millions of school students for more than a decade. It is certainly not by default to include such atypical stories of crude tribalism, Pashtun honour, *badraga* (providing protection to person(s) seeking refuge) and *nanavathi* (unconditional forgiveness to person who confess his/her crime), and the presence of weapons in a school textbook. By the time adolescents of Year 8 were reading this story in the textbook, thousands of Uzbek, Chechen, Afghan, Tajik, and Arab terrorists had crossed the porous mountains of Tora-Bora and settled in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. Ahmed Rashid, in his *Descent into Chaos* (2008), unfolds the story of how the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda outfits were reorganised in the erstwhile FATAs after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001.⁴³

In fact, Pashtuns in FATA welcomed and protected Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters ostensibly due to the influence of the tribal value system of hospitality, *panah* (providing shelter) and *badraga* but the reorganisation of these terrorist outfits imposed a peculiar type of Islamic *shari'ah* which was resisted by local notables and nationalist political parties, and series of target killings, collective and individual punishments on the pretext of *shari'ah* gradually resulted in Pakistan's military operations in the erstwhile FATAs. These operations in turn led to the killing thousands of Pashtuns, and internally displaced millions from Swat, Waziristan and other parts of the erstwhile FATA.

'Ek Safar, Ek Ishtihar': A Journey and an Advertisement

This short story is selected from the works of Hajira Masroor, a renowned Urdu fiction writer, and is published in the Urdu textbook for Year 10 (O-level) published by Balochistan Textbooks Bureau in 2018.

The story is seemingly a critique of social behaviour in Pakistani society. The writer paints a picture of her journey in a train full of suffocation, annoyance and quarrels. Metaphorically, it presents 'Pakistan', where people from different backgrounds live and interact. Instances of gender discrimination, might is right, mismanagement and the inefficiency of railway authorities are depicted. But in its illustrations of the problems, the story singles out a group of Pashtuns and portrays them with a peculiar alterity and demonic otherness.

⁴³ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The US and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*, London: Viking, 2008, p. 45.

In the opening paragraph of the story, the writer describes the dirt, congestion and panic inside the train; amidst all these adversities, 'A Pathan appears and spits *naswar*'.⁴⁴ Later, a nefarious gang 'Kho Bhau Log'⁴⁵ enter in the train. She writes:

*'Amid the mêlée between the two groups, the women were crying, their veils stretched and falling down. The affray was at its peak when the bunch of "Kho Bhau Log" entered. The squabble itself ended, and all the passengers abruptly sat on their seats. "Kho Bahui Log" intended to inject at least one person of their gang between the two passengers.'*⁴⁶

After getting into the train the gang-leader targets a sick boy lying on the seat. The dialogue between the boy's father and the 'Kho Bhau Log' leader further unravels Pashtun alterity.

"Uncle! There is no seat vacant here for you, this boy is sick", said the father of the sick boy gently.

"If he is sick then why lie on the seat?", the old leader of the gang asked furiously.

"He is sick, that is why he is lying", the sick boy's father replied.

"I asked, if he is sick then why he is traveling?", the eyes of the old man glared.

"I am taking him to hospital, please don't make him get up, he is infected, he has got smallpox", the eyes of the boy's father shone.

"Why not get him up, I have purchased a ticket", the old leader of the gang roared.

"I too have purchased a ticket", the boy's father replied.

"Your ticket is not for laying on the seat."

*"Mind your language." The old chap shouted and started beating the boy's father, the disorder once again mounted, the sick boy started weeping, and all the passengers started shouting.*⁴⁷

The Uncivil, Filthy, Violent and Boorish Pashtun

The outcome of this story is that Pashtuns operate and encroach on a group. They are uncivil, which is why they have no sense of how to behave gently in public, and travel in groups with their fellow people. Their insensitivity towards a sick boy and domineering attitude towards the weak and sick is embedded in their collective character.

Literature relies on the use metaphors and symbols. The idiom of this story is satirical and metaphoric. The train, full of people from the country can itself be imagined as a microcosm of the nation. The mismanagement of the railway department is overlooked, while the jingoism displayed in occupying the

⁴⁴ 'Naswar' (chewable tobacco) is mainly used by Pashtuns in Pakistan and Afghanistan. 'Naswar' and 'Nut' are usually used as a slang for Pashtuns in metropolitan cities of Pakistan (mainly Lahore and Karachi); see Hajira Masroor, 'Ek Safar, Ek Ishtihar', in Urdu textbook for Year 10 (O-level), Quetta: Balochistan Textbook Board, 2017, p. 49.

⁴⁵ While speaking Urdu, illiterate and Pashtun rural folk usually add 'Kho' at the beginning of an Urdu sentence.

⁴⁶ Masroor, 'Ek Safar, Ek Ishtihar', p. 51.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

right place is the contention between people from different religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The misfit in the train is the Pashtun ‘Kho Bhau Log’.

Tropes like ‘Kho Bhau Log’ have long resonated in the works of other Urdu fiction writers. The alterity of Pashtun characters as molesters, gangsters, violent, simpletons, dimwits and dirty has been presented in the works of various contemporary and 20th century Urdu fiction writers including Ghulam Abbas, Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai and others.

The latent meaning in this story is to create a ‘cultural shame’ amongst Pashtun students. They are doomed to rethink the way they look, the language they speak and the ethnic identity in which they are born.

It is important to note that this story is also a part of textbooks in all four provinces across Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The contesting narratives of Pashtun’s alterity in Pakistan has resulted in chronic racial profiling, exclusion and a deep sense of otherness.

Stereotypes of Pashtuns perpetuated in cultural, educational and political institutions in Pakistan have negatively affected the social fabric of the country. The persecution of Pashtuns in Islamabad, Punjab and Sindh is not accidental. During 2010–18, the racial profiling of Pashtuns in these regions was a chronic issue: the district administration in Punjab started combing operations against Pashtun businessmen, skilled and unskilled labourers. Market-owners and trade union leaders were summoned to keep an eye on Pashtun folk around them. Fake encounters with Pashtuns in Karachi during 2013–19 were also an outcome of the discourse created over the years.

Nowadays, since the start of forced deportation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan from 1 November 2023, a largescale harassment of Afghan refugees and Pashtun–Pakistani citizens has begun. Expulsion and harassment of Pashtuns in almost all metropolitan cities and rural areas of the country is reported by Amnesty International, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), UNHCR, and UN Migration (IOM) — who have all taken note of this situation.⁴⁸

There are various viral videos on social media platforms showing ordinary people from Sindh and Punjab searching for Pashtun businessmen, skilled workers and daily wage labourers, and asking them to show their identity cards. This situation is an outcome of the consistent ‘alterity’ of the Pashtun in Pakistan.

Stereotyping and alterity of races, ethnicities and social groups cause unconscious mistrust, prejudice and discrimination. In times of crises, with weak socio-economic conditions, ethnic divisions can further worsen the situation. It is high time that Pakistani lawmakers, media, opinion leaders, and its privileged urban polity start rethinking marginal identities and unlearn the view that perpetuates the colonial mindset of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is based on research conducted as part of the Charles Wallace Pakistan Trust Visiting Fellowship at the LSE South Asia Centre between January–April 2023.

⁴⁸ Amin Ahmed & Manzoor Ali, ‘Pakistan must consider risks to returning Afghans, say UN agencies’, *Dawn*, 8 October 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1779892#:~:text=in%20Pakistan%20legally,-,HRCP%20slams%20harassment,this%20%E2%80%9Cblatantly%20xenophobic%E2%80%9D%20practice> (accessed on 10 September 2024).

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First published December 2024

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