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Representation of Pashtun identity in British Colonial Discourse

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ABSTRACT

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Production, classification and fixation of knowledge about Pashtuns remained one of the basic strategy of the colonial writers for the building of great empires. The British writings, travelogues and ethnographies produced, categorized and reproduced the indigenous identities. This colonial mission was started George J.R. Foster between 1782 and 1784. His work differentiated Pashtuns and Indians and sketches his personal encounters with local people including the *mullahs*. However, Mountstuart Elphinstone started ethnographic study of Pashtuns in 1808 through the Khyber Pass that was published in 1815. That's why the present study examines the systematic production of knowledge about the Pashtuns in British colonial discourse from 1815 to 1947. This study also focuses on indigenous scholarships and responses to colonial discourse. This study also examines theoretical dimension of Pashtun identity with post-colonial thoughts, subaltern approach and discourse analysis. This paper argues that colonial discourse produced the knowledge about Pashtun as tribal, martial, and ungovernable. These were not neutral claims but designed to facilitate imperial control over the indigenous population and their historiography. By studying both colonial discourses and indigenous responses, oral traditions and resistance movements, this study demonstrates that colonial knowledge about Pashtun identity is neither imposed thoroughly nor accepted passively. This identity is continuously negotiated and amended through the process of fragmented politicization. It concludes that the categorization of local population through knowledge have had enduring legacies of the British forces, but this was persistently contested and reinterpreted by postcolonial intellectuals.



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Introduction

Debate over the production of knowledge about Pashtuns in colonial discourse is one of the crucial topic in the postcolonial scholarships. These scholarships critique the colonial knowledge that claims Pashtun identity is static and fixed. The colonial writers like Mountstuart Elphinstone, Alexander Burns, Charles Masson, Henry George Raverty, Henry Walter Bellew and Olaf Caroe gave detailed descriptions that codified, classified and fixed the Pashtun identity. Besides the British colonial writers, German colonial view about Pashtuns is also equally important that is given by Bernard Dorn. Writers like Michal Foucault, Mahmood Mamdani, Benjamin D. Hopkins and David Gilmartin identified that colonial knowledge production about indigenous people remained one of the primary objectives for imperial governance. Their critiques about colonial knowledge were further elaborated by Edward Said's *Orientalism*.¹ His argument highlights that colonial rule operated not only through military force and economic exploitation, but also through the production, classification and fixation of knowledge about the indigenous people. He explains that this was a systematic representation that statically categorized, essentialized, and controlled colonized people. Said's understanding of colonial knowledge was later more clarified the intellectual debate with Bernard S. Cohn's concept of *enumerative*² modality. His argument highlights that the British colonialism in India was based on codification and classification of indigenous people through survey, ethnographies, and legal system. These codifications and classification through the production of knowledge transformed the fluid and liquefied social identities into administrative categories. In this debate, the production of knowledge about Pashtuns is a compelling case study for the understanding of identity formation in colonial discourse and the backlash that originates counter narrative from the postcolonial scholarships.

As this paper illustrates pre-colonial discourse of Pashtuns identity, it primarily investigates that how British travelers, ethnographers, officials and administrators produced, codified and categorized Pashtuns to obtain imperial objectives. This knowledge of categorization Pashtun population helped colonial master to enrich its strategies of frontier security, military recruitment, and legal exceptionalism. For the understanding of knowledge production about Pashtuns in colonial discourse, it is crucial to understand the counter narrative of the Pashtun intellectuals, poets, and writers. By analysing both colonial and indigenous narratives, this paper goes beyond binaries of domination and resistance. It proposes a theory of fragmented politicization to explain the multi-layered and dialectical process of identity formation under British colonial rule.

Pre-Colonial Pashtun Identity

Tazkerat-ul-Awlia (Memoir of Saints) is one of the important pre-colonial scholarship that describes Pashtun character.³ This book is written by Sulaiman Mako, son of Babrak Khan from the Maku Sabzai tribe, in 1216 AD. Sulaiman was the resident of Arghasan. His work represents the earliest work of Pashto prose. This manuscript first appeared in the Kabul Annual and later in Pashtana Shu'ra. The second volume is presented in *Da Pashto Adaiyano Tarekh* (History of Pashto literature).⁴ it is one of the oldest book of Pashto language. This manuscript records the life of Amir Karor (8th century), a ruler from Ghor. Sulaiman represents Karor both as a violent warrior and as an eloquent poet. His observations create the archetype in which pen and sword are equally important and valued in Pashtun society. This seven pages' manuscript was discovered and translated by Abdul Hay Habibi. Habibi discover it in the mosque of Adam Khan village in Helmand valley in 1933. Habibi describes that "I came across the old pages of the book which had been eaten away by insects in a mosque of Adam

¹ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, 1979.

² Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

³ Habibi, Abdul Hai. *Memoirs of Saints*. Alamahabibi.net. http://alamahabibi.net/English_Articles/Memoirs_of_Saints.htm.

⁴ Abd al-Hayy Ḥabībī, *Da Puṣṭo adab lanḍ tārīkh : da Pohantūn da dreyam aw ṣaloram ʔolgayo lah pārah* (Kandahār: 'Alāmah Rashād Khparandwiyah Ṭolanah, 2008).

Khan village". He illustrates that the manuscript was visible to written in Pashto and titled in Arabic as *Hada Ketab-e-Tazkerat ul Awlia*.⁵ However, the complete manuscript is still unknown to the scholars. That's why it is near to impossible to analyse Pashtun identity through the seven pages found by Habibi. Nevertheless, this book can be reduced to the idea that it portrays Pashtun both as a violent warrior and as an archetype with pen.

Pre-colonial understanding of knowledge about Pashtuns is traced from the writings of Bayazid Ansari (1525-1585) also known as Pir Roshan. He was born in Jalandhar, east Punjab, in 1525. His family was living both in Kaniguram south Waziristan and Jalandhar. Bayazid's father was Qazi of his area and his family sought refuge in Bihar after the invasion of Babur in 1526. From thence Bayazid's family arrived to Kaniguram in 1530. In Himayat Ullah Yaqubi's words "Bayazid Ansari tried to muster the support of other Pakhtuns by making resources to mystic activities and give up mundane activities".⁶ He describes that the descendants of Hazrat Yaqub Ansari also settled in Kaniguram and generally those people are called Ansari who migrated from outside and then intermingled with local population. Yaqubi also narrates that at the time of Bahlul Lodi (1451-1488) "a large number of Pakhtuns (or Pashtuns) migrated to the Punjab and other parts of India".⁷ and majority of the Burki tribe went to Jalandhar and settled there. In 1651, Bayazid wrote his book *Khair-ul-Bayan* in which he describes religious commands like the holy Qur'an and Sunnah.⁸ He describes his political struggle and Roshnaiya Movement in this book. However, for Kaka Khel. In *Khair-ul-Bayan* is written in four languages concomitantly in Pashto, Arabic, Persian, and Hindi. While Qalandar Mohmand in his book *Da Khair-ul-Bayan Tanqeedi Mutaliah* (1988) illustrates that original

Khair-ul-Bayan is written only in Pashto and the subsequent versions are the exegesis of original one.⁹ About *Khair-ul-Bayan* it can be stated that like *Risala-e-Ghosia* of Abdul Qadir Jilani, *Kitabul Mawafiq* of Naffri, and *Lam'at* of Shah Waliullah, *Khair-ul-Bayan* is deemed to have been revealed to Bayazid". As there are varying critiques on Bayazid's work, his work is considered the first writing of Pashto prose.

There are different opinions about Bayazid's political struggle and writing. Some scholars consider him a sufi-warrior while the other writes him a Pashtun nationalist. His proclamation of Divine revelation is subject of a great controversy by Akhund Darveza, a leading cleric and mystic of his time. Darveza degraded this book by calling it "Kharrul Bayan" (narration of the donkey) rather than *Khair-ul-Bayan* (narration of welfare).¹⁰ Although, there are critique on Bayazid's work, he dispatched Pashtuns with music and dance programs. As Yaqubi describes that Bayazid identified himself as a *pir* in the eyes of common Pashtuns to give them the impression that he has supernatural powers. His movement was so intensified that his followers made the frontier free from the influence of the Mughals. His works identifies two binary oppositions¹¹. At one end Pashtun population on the frontiers joined the Roshnaiya movement for spiritual ambition while on the other end it militarized Pashtun population against the outsiders.

Bayazid was denounced by his rival Akhund Darweza (1533-1638). Darweza was a renowned religious scholar, writer, and leader of his society. He is considered the founder of Pashto literature. His famous work is *Makhzan-i-Islam* (The Treasure of Islam) written in 1605-1615. This book starts with a fierce critics on Roshnaiya movement of Bayazid Ansari, labelling his

^{5 5} Ibid., 12-17.

⁶ Khan, Shāhbaz, and Himayatullah Yaqubi. "Syed 'Alī Tirmidhī and Akhūnd Darwezah: Mughal Agents or Popular Saints." (*Al-Īdāh*) 35, no. 2 (December 2017): 29-40.

⁷ Ibid, 37.

⁸ Bayazid Ansari, *Khayr ul-Bayan*, ed. Mawlānā Abdul Qādir (Peshawar: Pashto Academy, University of Peshawar, 1967).

⁹ Qalandar Momand, *Da Khair-ul-Bayan Tanqeedi Mutala'a* (1988), 25.

<https://archive.org/details/da-khair-ul-bayan-tanqeedi-mutalaa-qalandar-momand>.

¹⁰ Qasmi, Abdul Qudus. (1967). Foreword. *Khairul Bayan*. (pp5-36). Peshawar: Pukhto Academy, Peshawar University.

¹¹ Himayatullah Yaqubi, *Bayazid Ansari and Roushaniya Movement: A Conservative Cult or a Nationalist Endeavor?* 151-152

followers as “infidels”.¹² In this book, Darweza criticizes the religious and political movement of Bayazid Ansari. This book is also categorized as a second major work of Pashto prose after *Khair-ul-Bayan*. This book is not a single narrative but a compendium of Pashto and Persian that uses “saj” (rhymed prose). His catechism in this book provides five pillar and six articles of faith.¹³ In Himayat Ullah Yaqubi’s view, Derweza used *Makhzan-i-Islam* as a political tool the support of Mughal empire and to negate the Bayazid’s spiritual and political struggle. By opposing the anti-Mughal Roshnaiya Movement, he provided the theological justification for Mughal rule in Khyber and Tirah.¹⁴ Some nationalist historians, including Abdul Hai Habibi, claim that Derweza traded Pashtun political independence for religious orthodoxy.¹⁵ Some writes states that his work converted Pashto language into the “saj” format of Persian and Arabic which not only makes the sound of his language artificial but also creates a gap between the spoken language of the tribes and written language of the religious elites. However, the Derweza’s work describes Pashtun as a law-abiding and religious warrior.¹⁶

His second influential book is *Tazkirat-ul-Abrar va al-Ashrar* (A Memoir of the Pious and the Wicked).¹⁷ This book is written in early seventeenth century and describes the hagiography of orthodox saints, most notably of them is Sayyid Ali Tirmazi, popularly known as Pir Baba. This book also criticizes Bayazid Ansari and his Roshnaiya Movement. It provides a detailed information about Yusufzais migration from Kabul to Swat. It mentions tribal genealogies that later became primary source for British writers. Mikhail Pelevin in his article *Pashtuns’ Tribal Islam* describes that “how Darweza, a

descendant of non-Pashtun missionaries, reinterpreted these myths in line with his own homiletic purposes and socio-political views about the incompatibility of the Pashtun tribalistic ideology with the universalistic nature of Islam”.¹⁸ He further states that Darweza does not mention the mythical image of Qays Abdul al-Rashid as the supreme leader and representative of all Pashtuns.

Some Persian historians also narrated Pashtun image in Persian writing including Nimat Ullah al-Harawi (1585-1630) who was chronical and court historian of the Mughal Empire. He is best known for his work *Tarikh-i-Khanjahani va Makhzan-i-Afghani* (The History of Khan Jahan and the Afghan Treasury), published in 1610 and 1611.¹⁹ This book covers the history of Pashuns from the time of Bahlul Lodi to the death of Khwaja Usman. Nimatullah describes the origin, genealogy, and histories of different Pashtun tribes in this book. This work is also called *Makhzan-i-Afghani* and is it is also considered one of the earliest medieval Persian historiographies of the Pashtun tribes. As Nimat Ullah worked under emperor Akbar and Jahangir, he uses written sources to trace Pashtun origin from mythical Israelite patriarchs like Yaqoob and Talut and describes Pashtuns as one of the ten lost tribes of Israel. This book traces Pashtun history from mythical origin pointing out Islamic adaptation under Khalid-bin-Walid. The second version *Tarikh-i-Khanjahan va Makhzan-i-Afghani* is more extended that includes seven chapters on historical dynasties, life history of Khan Jahan and Jahangir, and Pashtun’s genealogy.²⁰ M.S. Pelevin claims that *Makhzan-i-Afghani* is later revised version and compiled by

¹² Ākhūn Darvazah. *Makhzan al-Islām*. Edited by Muḥammad Zarīf Šīdīqī. Peshawar: Peshawar University, 1968.

¹³ M. Hasrat, *Tārīkh-i Adabiyāt-i Pashto* (Peshawar: Pashto Academy, 2005).

¹⁴ Shahbaz Khan and Himayatullah Yaqubi, "Syed ‘Alī Tirmidhī and Akhūnd Darwezah: Mughal Agents or Popular Saints," *Al-Idah* 35, no. 2 (December 2017), 36-40.

¹⁵ Abdul Hai Habibi, *A Short History of Afghanistan*, Alamahabibi.net, http://alamahabibi.net/English_Articles/A_SHORT_HISTORY_OF_AFGHANISTAN.pdf.

¹⁶ M. Hasrat, *Tārīkh-i Adabiyāt-i Pashto* (Peshawar: Pashto Academy, 2005), 35.

¹⁷ Darweza, Akhund. *Tazkiratul Abrar Wal Ashrar*. Peshawar: Idara Ishaat Sarhad, n.d.

¹⁸ Mikhail Pelevin, *Pashtuns' Tribal Islam: The Beginning of Written History*, *Iran and the Caucasus*, 25, no. 2 (2021): 115–33.

¹⁹ Ni‘mat Allāh al-Harawī, *Tārīkh-i Khān-Jahānī va Makhzan-i Afghānī*, ed. S. M. Imam al-Din, vol. 1 (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960).

²⁰ Imamuddin, S. M., ed. *Tārīkh-i Khān-Jahānī va Makhzan-i Afghānī*. 2 vols. Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960–1962.

another person. This version is smaller variant.²¹

Contemporary scholars argue that the extended version *Tarikh-i-Khan Jahan va Makhzan-i-Afghani* represents the original text of the author. Pelevin mentions that “in the history of India, Elliot and Dowson *Makhzan-i-Afghani* is identified as the original text of Nimat Ullah al-Harawi, while *Tarikh-i-Khan Jahani*, as its subsequent extended version, however, there is no evidence of this argument”.²² His sources for the study of Pashtun’s origin was Tabari’s *History* and Ahmad-Bin-Bahbal Kanbu’s *Ma’ad-i-Akhbari-i-Ahmadi* (1611-1612). Nimat Ullah’s work is also translated by Bernhard Dorn in English in 1836.²³ Dorn’s translation enhanced its circulation among the western scholarships. Dorn introduced *Makhzan-i-Afghani* to the scientific discourse in the first half of nineteenth century. He translated this work upon the manuscript of taken from the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society. Dorn extended translation is kept in British Library of the University of Oxford. His published translation is considered as a primary source of Nimat Ullah’s original work. His work synthesis Pashtun as the descendent of *Afghana* who was raised by King David and became a commander in King Solomon’s army.²⁴ Hence, his understand about Pashtun is the decedent of Israelites that later converted to Islam with the meeting of Qais Abdul Rashid with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Another important book written in Pashto is *Pata Khazana*. This is a magnificent book is authored by Mohammad bin Daud bin Qader Khan Hotak in Kandahar in 1728-29 A.D. and written under the patronage of emperor Shah Hussain Hotak.²⁵ The author of this book is dedicated scholar of a Pashto language and poetry. This book is divided

into three parts. Part one describes the bibliography and work of past poets from 100 H. (718 A.D.) to one thousand Hejra. The second part of the book deals with contemporary poets, and the third part refers to poetesses of the Pashto language. In the end of the book, author describes his biography and literary works. This book is edited and translated by Abdul Hay Habibi in 1944.²⁶ Habibi obtained the first edition of this book with the help of late Abdul Ali Khanozay, a Kakar from Pishin in 1943. He first translated this book into Persian from the Pashto Academy in 1944. It was republishing with thousand copies of the original edition by Publication and Translation Department in 1961.

Besides the *Pata Khazana*, the *Tawarikh-i-Hafiz Rahmat Khani* (1624) also preserves the fifteenth and sixteenth century tribal history. This book is compiled by Pir Mu’azzam Shah in the early seventeenth century.²⁷ It was later dedicated and expanded under the patronage of Hafiz Rahmat Khan Barech, the Rohila agent in the eighteenth century to solidify the historical legitimacy of the Pashtun tribes in India. In the 1760s, the Pashtuns had established the Rohilkhand kingdom in India. Hafiz Rahmat Khan Barech commissioned a revision of the work to keep Rohilkhand’s Pashtun aware of their roots and to prove their noble lineage to the Mughal authorities. In this book, Mu’azzam Shah describes war history and tracks the movement of armies.²⁸ It records laws of Sheikh Mali and his system of *vesh*²⁹ or the redistribution of lands between the tribes. This book highlights that *vesh* system prevented internal war between the tribes for more than four hundred years. This book also provides information about the history of the *Khakhai* and *Goriakhel* tribes of *Sarbani* Pashtun. The

²¹ Pelevin, M. S. *Two Versions of Ni‘matallāh Haravī’s Book on the History of Afghans*. Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Asian and African Studies, 12, no. 2 (2020): 249–261. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu13.2020.206>.

²² Ibid., 250.

²³ Dorn, Bernhard, trans. *History of the Afghans: Translated from the Persian of Neamet Ullah*. London: Printed for the Oriental Translation Committee, 1829–36.

²⁴ Khuwja Nimat Allah Harti, *Tarikh Khan jihani o makhzan-e-Afghani*, trans. Muhammad Bashir Hussain (Lahore: Urdu Science Board, 2004).

²⁵ Mohammad, Hotak ibn Dā’ūd. *Paṭah khazānah*. Edited by Qāsim Banawī and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī. Sarā-yi Nawrang, Bannūn: Da Puṣhto Adabī Markaz, 1989.

²⁶ Abdul Hay Habibi and Khushal Habibi, trans., *The Hidden Treasure: A Biography of Pashtoon Poets (Paṭa khazana)* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 10-11.

²⁷ Mu’azzam Shāh. *Tawārīkh-i Ḥāfiz Raḥmat Khānī*. Peshawar: Pushto Academy, Peshawar University, 1976.

²⁸ Ibid., 16-19.

²⁹ The *wesh* (or *vesh*) system was a traditional Pashtun custom of periodically redistributing land, houses, and water rights among tribe members by drawing lots under a tribal Jirga, primarily to prevent economic inequality and maintain collective tribal strength

document narrates detailed description about the *Yusufzai*, *Gigiani*, and *Tarkalani* tribes of Kandahar and Kabul to Peshawar and Swat valley.

This book provides the war history and records the massacre of seven hundred Pashtun elders by the hand of Ulugh Beg, a governor and uncle to the founder of Mughal Empire, Babur. Babur betrayed the Yusufzai elders by inviting and killing them to break their power. The description of the Battle of Katlang is preserved in this book. It describes the decisive victory of Yusufzais over the Dilazak tribe, which initially allowed the Yusufzais to settle permanently in the northern plains and Swat. This book provides the Pashtun centric view of those events that are ignored in *Baburnama* and *Akbarnama*. H.G. Raverty³⁰ and H.W. Bellew³¹ translated large portion of “frontier intelligence” including *Hafiz Rahmat Khani*, into English. The importance of this book is that it describes the war history and gives detailed information about the Pashtun tribal identity. However, it lacks the in-depth cultural understanding of the Pashtun society.

Pre-colonial nationalist view about Pashtun identity is preserved in the work of Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1689). He was born in Akora Khattak and considered as a great Pashto poet. He is known as the father of Pashto language. His life is extensively defined in the book *Khushal Khan Khattak Au Tareekh Nawisi* written by Professor Sayed Waqar Ali Shah.³² Waqar Ali Shah's work explores the historical consciousness and historiographical contribution of the legendary Pashto poet, author, and tribal leader Khushal Khan Khattak. He narrates Khushal Khan's work that lacks the standardized meter, rhyme, and classical form like *ghazal* or *qasida*. Khushal Khan Khattak was multidimensional thinker and his works are based on different themes. His *Dewan* focuses on his early thoughts in poetry and

highlights ethics, bravery, wisdom, and self-discipline. His poetry in his *Dewan* reflects his life as a tribal noble under the Mughal service. *Dewan* emphasizes on personal virtue rather than overt politics or resistance. According to Dr. Khadija Begum Ferozuddin who quoted Raverty and mentions that Khushal Khan Khattak has authored more than fifty books.³³ However, most of his work is lost and a few are still exist. She gives detailed description of Khushal Khan's work. She mentions *Rubiyat-e-Khushal*, *Baz Nama*, *Shahabi-Tib*, (or *Tib Nama*), *Firaq Nama*, *Zanzeerai*, *Bayaz*, *Hudaya*, and *Aina*. Khushal Khan's *Baz Nama* (Book of Falconry)³⁴ is written in 1657 and describes hunting as a symbol of leadership, discipline, and patience. His *Dastar Nama* (Book of Turban) is written in 1665 that qualifies leadership, justice, wisdom, and moral responsibility.³⁵ Khushal Khan symbolizes the turban as a sign of authority and honor. His *Swat Nama* is different from his other works as it focuses on his travel and ethnography of Swat valley.³⁶ In this book, Khushal Khan highlights the geography, people, customs, and political conditions of Swat. This book is a valuable historical and ethnographic source for colonial and postcolonial writers.

Another nationalist writer contributed to Pashtun historiography is Afzal Khan Khattak (1664-1770). He was the grandson of Khushal Khan Khattak. He succeeded his father Ashraf Khan as a chieftain of Khattak tribe in 1691. He was arrested by Mughal forces in 1686 for the charges of his anti-Mughal struggle. His detention left the Khattak tribe without unified leader. He has great contribution in the documentation of Pashtun historiography. He authored the famous work *Tarikh-i-Murassa* (The Bejeweled History).³⁷ This book is written in Pashto and describes the chronicle history of Afghan tribes. This work

³⁰ H. G. Raverty, *A Dictionary of the Pukhto, Pushto, or Language of the Afghans* (London: Longman and Roberts, 1860).

³¹ Henry Walter Bellew, *An Inquiry into the Ethnography of Afghanistan*, (London, 1891).

³² Syed Waqar Ali Shah, *Khushal Khan Khattak Au Tarikh Nawisi* (Peshawar: University Books Agency, 1992)

³³ Khadija Begum Feroziuddin, *Life and Works of the Illustrious Khushal Khan Khattak Chieftain of Khattaks* (Peshawar: Pashto Academy, University of Peshawar, 2007).

³⁴ Khattak, Khushal Khan. *Baz Nama* (The Book of Falconry). Translated by Sami ur Rahman. Islamabad: PanGraphics, 2014.

³⁵ Khwushhāl Khān, *Dastar Nama*, trans. Arif Naseem (Peshawar: Pashto Academy, University of Peshawar, 2007).

³⁶ Khushal Khan Khattak, *Swat Nama* (Chronicles of Swat), ed. and annot. Abdul Hai Habibi, trans. Khushal Habibi (Kabul, 1979).

³⁷ Afzal Khan. *Tarikh Murassa*. Edi. Dost Muhammad Khan Kamil Mohmand, (Peshawar: University Book Agency, 2006).

represents one of the earliest extensive historical text in Pashto that began in 1708. The first and last section of this book is the translation of *Makhzan-i-Afghani* from Persian into Pashto. Second section of this book draws on Persian sources like *Tazkirat-ul-Abrar*³⁸ and *Jahangir Nama*.³⁹ It also provides records of Khushal Khan Khattak's work. Raverty mentions and utilizes this work for his Notes on Afghanistan. This book hold a significant value in Pashtun historiography and tribal history.⁴⁰

From the *sufi* point of view, Abdul Rahman Mohmand, popularly known as Reman Baba (1653-1711) gave rich information about Pashtun character through his poetry. He is considered one of the most talented Pashto poet and called the Nightingale of Pashto poetry. His poetry signifies his *sufi* philosophy of spirituality, love, peace, faith, and the beauty of life. He describe himself as a poor *faqir* and mentions "May no one be without life and livelihood as I am lifeless and penniless".⁴¹ He got his early education from his own village, Bahadur Kallay, Peshawar. He got the education of *Fiqah* and *Tassawwaf* in his village under the discipleship of Mohammad Yusuf Yusufzai.⁴² He went to Kohat to get more education from Haji Bahadur. There is no evidence of what type of religious education he obtained but *Pata Khazan* claims that Rahaman Baba's teacher was known to have been a great religious man. His *Dewan* displays a subtle use of several languages including Pashto, Arabic, and Persian. It gives wide knowledge of history, philosophy, and theology. His writing and poems are collected by his friends and compiled in *Dewan*. The copies of *Dewan* is said to be in circulation from early 1728 and over twenty-five original manuscripts are scattered in various

libraries and private collection worldwide. Dost Muhammad Kamil says that "The history of Rahaman Baba's life lies very much in dark yet it can be said that Rahman Baba belongs to Mohmand, the sub section of Sarban tribe".⁴³ Although his *Dewan* narrates his *sufi* views, it identified the instinct of love, peace and the beauty of life in Pashtun character.

The non-violence propagators, like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988), popularly known as Bacha Khan also gave detailed description about the Pashtun character and historiography. He was born in Utmanzai, Charsadda and was the son of Bahram Khan, a well-to-do landowner of Mohammadzai clan. His father sent him to the local mosque to take education of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah.⁴⁴ After finishing his religious education, Bacha Khan was sent to the Municipal Board High School at Peshawar. He soon after joined the Edwardes Memorial Mission High School at Peshawar. Ghaffar Khan also applied for the commission in the army. Safoora Arbab in her doctorate research *The Ecstasy and Anarchy of Nonviolence: The Khudai Khidmatgar Resistance in North-West Frontier of British India* (2019) highlights that how Bacha Khan organized the largest army of nonviolence called the Khudai Khidmatgar or the Servant of God, against the British imperialism.⁴⁵ He organized Pashtun society for education, emancipation of women, and the reinterpretation of patriarchal traditions. Although the purpose of Khudai Khidmatgars was social welfare and social change, it soon became an anti-colonial resistance movement after the Peshawar Riots of 1930. Many of the Khudai Khidmatgars faced violence and brutalities by British forces, and swelled to a hundred thousand volunteers in a short period of time, yet they

³⁸ Akhūnd Darweza. *Tazkirat al-abrār wa-l-ashrār* [An Account of Pious and Wicked]. Peshawar, Idāra yi ishā'at-i sarhadd-i Pishāwar, 1960. 248 p. (In Persian).

³⁹ Jahangir, *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans., ed., and annot. Wheeler M. Thackston (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)

⁴⁰ H. G. Raverty, *Notes on Afghanistan and Part of Baluchistan*, (London: Printed by order of the Secretary of State for India in Council, 1880), 44-50.

⁴¹ *Dīwān-i 'Abd ur-Rahmān Ṣafbanī Mohmand*, edi. Dost Muhammad Khan Kamil, and Qalandar Mohmand. Peshawar, 1960, 4.

⁴² Dost Muhammad Kamil, *Da Rahmān Bābā kulliyāt* (Peshawar: 1984), 43.

⁴³ Ibid., 40-56.

⁴⁴ Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *The Frontier Gandhi: My Life and Struggle*, trans. Imtiaz Ahmad Sahibzada (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2021).

⁴⁵ Safoora Arbab, "The Ecstasy and Anarchy of Nonviolence: The Khudai Khidmatgar Resistance in the North-West Frontier of British India" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2019), 45-48. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/98s5t77b>.

remained nonviolent. Bacha Khan was arrested along with his numerous followers in the wake of Civil Disobedience Movement in April 1930. Overall, Bacha Khan's narration in his *Autobiography*⁴⁶ represents his struggle for the propagation of nonviolent political struggle against the imperialist power in Pashtun society.

Colonial Representation of Pashtun Identity

The British officials started their travel in early nineteenth century. These officials produced extensive writings on Pashtuns, what Edward Said calls orientalism. These British colonial writings, travelogues and ethnographies produced, categorized and reproduced the indigenous identities. This colonial mission was about the production of knowledge about Pashtun identity was started by George J.R. Foster between 1782 and 1784.⁴⁷ However, Mountstuart Elphinstone's work *An Account of the Kingdom of Cabul*, provides first systematic description of Pashtun society that was published in 1815.⁴⁸ His *Account* portrays Pashtun as noble but inherently anarchic. He also describes that Pashtuns are governed by tribal codes but still incapable in executing centralized government. For him, Pashtun society is both egalitarian and uncivilized. He saw Pashtun society as ancient and unchangeable. First major work This work was published in 1815. It was the Indian British experience in the Kingdom of Kabul that became Afghanistan through colonial engagement.

In AKC, Elphinstone interchangeably use the demononyms *Afghan*, *Pashtun*, and *Pathan*. For him, all those people who are called with these names are same. Academically AKC not only got attention from the historians but also from those anthropologists who have been working on Afghanistan and Pashto speaking population in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Among these anthropologists, Bahram Tavakolian declared

Elphinstone as an anthropologist of his time. According to him, Elphinstone sound methodologically, indirectly involved the relationship between nature, culture, social structure and evolution.⁴⁹ Although his work produced the foundation of the colonial knowledge about Pashtu society, it became one of the primary source for Pashtun historiography and most of the subsequent writer, including postcolonial scholarships, rely on this document.

Elphinstone's literary tradition of the production of colonial knowledge about Pashtuns were proceeded by Sir Alexander Burnes (1805-1841). He belongs to a Scottish gentry family, joined the British East India Company' army as Bengal Native Infantry at the age of sixteen. He was sent to India in 1821. He did master in Persian and Hindustani languages. Both of these languages were the administrative and diplomatic *lingua francas* of the subcontinent. By 1831, the East India Company gave him dual tasks. First was to assess the political situation in Afghanistan, Bukhara and Persia. The purpose of this political espionage was to gauge the Russian influence and to evaluate the power of local rulers. His second task was commercial and geographic. He was assigned to survey the navigability of the Indus River. In travel he used the pseudonym "Sekundar Beg" while interacting with locals. Burnes clandestine journey of 1831 to 1833 is highlighted in his book *Travels into Bukhara* (1834).⁵⁰ This book describes his whole story of his travel through the Indus River and through Afghanistan to Bukhara. Burnes gave his central argument about the Russian threat and farmed Central Asia as emerging stage for "Great Game". He highlighted the expansion of Russia towards Persia, Afghanistan and Bukhara.⁵¹

Burnes highlighted the intense political division fragmentation of Afghan society on the basis of

⁴⁶ Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *The Frontier Gandhi: My Life and Struggle: The Autobiography of Abdul Ghaffar Khan*, trans. Imtiaz Ahmad Sahibzada (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2021).

⁴⁷ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England, through the Northern Part of India, Kashmere, Afghanistan, and Persia, and into Russia*, by the Caspian-Sea, 2 vols. (London: R. Faulder, 1798), 1:45.

⁴⁸ Elphinstone, Mountstuart. *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul, and Its Dependencies in Persia, Tartary, and India; Comprising a View of the Afghaun Nation, and a*

History of the Dooraunee Monarchy. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1815.

⁴⁹ Tavakolian. "An Anthropologist." 26-43.

⁵⁰ Burnes, Alexander. *Travels into Bokhara: Being the Account of a Journey from India to Cabool, Tartary, and Persia; Also, Narrative of a Voyage on the Indus, from the Sea to Lahore, with Presents from the King of Great Britain; Performed under the Orders of the Supreme Government of India, in the Years 1831, 1832, and 1833*. 3 vols. London: John Murray, 1834.

⁵¹ Ibid., 45-67.

tribal identities. For him, Pashtun society was a “confederacy of tribes”. The tribes held in loose and hostile federation. He observed that tribal loyalty is just pragmatic and not ideological. He illustrated the shifting of alliances between the tribes that are mostly based on immediate rewards, punishments, or the perceived strength of a leader. For him “the Afghans are a nation of petty chiefs, intolerant of rule and engaged in perpetual strife”. For Burnes *jirgah* (tribal council for dispute resolution) is a source of weakness “that love of equality is so great that it precludes all obedience and discipline”.⁵² His analysis considers Pashtun male as a formidable guerrilla fighter but impossible to be recruited to the regular army of the state. In his writings, Islam is an instrument of political mobilization in Pashtun society. Burnes described Durranis of Kandahar as more Persianized that possess a courtly nobility. In contrast, he declared Ghilzais and major tribes of Khyber regions like Afridis and Shinwaris more “rude”, independent, and warlike.⁵³ These observations led British forces to co-opt the Durranis elite against other tribes.

Besides Elphinstone and Burnes, Charles Masson also provided extensive writing over the Pashtun society and its individuals. Masson was a British orientalist writer from East India Company turned antiquarian, also narrated extensive study on Pashtun’s tribal identity. He contributed via ethnographic sketches that emphasizes tribal violence, volatility and disunity. He gave detailed description about Pashtun’s individual agency, economic motives and also tribal contradictions in his book *Narrative of Various Journey*.⁵⁴ This work also describes the role of Pashtun women in conflict resolution among the tribes. It narrates the intellectual debates over the territory, history, and historiography of Pashtun individuals in the bazar of Kandahar and Kabul. In this book Masson narrates that “the frontier is a land of shifting

allegiances and perpetual discord; every tribe guards its own interests above all else.”⁵⁵ He described the internal division of the Pashtun and synthesis that Pashtuns are internally fragmented and divided. His description provided spaces of control to the British imperial forces. His argument legitimized the British idea of the militarization of the frontier. Although his writings are empirically rich, it was always read through a lens of strategic imperial concern.

Another British colonial writer Henry George Raverty also described Pashtun society in his work *Notes on Afghanistan*.⁵⁶ This book codified, classified and fixed the philological and historical writing on Pashtuns genealogies, tribes, and languages. Raverty’s argument support the approach of primordialism that argues ethnic identities are biological, natural and unchangeable. He tried to describe systematically recorded tribal affiliations that is in isolation from local political context.⁵⁷ Raverty transformed oral histories into the written format for administrative purposes. Like Masson, the primary objective of Raverty’s writing was to provide justification to imperial forces for the control of indigenous population. His work contributed to the colonial project of knowledge as power, a concept later articulated by Bernard S. Cohn in his book *Colonialism and its form of Knowledge*.⁵⁸ This approach of Raverty’s writing reified tribal divisions and portray them as eternal and immutable rather than contextually contingents.

Apart from Raverty, Henry Walter Bellew also depicted Pashtun image in his writing. He was an Indian born British medical officer who described first major description of Afghanistan and its population in his book *Journal of A political Mission to Afghanistan in 1857* (1862).⁵⁹ This book provides detailed description about Pashtun tribal structure, genealogies and individuals

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁴ Charles Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan, the Panjab, & Kalât, during a Residence in Those Countries: To Which Is Added an Account of the Insurrection at Kalat, and a Memoir on Eastern Balochistan*, 4 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1844).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 89-92.

⁵⁶ H. G. Raverty, *Notes on Afghanistan and Part of Baluchistan, Geographical, Ethnographical, and*

Historical (London: Secretary of State for India in Council, 1880–1888).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 105-112.

⁵⁸ Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 102-8.

⁵⁹ H. W. Bellew, *Journal of a Political Mission to Afghanistan, in 1857, under Major (now Colonel) Lumsden; with an Account of the Country and People* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1862).

physical appearances. As he distinguished Pashtun individual between the “ruddy” and “fair” of the hell verses the “darker” and more Persian like people of the Kandahar and Kabul, his work divided Pashtuns on the bases of color. That’s why he narrated the theory of dual origin about Pashtun population. Besides, he also dived Pashtuns on the bases of linguistic hierarchies. He pointed out Kandahri Pasto as “soft” and Peshawari Pasto as “hard” Pashto in his narration.⁶⁰ His second influential book is *The Races of Afghanistan* (1880) in which he highlighted the racialized hierarchies into his ethnographic analysis.⁶¹ He categorized Afghan and Pashtuns as Aryan ancestry and also embedded moral and intellectual hierarchies in his writings (Bellew, 77-82).⁶² These orientalist descriptions justified both differential governance and recruitment policies. It influenced and supported imperial policies for decades. Similarly, *The Pathans*, work of Olaf Caroe (1958) reinforced colonial stereotypes, portraying Pashtun as simultaneously “martial and disorderly”. For Caroe, tribal law was a site of both valor and unruliness.⁶³

For Caroe maps the Pashtun’s life around Greek, Arab and Persian texts and descriptions. In these texts and descriptions, he traces Pashtuns back to the *Pactyans* of Herodotus and synthesizes the theory of lost tribe of Israel that migrated from Iran (Persia) and Saka tribes. He also describes Arab expansionism and interventionism towards these regions. Caroe’s work extensively describes Elphinstone’s observations and his family tree of the Durrani tribe. He writes that “It was at the end of that time that in the spring of 1809 Mountstuart Elphinstone arrived in Peshawar”.⁶⁴ Caroe also mentions the threat of France due to which the mission to Kabul was prepared by British authorities. He divides the tribes on the basis of

their geography and land, and highlighted tribal fragmentation as “The western Afghans, of whom much of the most important are Abdalis and known as Durrani and Ghiljis, and the Afghans, namely Yusufzais and others kindred tribes of Peshawar plain and valley to the north of it”.⁶⁵

Postcolonial Critiques on Colonial Writing

There are many academic scholarships that critics the British colonial knowledge about the Pashtuns. Writers like Michal Foucault, Mahmood Mamdani, Benjamin D. Hopkins and David Gilmartin identified that colonial knowledge production about indigenous people remained one of the primary objectives for imperial governance. Not only the British administrators codified identities for their imperialist policies, the French colonial administrators in Algeria and the Belgian authorities in Rawanda implied similar strategies. They codified indigenous ethnic identities to maintain control over the larger territories.⁶⁶ As the Russian writers described Pashtun identity for their Great Game strategies as autonomous⁶⁷ but the postcolonial historian declared their writings as misrepresentation of Pashtun identity.

This misrepresentation of indigenous image is eloquently highlighted by Foucault’s understanding of power, knowledge, discourse and identity. For him, those who controls knowledge actually defines and create the truth.⁶⁸ This control over knowledge provides instruments of power that categorizes people, establish norms, and legitimize British colonial authority in Pashtun society. Foucault explains that through the production of knowledge the colonial forces acquired strategies to control the Pashtun people. Foucault concept of governmentality is the basic foundation for the understanding of his idea about

⁶⁰ H. W. Bellew, *An Inquiry into the Ethnography of Afghanistan: Prepared and Presented to the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists (London, September, 1891)* (Woking: The Oriental University Institute, 1891).

⁶¹ H. W. Bellew, *The Races of Afghanistan: Being a Brief Account of the Principal Nations Inhabiting That Country* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, and Co.; London: W. Thacker and Co., 1880).

⁶² Ibid., 77-82.

⁶³ Caroe, Olaf. *The Pathans, 550 B.C.–A.D. 1957*. London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1958, 121-135.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 274-285.

⁶⁵ Ibid., xv.

⁶⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 68-74.

⁶⁷ Khodarkovsky, Michael. *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

⁶⁸ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977

power, knowledge, discourse and identity. Foucault's book *The History of Sexuality*⁶⁹ questions how power is exercised and by what medium or technique. That's is what he he considered colonial knowledge production about Pashtun identity is the imposition of imperial power over the indigenous population. He questions the nature and origin of power. For him, power is not comprehended as a personal property of a ruling or domineering class, institution, or state. Rather he considers power as a strategy having certain tactics and techniques. He defined power as a multiplicity of force relations which are intentional as well as objective. He writes "Where there is power, there is resistance, that power depends for its existence on the presence of the multiplicity of points of resistance".

Second important postcolonial writer Mahmood Mamdani also highlighted in his book *Define and Rule: Native as Political identity*⁷⁰ that a new form of governmentality emerged with the aftermath of mid-nineteenth century crisis of colonialism. Mamdani theorizes Sir Henry Maine by stating "Maine sought to recognize the historicity and the agency to the colonized as part of an endeavor to rethink and reconstitute the colonial project on more durable basis. Through the theory of history and theory of law, he distinguished the West from non-West and a universal civilization from local customs".⁷¹ Maine provided the nativism by distinguishing the settlers from the natives. He also describes that colonials and political identity was used by western writers that presented the production of colonial knowledge about Pashtun identity as a civilizing project. This is what Said called that the modern state was testimony of genius of western man. Madman's illustration of "define and rule" offers a critical lens for understanding how colonial governance constructed political identities that continue to shape Pashtun identity in contemporary Pakistan and Afghanistan. Mamdani argues that late nineteenth-century colonial statecraft marked a significant turn where Britain abandoned the attempt to eradicate difference between conqueror and conquered and instead introduced governance

as the definition and management of difference, establishing a bifurcated power that mediated racial domination through tribally organized local authorities and reproduced ethnic identity in subjects.

Benjamin D. Hopkins in his book *Ruling the Savage Periphery: Frontier Governance and the Making of Modern State*⁷² writes that the peripheral spaces of the frontier are characterized as a contact zones between order and anarchy, peace and violence, and "civilization" and "savagery".⁷³ Hopkins illustrates that how the nineteenth century world was marked by rapid progress in technology, communication, and transport. Hopkins and Gilmartin understandings explain how Pashtun identity was shaped not just by colonial knowledge, but through economic ties, border governance, and natural resources. David Gilmartin's *Blood and Water* focuses on how control over natural resources, specifically the Indus River, shaped political communities. He explores how colonial and postcolonial states used irrigation systems to exert power over agrarian populations. His understandings offer a lens to examine how imperial forces used control over land and water to govern and define communities. Changing systems of irrigation brought different people together or set them apart, creating new political relationships. This shows that identity was also tied to who controlled the essential resources needed for survival and agriculture.

Conclusion

In the contemporary analysis, the colonial production of knowledge about the Pashtuns were observed both as a positive illustration and as objectionable dimensions. Positive illustration describes that the work of Elphinstone, Burnes, Masson, Raverty, Bellew and Caroe provide rich and deep ethnographic and linguistic data about the Pashtun society and culture. Objectionable dimension express that these accounts and observations served for British imperial and political end, distorting indigenous identities, enforcing racial hierarchies, and legitimizing colonial coercive governance. This is what

⁶⁹ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

⁷⁰ Mamdani, Mahmood. *Define and Rule: Native as Political identity*. London: Harvard University Press, 2012.

⁷¹ Ibid. 06

⁷² Hopkins, Benjamin D. *Ruling the Savage Periphery: Frontier Governance and the Making of Modern State*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020.

⁷³ Ibid.01.

described by the post-colonial writer in their understandings of the colonial production of knowledge. Overall this study highlights several important insights of the colonial production of knowledge. This knowledge was not merely a reflection of imperial interests but an active force for define and rule that shapes, categorized and

codified the very terrain of Pashtun society. Pashtun identity is continuously negotiated and amended through the process of fragmented politicization. The categorization of local population have had enduring legacies of the British forces, but this was persistently contested and reinterpreted by postcolonial intellectuals.

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