

PASHTO POETRY AND MILITANCY IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF PASHTO POETRY IN RESISTING MILITANCY

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ABSTRACT

The present study sheds light on “Pashto Poetry and Militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after 9/11”. The fieldwork for the present study was conducted in the Peshawar district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, from December 2020 to April 2021. Findings of this research are based on participants’ observations, in-depth interviews, Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), and informal discussions with poets, literary people, audience of poetry gatherings, and academicians. Furthermore, the collected data is analyzed through thematic analysis. The works on culture alternatives of social movements of Guha and Laclau and ‘weapons of the weak’ by Scott have been consulted for the theoretical framework for the current research. Data collected from various sources reveals that Pashto poetry was influenced by different factors throughout the last hundred years of written and oral record. Different themes and genres were introduced to Pashto poetry, which were influenced by invasions, resistance movements, socio-religious and political movements. During British colonialism, Pashto poetry was one the few cultural alternatives which helped the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement (KKM) of Bacha Khan to spread message of the movement among the masses. In return, the movement also worked for the improvement and dissemination of Pashto poetry with the help of the “Pakhtun” magazine and organizing poetry gatherings to create cultural space for Pashto poetry. After 9/11, Pashto poetry played a vital role in countering militancy, terrorism and ‘war on terrorism.’ Pashto poetry introduced themes of Peace, Condemnation of War, Nationalism, and Resilience along with others –which were borrowed from the 20th century– into the social fabric of the Pakhtun society. These themes in Pashto poetry helped to counter violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa created by militancy, terrorism and ‘war on terrorism’.

Keywords: Pashto, poetry, militancy, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

For the past twenty years since 9/11, majority of the region inhabited by the Pakhtuns in Pakistan that includes the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ex-FATA¹ and part of the Baluchistan province has been engulfed by militancy, terrorism, and war on terrorism. This region of the Pakhtuns borders Afghanistan, which was invaded by the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic) in 1979 and then by America in 2001. The USSR suffered a defeat after fighting for ten years against the Mujahideen, which were funded by the US, Saudi Arabia and were trained in Pakistan (Marwat F. U., 2005). In the latter case, Pakistan supported America against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

¹ The seven tribal agencies namely South Waziristan, North Waziristan, Kurram, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, and Orakzai and now the new districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Since Pakistan sided with the US in the war against terrorism, the militants as a retaliation started to attack any person associated with or collaborating with the government. They started attacking police stations, military installations, security forces' convoys, courts and marketplaces, and political gatherings in the Pakhtun region. Bomb blasts, explosive devices' denotation, suicide bombings, beheading and kidnaping in broad daylight became the norm of the day. They successfully challenged the state writ in Swat, Ex-FATA and in various other localities. They controlled areas of Ex-FATA and Swat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by force and imposed their rather conservative and rigid brand of Islam on locals.

Pakistani Arm forces launched a full fledge military operation against these militants in all the afore-mentioned areas. Many places in these areas were targeted from the air as they were hideouts of key militant commanders. Civilian population suffered gravely because of these operations and resulted in the flight of local people into nearby surrounding districts. There was a warlike situation in the area. Military check posts and barricades, barbwire and tanks, security forces' convoys and restricted mobilization became the norm of the day. Violence became more intense and frequent. The locals of these areas became Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), abandoned their homes, and turned towards urban and militant free rural areas to seek shelter because of the military operations started against the militants.

Along with government officials and installation the militants started targeting artists, poets, singers, teachers, and shrines as a potential threat to their ideology (Hussain, 2013). Since these forums and sites did not succumb to militant rule and ideology because they are largely moderate and modern in outlook and thought. Scores of actors and artists were killed, and other sites were bombed by militants. Countering this ideological violence, the Pakistani state started building up its own narrative, underpinned by violence. Musharraf's vision of Pakistan as a 'moderate and liberal' state, there are 'good Taliban' and 'bad Taliban', and the bad Taliban are conspiring with the enemies of Pakistan, etc. In this narrative-building war, militants and Pakistani state followed combative competition in the production of literature, video messages, electronic and print media, pamphlets, interviews, etc. This combative scholarship presented the Pakhtuns as 'terrorists and militants' (Musharraf). In this scholarship, there is no reference to the non-violent philosophy of Bacha Khan, as a philosophy and means to counter violence and terrorism. The government's narrative intentionally subsided the role of indigenous forces which resisted the militant violence through non-violent methods.

Contrary to that what has been written above, the Pakhtun region has historically remained the bastion of the philosophy and legacy of non-violence (Shah, 2007); (Banerjee, 2000); (Tendulkar, 1967), but, academic scholarship (Rana, 2004); (Hussain Z. , 2008); (Fair, 2014) has largely ignored the role of non-violence in fighting the violence of militants and military. Non-violence has remained the legacy of Khudai Khidmatgar Movement (KKM), a nonviolent movement founded by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, popularly known as Bacha Khan, a great leader and fighter of freedom movement against British colonialism in India with support-base in the Pakhtun region. Apart from political struggle against British colonialism, this movement brought about a splendid revolution in culture, art, poetry and social life, which resulted in new life for the Pathans (Kurtz, 2011).

After 9/11, the non-violence legacy asserted once again and brought into the center the significance of art and culture in combating militancy and terrorism. In the domain of culture, particularly the artists, singers, and poets played a key role in resisting militancy and narrative of militancy. This research will highlight the historical role of the Pashto poetry in the face of all adversaries such as foreign invaders, militants' religious ideologies, historical and political epochs, and socially important events. How for these social forces have influenced the themes and nature of the Pashto poetry in time and space? The main purpose of this research is to investigate and analyze the themes in Pashto poetry which counters militancy, terrorism, and war on terrorism in the Pakhtun region of Pakistan after 9/11.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research falls in the domain of social movements where different forms of art and culture work as a stimulant to urge people for resistance. These culture and art forms are known as the 'cultural alternative' in social movements, which bring political science and anthropology together. There is a very less contribution to cultural side or what is considered as 'Boasian perspective' of the social movement, which create the resistant's space in society through means of art and culture. Social

movements employ a variety of culture and art forms like borrowing the powerful symbols, reforming, and remodeling the existing culture for creating new culture by arguing that culture cannot be viewed as a tool or merely symbolic form alone (Vinthagen, 2012). The construction and promotion of the narrative of historical identity through prose writing in rural India by peasant movements and the role of kinship ties and ethnicity in social movements of Latin America are the examples of cultural alternatives (Guha R. , 1988); (Laclau E. , 1986). These cultural alternatives are called as strategies of nonviolence by Gene Sharp in his book 'How Nonviolent Struggle Works' (2013) and the strategies and successes are examined by Richard B. Gregg in his work 'The Power of Nonviolence'(2018).

Poetry and poetic resistance have played a role in shaping an alternative to the violent and suppressive regimes as well as to the dominant discourses. Pashto poetry has no exception of it, and it is used in literary forums and spaces where the Pakhtuns resisted state power historically as well as discrimination within society. Moreover, it comes in the domains of what James C Scott's called *Weapons of the weak* in his much known and celebrated book. The crux of the Scott's formulation of resistance is that open resistance has consequences, and it leads to severe punishment and disciplinary actions against the resisters, however, to keep the resistance alive and active, the resisters must play with the suppressive and domination and on the one hand they escape the suppression and on the other hand keep the resistance alive. It is the level of oppression that shapes the shapes the level of resistance (Scott, 2008, 292). Scott's work *Weapons of the weak* in Pakhtuns case is advanced by Khan *et al* (2020), and argued that, a group of the Pakhtuns consists of the younger generation and mostly students who moved to cities for education or due to "war on terror" have organized and developed different spaces what the authors called *Informal Spaces*. In these informal spaces the Pakhtuns who are critical on the Pakistan's state role especially in the context of 9/11, constructed an alternative narrative to the state and provided a foundation and literary support to the ongoing resistance for the restoration of the Pakhtun's cultural, historical, and political identity as well as problematized and critically engaged the "war on terror" narrative in the Pakhtun's region. Considering the above theoretical engagement and framework, this study critically engages and analyses poetry as a form of resistance that challenges the national and international agenda and role of imposing a kind of war that raged and reshaped the Pakhtun region overwhelmingly. In response, the Pakhtun poets and literary critics on the one hand challenged the dominant discourse of "war on terror" through poetry, and on the other hand, they preserve their cultural, political, and historical identification in the form of poetry to keep their agency in the form of cultural production.

METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork was conducted in the historical and significant city of Peshawar, the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Peshawar is located on historical route, Khyber Pass, between Central and South Asia. Currently the city hosts important state buildings, privately owned businesses, and commercial centers of the province. Being a hub of the state machinery, it remained an important area for political and social activism for centuries. Political parties, literary societies and public and private educational institutions research centers, publication houses, museums, archives, and bookshops remained the identity of the city. For the memorization of historical events and current situation, the city has always given space to people to come and flourish. That was the reason that Peshawar remained a stronghold of the Non-violent movement and its legacy. The second reason was that the city also remained the target of the militants' attacks in the past eighteen years after 9/11. Third reason was that the militancy has been resisted in Peshawar by the adherents of the Non-violence philosophy.

Researchers and literary people arranged various poetry and literary gatherings like seminars and book launching ceremonies and academic activities on Pashto poetry in the Department of Pashto, Pashto Academy of University of Peshawar as well as *Mafkoora* Research Centre and Bacha Khan Research Centre. The respondents for this research were poets, audience of the poetry gatherings and experts on the subject. Total of thirty (30) respondents were selected through random sampling and purposive sampling. Reason for using random sampling is that we meet a lot of poets and audience in the field where we use to select the respondents randomly. While in some cases the poets, audience and experts are selected through purposive sampling because of their understanding and rich knowledge of the area. Actual names and descriptions of the respondents are being used with their consent. During research, data was collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews using interview guide

and focused group discussions (FGDs). For the convenience of the respondents, the interviews and FGDs were conducted in the local Pashto language and then transcribed into English by the researcher.

Poetry included in this paper is selected based on the themes from recitation of poetry in live sermons during fieldwork, where poets one by one comes on the stage to share their new composition of verses with audience and other poets for receiving appreciation and disseminating their views to public. Some of the poetry couplets were also collected from the poets and experts in the field from their individual interviews and focus group discussions. Such selections were helpful and were best to express the questions of the researcher. The collected poetry was translated into English by the researcher using simple verse to convey the spirit of the poetry for the readers' understanding. Some sources of the Pashto literature were also used in the researcher's own words in English language, where it is needed to be discussed in the paper. During interviews and FGDs, vignette method was used to discern poetry in detail and was linked to the nature of findings and exploration. The couplets of poetry, which are referred to in this paper, were narrated before the respondents during interviews and informal discussions, and they were asked to shed light on the themes and meanings expressed in these couplets. The vignette method was helpful for the respondents to express their understanding of the poetry and in investigating the dominant themes as well as historical roots of the themes in Pashto poetry. The method also enriched the findings of poetic resistance in combating militancy through investigating hidden meanings in the poetry.

Furthermore, the collected data was thematically analyzed using the technique of thematic analysis. All the data went through coding process where data was organized through line-by-line coding in the first stage of analysis. After the process of coding, the data was divided based on themes and broad themes were collected from the data. In the next step the data was put under certain themes according to connectivity of the broader themes with the data. The method of thematic analysis was helpful in developing themes in the data and interconnectivity of themes which helped in constructing theoretical argument.

Pashto Poetry in time and Space

Pashto language sees different eras where on the one hand the socio-economic and political situation and its cross-border interaction with the Persian, Indian and Turkic languages as well as religious and political movements, invasions, resistance of the Pakhtuns to invaders effect the Pashto language (Hanifi, 2013); (Habibi, 2005, p. 530). The effect is in terms of text and script of the Pashto language as well as themes and genres in its oral tradition, poetry, and prose. In this line of debate, the Pashto poetry and literature is basically categorized in three *Dawr* (eras) known as *Laghoni Dawr* (ancient era), *Classikee* or *Myanzani Dawr* (classic or middle era) and *Jadeed Dawr* (modern era) (Zaiwar, 2018, p. 43). Each *Dawr* is then sub-categorized into different schools of thought known as *Maktab* (singular), which is associated with a poet, an era, a movement, or an area. These *Maktabona* (Plural of *Maktab*) are known as *Laghoni Maktab* (ancient school), *Rokhani Maktab* (Roshanite School), *Khushal Maktab* (Khushal Khan School), *Rahman Maktab* (Rahman Baba School), *Hindi Maktab* (Hindi School), *Uiasi Maktab* (Folk School) and *Nawi Maktab* (Modern School) (Rishteen, 1988)².

The first part of *Laghonai Dawr* is about those poets and literary figures whose written record have not been found and they are only discussed in poetry or in folklore, which compose the second part of *Laghonai Dawr*. In the second part of *Laghonai Dawr*, there are poets who have used simple Pashto language in their poetry and the themes of their poetry are mostly love, beauty, aesthetics, glorification of tribal chiefs, etc.. Most of the poetry written in the second part of *Laghonai Dawr* contains genres like *Qaseeda*, *Marsiya* and Poem (Zaiwar, 2018, p. 43). Some folk genres are also claimed to be from *Laghonai Dawr* of Pashto poetry, transmitted orally for generations. Though there are different opinions of experts on these folk genres of *Laghonai Dawr* (Rishteen, 1988, pp. 7-8).

The second era of Pashto poetry, which is called *Classikee Adab* or *Myanzani Dawr*, starts with the Mughal invasion of the Indian subcontinent. This era of Pashto poetry has seen two major resistance movements; *Rokhani* or *Roshani Tehreek* (Roshanite Movement) of Bayazid Ansari also known as Pir Rokhan and resistance movement of Khushal Khan Khattak against the Mughul Emperor Aurangzaib (Rishteen, 1988, pp. 9-10)³. The poetry of the *Rokhani Tehreek* (Roshanite Movement) is called as the

² In a *Maktab* poets are in one way or another inspired from a movement, poet, or poetry of another language.

³ *Roshani* and *Rokhani* are from two different dialects of Pashto language.

first era of Pashto poetry which has many gains including introducing the Pakhtuns to reading and writing as well as making Pashto literature and poetry works for their violent resistance against Mughal Emperors. Themes of the poetry of the Roshanite Movement are based on glorification of war and bravery (Rishteen, 1988, p. 11). Khushal Khan Khattak's poetry contain themes of Pakhtun nationalism and unity, along with themes of Sufism, romanticism, and societal problems. Khushal Khan Khattak was not only a poet but also a warrior, leader of his tribe, which make his character unique as compared to other poets of classical era and that is why his poetry mostly depicts armed struggle to defend and protect his tribe/nation (Rishteen, 1988, p. 14) (Pakhtunyar, 2021). This is very much evident from his poetry as at one stage he writes; "*Da Afghan pah nang me otarrala toora ; Nangyalay da zamanay Khushal Khattak yam*" ("I girded my sword in the honor of the Afghan (nation); I am the daring Khushal Khattak of this era") (Pakhtunyar, 2021).

The age of Khushal Khan Khattak and his contemporaries, poets after Khushal Khan Khattak like his sons and grandsons, i.e., Ashraf Khan Khattak, Gohar Khan Khattak, and poets like Rahman Baba, Hameed Baba, Kazim Khan Sheda and Ali Khan introduced the Pashto literature to new themes and genres. In this period Pashto poetry adopted new themes related to idealism, romanticism, aesthetics, and realism (Rishteen, 1988, p. 24). Though except Khushal Khan Khattak, the classical era's poets did not give much attention to discuss in their poetry, the social evils, its causes, and their solution. One can find very few examples of classical poetry in which poets have highlighted social evils. As Rahman Baba says: "*Pa sabab da zalemano hakemano; Kor aw gor aw Pekhawar dre warra yaw dee*" ("Because of the deeds of wicked potentates; Home and Peshawar have become like necropolis") (Zalal, 2021). These verses of Rahman Baba depict the condition of the city of Peshawar when the Mughals were sovereigns (Rishteen, 1988, p. 17). However, there lack examples of poetry where resistance to these wicked sovereigns and problems of society are highlighted.

In the 19th century, when the British were in control of the Indian subcontinent, the Pakhtuns (now inhabiting in parts of Afghanistan and the newly merged districts of Pakistan) faced an invasion from the Crown as an attempt to capture the Pakhtun land. Three wars, generally known as the Afghan wars, were fought between the British Crown's Indian forces and the Pakhtuns in 1839, 1878, and 1919. During this era of conflict and turmoil, there was no significant contribution to the Pashto writings, either in verse or prose. (Hanifi, 2013) (Jan W. , 2021). In those years, Pashto folklore reached its zenith, where people sang about the glory of wars and victories of their heroes, their stories of aesthetics, romance, and love in different genres like *Charbaita, Tappa, Loba* and *Sandara* (Gairas, 2008). There are not many names of renowned Pashto poets to mention in the decades from 1880 to 1910, except Hafiz Alpori of Shangla (Jan W. , 2021) . After the beginning of the 20th century, the Pakhtun society witnessed a new age in terms of politics and literature.

Conception of Nonviolent Resistance through Poetry

The freedom movements of the 20th century against the British colonialism like the *Khudai Khidmatgar Movement* (KKM), introduced Pashto poetry to themes like peace, non-violence, nationalism, coexistence, politics, resistance, problems, suffering, and social evils. (Zalal, 2021). Along with other movements and literary works, the rise of KKM brought about a paradigm shift in Pashto literature (Bawar, 2021). Kurtz noted KKM as "a new life for the Pathans," which created "a splendid revolution in their art, culture, poetry, and social life" (Kurtz, 2011). The KKM was started by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, adorably known as Bacha Khan, in 1928 in the Utmanzi village of the erstwhile NWFP. It was a socially committed anti-colonial nationalist movement of the Pakhtuns (Shah, 2007). It not only organized the Pakhtuns along with modern institutional lines of politics as an outward political strategy against the British Raj, but at the same it also worked as a non-violent social reform strategy, which aimed at reforming social practices prevalent in the Pakhtun society. The KKM was considered a paramount threat to colonial power and the social fabrication by the British. It worked as an indispensable force for forging unity among the Pakhtuns to wage the non-violent political struggle effectively. The Political struggle against the British colonialism, social reforms agenda, cultural and literary promotion, and production in the Pakhtun society have been the major goals that defined most of the history of KKM's long struggle (Bala, 2013).

In order to further the cause of the movement, Bacha Khan started a monthly journal in the Pashto language called "The Pakhtun" in 1928 (Jan F. , 1993). The journal consisted of essays on social and political subjects, which was published from the Utmanzai village. Bacha Khan was its first editor

and Atta Ullah was the publisher. 'The Pakhtun' was printed in Amritsar in its nascent days (Amir O. , 1986). The main purpose of the journal was to highlight the core problems of the Pakhtun society to discuss the contemporary issues, and to promote and develop Pashto language and literature to enable the Pakhtuns to meet the futuristic demands of scientific and literary inquiry. Along with 'the Pakhtun' journal, the KKM played a vital role in the organization and unity of the writers and artists through literary and poetry gatherings as well as recitation of poetry in political gatherings. The KKM gave a platform to the poets for discussing social issues, unity, and organization of the Pakhtun society through their writings. The KKM was working as a guiding force for the poets and writers to highlight the social issues in their poetry and writings (Khalil, 2021). Being a visionary political leader, it was in the knowledge of Bacha Khan that Pashto literature, poets, and literate class of the Pakhtun society can easily mobilize the marginalized Pakhtun society to raise the voice against the unjust British rule and the problems arising from it (Amin, 2021).

The poets started writing for the unity of the Pakhtuns through discussing the social problems and social evils of the Pakhtun society and their united resistance to the British imperialism. Literary people, and especially poets, changed the perception of the Pakhtuns from being an all-time belligerent *Gherati qaam* (the superior image of the Pakhtuns as a nation) to a peaceful, tolerant, and believer of coexistence (Buner, 2012). As Ghani Khan writes: "*Jang la de Mansoor rawan; Toup ao na tapang lari / Na da toro praq lari; Na da zgharo shrang lari*" ("Mansoor (referring to Bacha Khan the freedom fighter) is going to war without any cannon and mortar; Neither he owns a shining sword nor any valuable armor")⁴. It is the contribution of the KKM that if we look at the Pashto poetry today, there will be a couplet of nationalism and highlighting of social problems of society in every poem (Hussain, 2021). This couplet of Pashto poetry best expresses the effect of the KKM on Pashto poetry: "*Saleema sam de ka ghazal shar'e tha / Lag paki zikar da khpal qaam kawa*" ("O Saleem! Put your *ghazal* in accordance with the doctrines (*Pakhtunwali*; the Pakhtun code of conduct); Do mention your nation in it"). Tariq explained this poetry couplet as "it is necessary to write about the problems and issues of the Pakhtun society." It has become the principle of Pashto poetry to discuss social evils and social problems in a more simplistic way (Pakhtunyar, 2021).

Themes of Resistance in the aftermath of 9/11

After 9/11 the security situation in KP deteriorated when America declared war on terror. The result of the War on Terror was the rise of extremism in the region, leading to emergence of extremists in many areas. Taliban started killing the innocent people especially those who opposed their stance. The ideas and narrative of non-violence legacy were hindering their way and acted as a barrier to the violent ways used by extremists to achieve their goals (Buner, 2021). The legacy of Non-violence resisted militancy and extremism from the beginning. The KKM and its legacy were very critical even in Russia-Afghan war in the 80s of the 20th century. They openly criticized the project of Afghan Jihad as well as the indulgence of the Pakistani state in Afghan Jihad (Raza, 2021). One of the respondents quoted words of Bacha Khan in the time of Afghan Jihad against USSR, that: "The seeds of Mujahideen which you people are sowing will transform into a forest one day, and be aware, a fire in the forest cannot be controlled" (Yousafzai, 2021). The respondent further added that in the early 1980s, when those militants and extremists were titled as Mujahideen by Pakistani state as well as other international powers, the nonviolent legacy openly opposed them. Though there was no space for the narrative of the KKM legacy in media nor in academia. This was the reason that when the Taliban got hold in Malakand division and other areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the newly merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, they started targeting followers of non-violence legacy.

Along with other forms of culture and art the poets and literary people were on forefront of those who were resisting militancy. The Pakhtun poets used different platforms for disseminating their poetry in the masses, which included live poetry gatherings, publishing books, publishing magazines, and the use of print and electronic media as prominent sources (Arman, 2021). They were successful in creating space for their poetry in public, and it was the reason that themes like 'condemnation of war' and 'peace' were not only dominant in poetry but in other ways of life. The Pakhtun poets also praised the attitude of masses towards poetry, as a respondent quoted poetry couplet of Izhar Ullah Izhar: "*Mala*

⁴ Mansoor is a historical figure in Muslim literature who resisted the dogma of clergies.

haghi qaam da zrra pa tal ke zaye rakari; Las ke che janana nh qalam aw nh kitab lari” (“I’m adored by a nation that; possess neither pen nor a book”) (Izhar, p. 58). The poetry couplet shows the love and respect of the Pakhtuns for their poets. The Pakhtuns may not have pen and books, but they will love and respect poets (Bawar, 2021).

Pashto poetry written during the last two decades has mainly focused on the themes of ‘peace and nonviolence,’ ‘condemnation of war,’ ‘Resilience’ and nationalism. The themes like peace and condemnation of war were introduced in the last twenty years. While some of the themes like nonviolence, resilience and nationalism were transformed from the twentieth century’s poetry. Each of the themes used to construct alternative narrative for countering narrative of violence and militancy (Iqbal, 2021).

Condemnation of War

The theme of ‘condemnation of war’ was very dominant in Pashto poetry in the last two decades. The theme was used to condemn all those people, institutions, and states, who were supporters of militancy, terrorism, or war on terrorism in one way or the other. While talking on militancy and war as well as the role of religious leaders who were said to be supporters and promoters of militancy in the region, a respondent quoted these couplets of poetry: “Ay da jumat ao da mandar muhafizano waory / Bamona ma jorawai, tenkona ma jorawai / Da jang na sa jorregi, janguna ma jorawai”; (“Beware the leaders of mosques and temples / Don’t make bombs and tanks / War is a curse, don’t make wars”) (Ahmad, 2021). In these couplets the poet condemns war, the arms, and bombs and the role of those who ideologically support and promote war. The Pakhtun poets, audience of poetry, and intelligentsia were critical of those who were involved in supporting militancy either physically or ideologically. Talking about those who physically or ideologically supported militancy, an audience/respondent in a poetry gathering shared his views by quoting a couplet of Sahib Shah Sabir: “Da sro lambo da ghargharo da zora na de khabar / Da sok che Jang ghwari da jang da zora na de khabar” (“Thee are ignorant of the wrath of blazing fire / Thee who wage war, are ignorant of its power of obliteration”) (Manerwal, 2021). This couplet of poetry on the one hand talks about the consequences, fatalities, and devastation of war, and condemns the supporters and promoters of war (Muhammad, 2021). Talking about the consequences of war and militancy, the famous poet Aziz Manerwal shared a couplet of his poetry: “Jang qatil de, insanan wajalay kegi / Da cha wror, da cha janan wajalay kegi” (“War is a beast, it swallows every being; Be it somebody’s brother or beloved) (Manerwal, 2021). In post 9/11 poetry, the theme of the ‘condemnation of war’ is very dominant, where poets try to condemn war and those who support or promote war (Khan Z. , 2021).

In Pashto poetry, the poets condemn militancy and war not only because of the fatalities, but they also show their love for the land, and everything attached to it. As one of the respondents shared a couplet while talking about his land: “Ma darta tol umar da gulono khaar wayali de / Kala me perzo shi pa bamono Pekhawara” (“I have always praised you as my beloved, O the city of flowers!; O my Peshawar! / How come I could tolerate that you are bombed”) (Bawar, 2021). In this couplet, the respondent expresses his grief about Peshawar being bombed and be a center stage of militants’ bomb blasts and target killings in the last two decades after 9/11. In Pashto poetry and literature as well as in folk traditions, the city of Peshawar is called as the city of flowers. During the last two decades, the Pakhtun poets called Peshawar as city of flowers to show their love for the city and to remind the people the beauty of the city, which will help them to work for peace. In another couplet a poet also says: “Zama watan kho da sandaro aw naghmo watan de / Hum pakay gul kegi aw hum pakay bulbula kegi” (“My land is the land of songs and melodies / Both flowers and nightingale can be found here”). In this couplet the poet is calling the Pakhtun land as the land of beauty, songs and melodies which is now facing war and militancy (Zalal, 2021).

The Pakhtun poets also called militancy, terrorism, and war on terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as an imposed war. The Pakhtun poets reject the narrative of showing militancy as the product of the Pakhtun culture and call the militancy as a project of others. Calling militancy as other’s project, Aziz Manerwal shared these couplets of Sahib Shah Sabir:

“Pa chaman k ka gulona ka azghi mri /
Kho zma da kor khaist zma sparli mri /
Da me nura badbakhti na da nu sa dee /
Pa pradi jang k zma da kor zmari mree”

(“If it is flower or the thorn which are being destroyed /
These all are the beauties of my house, dying /
What should I call it if not my bad luck? /

The brave men of my home dying in a war of others”). (Manerwal, 2021).

In these couplets of poetry, the poet remembers the militancy, which have made a war like situation in the Pakhtun region, where violence is destroying everything. For the poet, the natural beauty of the land, which includes flowers and gardens as well as youngsters, are important, so he remembers both in his poetry couplets. The poet also called the militancy in the Pakhtun region as an imposed project by outsiders, so he calls it as ‘imposed war.’

Peace and Nonviolence

The theme of ‘Peace’ also remains dominant in Pashto poetry in the last two decades after 9/11. Reason behind the theme of ‘Peace’ is that peace remains the most prior demand of the people in the last twenty years because of militancy, which created a war like situation in the Pakhtun region. People asked for peace through many ways, especially in protests, wall chalkings, political gatherings and in public conversations (Khan H. , 2021). In this line of debate a young poet shared these couplets of poetry written by Khalil Ur Rahman Khalil: “*Lekam yaw dasay rang kalam da aman / Che warkawi hamesh peggam da aman*” (“I am going to compose such a poetry of peace / That is evident to give a message of peace, always”). The respondent added that the Pakhtun poets are using their pen and the rest of their energies for bringing peace to their land. He further added another couplet from the same poetry: “*Pa sar da zmakay ra khwaro Pukhtano / Pasai che ukrru intezam da aman*” (“O Pakhtuns! from every corner of the world / Let us be united to bring eternal peace to the land”). In this couplet the poet calls to his fellow Pakhtuns, inhabiting in every corner of the world, to be united and work for bringing peace to their land (Pakhtunyar, 2021).

The poet writes about peace in his poetry, but he also knows that only writing about it is not enough, we also need to work hard to acquire it. That is why he call the Pakhtuns from every corner of the world to work for achieving peace. While talking on the theme of peace in Pashto poetry, a respondent also added that “the theme of peace is not new in Pashto poetry, it is actually the continuity of the nonviolence legacy of the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement.” He added a couplet of Amjad Shahzad to support his argument: “*Zama da qaam bachi la har sarri wasla warkary / Yaw Bacha Khan warla da aman falsafa warkary*” (“Everyone has given a gun in hand to the youth of my nation / It was Bacha Khan only who gave them the philosophy of Peace”). In this couplet, the poet has explained the role of Bacha Khan, who was the only man to give the philosophy of non-violence to the Pakhtuns. In conceptual meaning the couplet means that everyone, was it the native or the foreigner, has brought war to the Pakhtun region. It was the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement of Bacha Khan, which presented the philosophy of peace and nonviolence to the Pakhtuns. One of the respondents also share that due to absence of peace in the Pakhtun land, the youngsters could not imagine the real peace and seek refuge in intoxicating drugs. The respondent shared a couplet of Jalal Khalil: ‘*Na poha de da aman aw wahdat na khabar na dee / Sukoon zama da qaam bachi la banga raobasi*’ – (“They are unaware of the fruits of unity and peace / The youth of my nation is trying to find peace in weeds”). This couplet, on the one hand, describes the ignorance of the Pakhtuns about unity, which can bring about peace to their land, and on the other hand, the attainment of peace of mind, or tranquility through means of various intoxicants, which is injurious to both health and the cultural fabric of the society. It also meant as a source of awareness for the youth, where the poet is calling out to them to unite and struggle for real and long lasting peace (Pakhtunyar, 2021) (Bawar, 2021).

Poetry of Resilience

It is known that militancy and terrorism spread fear in the masses, which in turn make them apolitical. In this case, the poetry worked not only as a source of awareness but also as a source of resilience. Poetry of resilience on the one hand, helps the masses to know different aspects of militancy, and to make sure that the public show their resilience and fight to counter it, on the other hand (Pakhtunyar, 2021). The resilience in poetry counters many phenomena, which is the byproduct of militancy and terrorism i.e., hopelessness, fear, terror, and the extermination of dreams. Pashto poetry worked as a source of courage, hope, entertainment, and awareness through themes of resilience. Talking about the theme of resilience in Pashto poetry, a young poet recalled: “*Ay wakhta ka qatil da har arman me ye*

kho sa / Bya hum pa wacho shondo me naghma da Zindagai da” – (“O wicked time! What if you are the killer of my dreams / There are songs of life on my dry lips”). In this couplet, the poet laments about the time and space being the killers of his dreams, and yet he tries to spread the message of hope and love for life through singing songs of the beauty of life (Khalil, 2021). Talking about the messages described in the above-mentioned couplet, a respondent stated: “poetry can explain many things in one couplet which couldn’t be explained in long speeches and discussions. One can see messages of shattering of dreams, poverty, singing songs about the glory of life, and blaming time and space in only one couplet” (Pakhtunyar, 2021). Jalal is also of the thought that in the times of militancy and terrorism, it is natural that people will sing about the beauty of life, hope, and love. He added a couplet of his poetry: “*Ranra da takhayul ba me zyategi khamakha / Wajood che me tor tam de aw lamba da zindagi*” (“It is pertinent that the light of my ingenuity will intensify / When life is ablaze and my whole body is engulfed”) (Khalil, 2021). The poet discusses things metaphorically, where he takes light of imagination as metaphor for creativity and flames and darkness as metaphor for social condition. In other words, the poet compares his poetry to light in his life and the social conditions to the flames of ravaging fire, and his poetry as a creative force against the depleted condition of society. The couplet gives hope and resilience against fears and terrors prevalent in the Pakhtun society (Pakhtunyar, 2021).

“Ay da Hamza aw Ghani Khan bachiya /
Pasa rawekh sha da soor oor marr krра /
Dagha che sta pa sar tayar walar de /
Da narriwal jang dagha shor marr krра /
Gora ka da zali ouda patay shwe /
Grana da bya ka rata ta patay shwe”
 (“O son of Hamza and Ghani Khan! /
Wake up and kill the ravaging fire /
That what is lurking on your head /
End this world war and the chaos /
What if you didn’t do anything to stop it /
You and the like will perish”)

In the above-mentioned couplet, the poet mentions the proxy war in the Pakhtun region and tries to aware the Pakhtuns about the consequences of being caught during international wars. The poet gives reference of the Pakhtun elders to remind history to the people, which is full of bravery and sacrifices of those elders for the land and its people. She requests her people to wake up and kill the fire on their land and call the war like situation as imposed from outsiders. The poet is also warning the Pakhtuns that if they failed to counter and resist the war on their land, they will face the question of survival this time (Khan N. , 2021). The couplet shows the struggle of the Pakhtuns for resilience and resistance against proxy wars on the Pakhtun region.

CONCLUSION

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa –being on the famous Khyber Pass among others, which was a doorway into South Asia for many invaders like Alexander, Babar, and Ahmad Shah–remained a centerstage of religious and political movements from Central and East Asia. These invasions and movements effected the lives of people in many ways. Society and culture, art and literature, music and state machinery were transformed. Most of the writings about the people of the province is foreign scholarship; where historians, linguists, and anthropologists have done research and collected data. These literary works have been produced from a master perspective through colonial lenses to serve the purpose of master and to let down and demean the local people. Most of the works produced are biased and not representing the real lives of the Pakhtuns, the majority population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Contrary to that the indigenous scholarship has also been marginalized by these dominant discourses of the orientalists. These scholarships portray the people of the province, specifically Pakhtuns, as violent. Toynbee referring to the Pakhtun region as “radiant region” is one example of the foreign literature produced about this region.

In the past forty years, this region remained as a training ground for the US and KSA backed Mujahideen, who were fighting the Soviets for America in the last two decades of the twentieth century, and then a battle ground for Al-Qaida and the Taliban against the US and their allies. Most of the literature produced in academia and journalism again shows this region and its people as the main actors

of militancy, terrorism, and war on terrorism. Though no attention has been given to the indigenous narratives and discourses in the modern war of electronic and social media. The region has an overwhelmingly rich history of nonviolence in the past century, where the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement brought about political and social reforms in the Pakhtun society. In the current situation, the legacy of the nonviolence is struggling to counter militancy and narrative of militancy.

This paper is an effort to document and analyze the Pakhtun poets' response to militancy, terrorism, and war on terrorism. For this purpose, three months' fieldwork was organized in the Peshawar district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where techniques of qualitative research including participant observation, in-depth interviews and focused group discussions were utilized as sources of data collection. The collected data was analyzed through thematic analyses where themes were generated. Analysis of the data reveals that Pashto poetry was inspired by time and space throughout its written and oral record. From the ancient oral poetry to the poetry of the Roshanites and post Roshanites poets of the classical era (14th-17th century), the Pakhtun poets were influenced by the presence of Mughals either because of invasion, resistance or because of the genres, themes, and metaphors introduced by languages and literatures of invaders. During British colonialism, the Pakhtuns witness a cultural decay, where there is no prominent poet from late 18th century to early twentieth century. Though there are a variety of folk genres of Pashto poetry, which describe the richness of the Pakhtun culture. In the third decade of the 20th century, the political and literary movements in the subcontinent against the British colonialism, once again brought a revolutionary change in the Pakhtun culture, art, and literature along with political struggle. Pashto poetry was transformed with the help of poets, introduction of new genres, themes, and metaphors, during freedom movements in the British India.

In the past two decades after 9/11, Pashto poetry was once again influenced by the prevalent condition in the Pakhtun society. The Pakhtun society remained on target of militants and military operations, which brought violence in the shape of bomb-blasts and target killings. The Pakhtun poets and writers tried to promote counter-narrative to militancy with their writings. They struggled for the awareness of the general masses by using themes of peace and nonviolence, condemnation of war, nationalism, and resilience. These themes provide courage and hope to those who believe that the current war is the product of proxy wars in the region. Dominant themes in Pashto poetry after 9/11 were the themes of resistance, condemnation of war, peace, and resilience among others. Poets used Pashto poetry as their weapon to counter violence and unrest in the Pakhtun society, created by militancy, terrorism, and war on terrorism. Analysis of the study suggests that poetry and other forms of expression could be best tool for countering militancy, militant discourse and for bringing peace in society.

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