MYTHS OR REALITY: PASHTUN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES RESISTANCE TO STATE AUTHORITY IN COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL ERA

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Abstract

Pashtun resistance to state authority has been interpreted in light of stereotypical colonial theories in colonial and post-colonial periods. Pashtuns were presented as marshals and wild people who resisted every kind of state authority in the colonial era. Perceptions about Pashtun's resistance to state authority based on politically motivated stereotypes resonate in the British colonial regime. This study focuses on the stereotypes and myths associated with Pashtun's resistance to state authority in the colonial period and its effect on them in post-colonial periods. The British colonial regime faced resistance in Pashtun indigenous society (now known as emerged districts). The findings of this study reveal that the Pashtun resistance to state authority is not part of their culture. Pashtun were against the exploitative policies of the British and it was genuine resistance. It reveals that their resistance was labeled by British as a normative part of their culture to legitimise the oppressive policies in this region. Moreover, in the post-colonial period, Pakistan also applied the same tactics and labelled genuine resistance as part of their culture. Stereotypes associated with Pashtun resistance to state should be deconstructed.

Keywords: Cultural Stereotypes, Pashtun Resistance, Colonization, Post-colonial, Pashtun Nationalism

Introduction

The British in the colonial era deliberately misinterpreted the Pashtun Indigenous community[1] resistance to state authority. Pashtun declared by British a marshal race for political interest. Politically motivated definition and construction of Pashtun resistance, marshal race and bravery still affected their evolution from tribal to state governance. Historically, the Pashtun resistance to the state institutions was misinterpreted by the British for political interest in this region (Borthakur, 2021). They were introduced to the outside world by British historians and anthropologists during the colonial period. The colonial thinkers labelled their resistance to the exploitative policies of the British as resistance to true democratic governance. They completely ignored the repressive policies of the British colonial regime in Pashtun tribal region (now known as merged districts). The intellectual imperialism of the Global North continuously replicates the British construction of Pashtun resistance. It is depicted as a normative part of Pashtun culture (Cherniak, 2021).

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[1] Indigenous Pashtun community refers to federally administered tribal region (FATA) (currently known as merged districts)

It is believed that resistance to state authority is embedded in Pashtun values and norms. The British used this interpretation to camouflage their repressive policy in this region. The British intellectuals in the colonial period created a so-called code *"Pakhtunwali''²*. They labelled Pashtun's genuine resistance against the exploitative policies of the British as part of the so-called *Pakhtunwali*. It is depicted that subjugation to central authority is against the spirit of *Pakhtunwali* in colonial literature. Pashtun culturally resist all kinds of state institutions or authority and they culturally do not accept centralize authority in form of state.

The colonial episteme perceives the people of colonies, especially of the indigenous or settler societies backwards and an uncivilized (Hakur, 2013). Literature produced in the colonial era replicates this thinking that Indigenous people resist all kinds of state authority and it is not against the repressive colonial policies. It is part of their cultural values, norms to oppose centralized authority in form of state (Tripodi, 2016; Manderson, 2012). The literature produced in the colonial era about Pashtun resistance is full of stereotypes, and biased generalizations about their resistance (Vázquez, 2009). For instance, Rudyard Kipling described the Pashtun as a warrior race with a martial temperament and depicted their resistance to state authority as part of their culture. Literature produced in the colonial era, deliberately for political purpose highlighted their resistance.

Hence, this research adopted a decolonizing perspective to undue knowledge created by British colonial regime about Pashtun resistance. It also focuses on how stereotypical explanations misguided the international community and created an image of Pashtun that they resist all kinds' state authority. The British colonial history has long-lasting implications for Pashtun in post-colonial era. This study decolonises the British construction of the Pashtun indigenous community's resistance to state authority and the hidden political interest behind this construction.

Theorizing Tribal Indigenous Resistance

The British colonial regime expansionist activities were encountered by indigenous tribal people from the 15 to 20th century in sub-continent. Indigenous tribal ethnic groups resisted British colonialism in sub-content before the independence of India and Pakistan. Resistance movements against colonialism in sub-contents started during the colonial era to challenge the imperial domination of the British colonial regime. These indigenous tribal people resisted British rule and also asserted indigenous autonomy during the repressive colonial era. The British colonial regime brought profound changes to tribal culture, social fabrics and social structure. Their natural resources were exploited and traditional governance systems were disrupted for self-interest. The tribal resistance resonates as a part of their culture in colonial literature. Colonial literature labeled their resistance as an uncivilized response to so-called British modernization in the colonial era. However, tribal resistance underscores their determination to defend their rights and way of life against colonial oppression (Pathmavathy, 2024).

Self-governance is an integral component of indigenous tribal people in South Asia. Their institutions of self-governance evolved over centuries and these institutions strengthened their self-rules. However, colonial policies distorted their self-governance, created a socio-cultural vacuum and snatched their autonomy (Nimesh, 2022). The British colonial regime made them marginalized and exploited their culture and resources (Eswarappa, 2024). The British colonial rule precipitated rebellion among the indigenous tribal groups. The colonial policies caused unrest and fueled tribal resistance. However, this tribal resistance is

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² This is a so-called cultural code of the Pashtun indigenous community. It is reflected in colonial literature as a permanent cultural code of Pashtun comprised of bravery, hospitality, asylum and revenge.

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stigmatized as a part of their culture or resistance to modern democratic rule in literature produced in a colonial era. This tribal resistance was presented without context in the colonial period and continuously replicated in post-colonial literature (Verghese, 2016).

For instance, the British launched almost sixty expeditions against the Pashtun indigenous tribal ethnic group from 1849 to 1899. There were different types of resistance faced by the British such as ideological, religious and cultural. However, among these types of resistance, the British targeted Pashtun culture (Hussain, Xingang, & Fatima, 2022). The indigenous Pashtun culture is stigmatized in colonial narratives for political interest (Yousaf, 2021; Khan, Cheng, Shah, & Ullah, 2020). The British deliberately created the so-called code *Pakhtunwali* and labelled the Pashtun genuine resistance as part of the normative culture to legitimize their repressive policy in their region. The following lines highlight the British repressive colonial policies in the Pashtun tribal region.

A Brief History of British Policies in the Indigenous Pashtun Tribal Region

British in 1849 came into direct contact with the Pashtun tribal people (Lundberg, 2016). After the demarcation of Durand Line 1893, the British divided Pashtun (currently Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan) into tribal and settled areas. British imposed laws in the tribal and settled areas to protect colonial interests in this region (Saikal, 2010). Initially, the British adopted a non-interference policy to avoid Pashtun indigenous resistance. However, later on, viceroy Lansdowne and Elgin (between 1887 and 1898), replaced the policy of non-interference with the 'Forward Policy'. The forward policy of the colonial regime was resisted by the indigenous tribal Pashtun because of its exploitative nature (Khan, 2020).

The British in the colonial period adopted the administrative policy Frontier Crime Regulation (FCR) in this region. British used FCR as a means in the tribal areas (now known as merged districts) to separate the so-called "civilized" Pashtun from the "uncivilized" tribal Pashtun (as mentioned above the British imposed different policies in tribal and settled areas). It was the strategy of the British colonial regime. The British colonial regime imposed two different administrative policies in Kenya for political interest (Kiwanuka, 2018). Therefore, the British adopted two policies in the Pashtun tribal region to achieve geostrategic interest. FCR was a repressive policy and violated the basic democratic rights of the Pashtun indigenous community. The FCR became a systematically violent instrument through which the British attempted to manage frontier tribes. FCR enabled the British to push established boundaries of sovereignty and power which affected the indigenous Pashtun community in unprecedented ways. FCR legitimized the imperial violence in the Pashtun Tribal areas. Strategies of control and punishment embedded in the FCR, marginalized Pashtuns in the colonial era. For example, the British imposed collective punishment, displacement and destruction of entire villages are draconian measures imposed by the British. They manipulated the local customs of the indigenous Pashtun community. British colonial laws manipulated Pashtun customs and created a new form of governance (Kharroubi, 2022). For instance, Political Agents (PA) (a representative of the colonial regime) dealt with Pashtun in more oppressive ways in this tribal region as compared to settled areas of the sub-continent. Therefore, Pashtuns were subject to unjust laws which violated Pashtun's legal and sovereign rights.

Moreover, British policy was not development and peace-oriented, the prime objective of their policy was security and their political interest in this region. British colonial policies were repressive and massively hindered political and economic development in the Pashtun tribal region (Haroon & Green, 2017). In the British policy framework, tribal people or indigenous Pashtun communities were considered as a factor of defence, not human beings. British policy did not provide an environment to integrate indigenous Pashtun into the imperial system. They deliberately ignored political reforms in this region to protect its international

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and local geopolitical interests (Yousaf & Wakhu, 2020). Therefore, they did not extend political reforms to the tribal of Pashtun society.

The British purposely depicted Pashtun resistance directed towards external control as an innate part of Pashtun culture, rather than a reaction to Britain's own extremely violent and repressive policy in this region (Ali & Zhibin, 2021). Resistance against the British colonial policy must therefore be understood as a consequence of Britain's violent policies, rather than an innate part of Pashtun culture. British policy towards Pashtuns thus created a geographically and politically isolated, oppressed state of existence for Pashtuns. Pashtun resistance to these inhuman colonial laws was labelled as resistance to state authority. They deliberately misinterpreted their cultural violence as resistance to state authority and declared them as wild, warrior and uncivilized people to legitimize their repressive policies in this region. This romantic view of the courageous warrior of Indigenous Pashtun was popularized by colonial writers (Lindholm, 1980). Pashtun resistance to state authority especially to exploitative British laws was considered a culturally embedded and inherent part of Pashtun culture (Khan, Cheng, Shah, & Ullah, 2020).

Moreover, the repressive policy in the shape of the FCR was continued by the Pakistani government after partition in 1947. Pakistan withstands the British policies in the post-colonial era. It is important to highlight the Pashtun resistance to state authority as a natural consequence of punitive British policy measures in this region. In the post-colonial period, Pakistan continued the British repressive policy mentioned above. The following lines explain the theoretical framework of this study.

Theoretical Framework

An eclectic approach is adopted to understand the diverse socio-cultural and political dimensions of Pashtun's resistance to state authority. Nina Swindler's (1977) famous glue theory explains Pashtun's resistance to state authority (Khan, Israr, & Khan, 2019). Glue theory asserted that Pashtun indigenous tribal people culturally resist state authority if someone imposes such changes by force. British colonial state violently forced the Pashtun indigenous people to follow central authority. Therefore, the British oppressive laws in this region created resistance against the colonial authority. British imperial position and repressive laws forced Pashtuns to resist their repressive colonial policies. British deliberately generated stereotypes about Pashtun to legitimize repressive policies against them. Social solidarity in tribal society is the outcome of its group values, clan, and family. Khaldun philosophy of Assabiyya emphasizes social solidarity and group consciousness. It strengthens relationships within a particular group (Jamil, 2011). The British colonial policies distorted their social solidarity and fueled resistance among the Pashtun indigenous tribal communities. Along with these two anthropological theories, the decolonizing research framework allows us to critically evaluate the laws of formally colonized states (Epstein, 2014). The British colonial regime adopted different administrative laws in the Pashtun tribal belt as mentioned above. The persistence of FCR's colonial legacy and Pakistan's suspicious policies in this region created resistance against the state authority (Pant, 2018). These theories provide theoretical insight to trace Pashtun's resistance to state authority.

Methods and Materials

The colonized literature or literature produced in colonial times adopted culture-reductionist lenses that misinterpreted Pashtun's resistance to state authority. In this research qualitative paradigms were adopted to explore the different aspects of Pashtun's resistance to state authority. This research collects both archival and as well as primary data to understand the different aspects of Pashtun's resistance to state authority. The ethnographic field data were gathered through in-depth interviews and participant observation with cultural experts, community elders and academicians. Different themes are derived from the primary data and

juxtaposed with the secondary literature to explore the different aspects of Pashtun's resistance to state authority.

Manipulation of Pashtun Socio-cultural Values Instigate Resistance to State Authority

As mentioned above, the British deliberately exaggerated Pashtun's resistance to state authority to legitimize their presence in this region. For this purpose, they not only adopted different administrative policies but also created a social schism in the Pashtun indigenous society (Baty, 1980). They applied different methods to manipulate and socially engineer the Pashtun indigenous society to legitimize their illegitimate presence in this region (Sōkefeld, 2005). British created different classes among Pashtun such as *Maliks* (tribal elders nominated by the British) and religious clerics to protect their interest. These people were bribed by the British. The local people who resisted the British policy were labelled by the British as uncivilized, wild people. These politically motivated manipulations of the Pashtun social structure created resistance to the British colonial regime. In this regard, one community elder stated that

> "The British manipulated the social structure of Pashtun. They created different classes for political interest and also manipulated the socio-cultural values. This manipulation fueled resistance against the colonial regime" Gul (Individual Interview, 25 June 2024).

Through Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) the British manipulated Pashtun socio-cultural institutions (Hanifi, 2016). The British labelled acts of non-violent resistance to their policies as inherently violent entity of Pashtun culture (Wagner, 2013). Pashtuns in the Tribal Areas are presented as violent, and 'uncivilized' by the British (Khan, Cheng, Shah, Ullah, & Jianfu, 2021). They were stigmatized as 'wild' and 'uncivilized' people to secure colonial interest. For this purpose, colonial anthropologists described indigenous Pashtun as incapable of creating political organizations for self-rule (Caroe, 1960; Reynolds, 2016; Mahmud, 2010). It was a kind of cultural reductionism and biased generalization about Pashtuns and their culture. The British intellectual imperialism further reinforced this stereotypical explanation of Pashtun's resistance as a normative part of their culture. One respondent stated that

> "Pashtun resistance was against the British repressive policies. It was quite a natural response and it was not part of our culture. British policies were instigated resistance. It was not against the state authority" Tayyeb (Individual Interview, 25 June 2024).

Pashtun indigenous leader, Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan known as Bacha Khan, tried to challenge the British-biased narrative through non-violent movement. He introduced modern education and his educational philosophy was in line with the Islamic philosophy of life, inculcating peace and tolerance (Sohail, Ahmad, & Inamullah, 2014). He founded the *Khudia Khedmatghar* (servant of God) movement to educate and serve the interests of the Pashtun. However, the British labelled Bacha Khan as a traitor (Ullah, Hayat and Khan, 2021). He was staunchly opposed to violence, sanctioning more peaceful, educational initiatives to avoid British provoking aggression. He utilizes the local socio-cultural capital to resist the exploitative policies of the British. This movement strongly criticized the political and military injustices of British colonialism. In this regard, one community member stated that

> "Pashtun resisted the British regime violently as well as through non-violent means. Religious leaders launched Jihad against the British repressive policies. However, the *Khudaye Khedmatgar movement* was a secular movement through peaceful cultural means that resisted

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the undemocratic and uncivilized institutions and behaviour of the colonial regime" Anwaar (Individual Interview 24 April).

Khudaye Khedmatgar movement tried to counter the British definition of Pashtun culture and to build Pashtun capacity for civility and self-governance (Arbab, 2019). Despite the non-violent nature of *the Khudaye Khedmatgar* movement, the British response was violent and repressive towards this movement. Through, FCR the British stopped the penetration of the *Khudaye Khedmatgar* movement to the Tribal Areas. The British were fearful of socially and politically motivated activism against their oppressive laws in the tribal belt. The British pigeonholed Pashtun indigenous resistance to the colonial regime as their uncivilized behaviour. Colonial literature exaggerated Pashtun resistance and depicted it as a natural part of the Pashtun tribal ethnic group.

Colonial Narrative of Pashtun Resistance to State Authority in the Post-Colonial Period

Pakistan replicated the British narrative about Pashtun's resistance to state authority (Khan, Cheng, Shah and Ullah, 2020). Pakistan also labelled Pashtun as a violent ethnic group in curriculum, art, and dramas. Pakistan deliberately for political interest in this region reinforced what the British narrated about Pashtun's resistance to state authority in colonial literature (Siddique, 2014). Pakistan also continued the British strategies and laws in this region (Williams and Law, 2012). The present-day post-colonial literature was significantly influenced by what was narrated in colonial times about Pashtun's resistance to state authority (Akhtar, 2022). Pakistan also continued the British policies in the tribal region un The colonized image of Pashtun still affects them in the post-colonial era (Saeed, Shah and Ul Ain, 2020). til 2018. One respondent stated that

> "Pakistan adopted the same colonized strategy and laws until 2018. Pakistan still does not give rights to these Indigenous Pashtuns and their peaceful protest against the state repressive policies is considered as resistance to state authority" Darvaish (Individual Interview) 25 March 2024).

Pakistan also exaggerated their resistance to state authority for political interest (Gregorian, 1969; Misdaq, 2006). Pakistan also resisted the movement of Bacha Khan and labelled the *Khudaye Khedmatgar* movement as against the state authority (Bala, 2013). Indigenous Pashtun were exposed to violence and war during post-colonial periods (Bansode, 2020). Pakistan in the post-colonial era brought violence and also manipulated its cultural values to achieve its strategic objectives in this region. British stereotypical construction of Pashtun resistance to state authority has been further exploited by Pakistan (Bangash, 2015). Pakistan in the post-colonial period presented them as violent ethnic groups that made them isolated economically from the rest of Pakistan. The Pakistan academic discourses and media portrayals completely sideline Pashtun representation. They are presented in movies and dramas as a violent ethnic group and misinterpret the Pashtun culture violence with their resistance against the repressive policies of the state. This stereotypical explanation of Pashtun's resistance to state authority intersects with their marginality. These historical political injustices with Pashtun by the colonial forces still affect their lives (Aman and Jan 2020; Green, N., 2016). In this regard, one Pashtun community elder stated that

> "Pakistan still doubts their loyalties with the state and does not allow their indigenous movement to protest their democratic rights. Pakistan media presented them as presented by the British in colonial era" Khan (Individual Interview, 23 March 2024).

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Pashtun resistance to state authority for centuries was presented and constructed by outsiders both in the colonial and post-colonial periods. The violent representation of Pashtun multiplies their socio-economic and political problems in the post-colonial period. The nationalist forces who try to deconstruct Pashtun culture are discouraged historically by the British and currently by Pakistan. Pakistan in the post-colonial period tries to suppress the indigenous movement that demands peace and development in this region. For example, the Pashtun Tahafuz (protection) movement (PTM), an indigenous peace movement faces resistance from the side of the Pakistan government (Asif, 2024; Yousaf, 2019). In this regard, one community elder stated that

> "In the colonial era, the British opposed the *khudaye khedmatgar* movement; it was an indigenous movement against their oppressive policies. In the post-colonial era, Pakistan opposes the Pashtun Tahafuz movement. This is a non-violent movement to resist Pakistan's violent social engineering in Pashtun build" Iftihar (Individual Interview) 21 February 2024).

Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) has been facing the worst repression and court cases to discourage the young leader Manzoor Pashteen (Mir, 2018). Manzoor Pashteen's speeches are banned by national media. Pakistan propagated against the Pashtun Tahafuz movement and labelled this movement as resistance to state authority. It is not the first time that the nationalist movement that tries to deconstruct Pashtun identity has been opposed but historically the efforts of the local nationalist leaders have been discouraged by the British (White, 2008; Leonard, 2016). In post-colonial times, Pakistan adopted the British colonial policy in this region (Gregory, 2004; Mische, 2011). Pashtun indigenous resistance to state authority needs to be redefined. Pashtun resistance to state authority is based on the stereotypical biased colonial construction and Pakistan deliberately reinforces this for the geostrategic interest in this region.

Limitation of the Study

This research essay focuses on the Pashtun resistance to state authority. Historically in the colonial and post-colonial periods, different resistance movements started in this region against the oppressive policy. However, this essay is only confined to cultural aspects of Pashtun resistance. It focuses only that resistance is the part of Pashtun culture or not.

Conclusion

This essay focuses on the misinterpretation of Pashtun's resistance to state authority in colonial and post-colonial periods. It is revealed that the colonial and post-colonial forces define Pashtun resistance as a way that suited the political interest of the British colonizer and later in the post-colonial period to Pakistan. In colonial and also in post-colonial literature Pashtun resistance replicated and Pashtun resistance against the repressive policies of the British and Pakistan was as presented the normative part of their culture. The colonial forces imposed changes which were against their culture and norms as presented in glue theory. This cultural manipulation in the colonial era instigated their resistance against the British regime. Pakistan also manipulated and violently engineered Pashtun society. Pakistan oppressive policies face resistance in this region. The international community needs to explore their resistance in response to state policies.

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