

## War on Terrorism and its Impacts on the Socio-Political Structure of *Pakhtun* Society of Pakistan

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**Abstract:** Present study was conducted in *Bajaur* Agency in Pakistan in 2009. This research is an attempt to understand the early development of War on Terror with special reference to the 9/11 attack-which actually lead to such activities to demolish terrorist groups across world including Pakistan. In the second section, study aims to explore the *Pukhtun* code naming *Pukhtunwali* and its relation with the war on terror in the region. The third main focus of the research is to investigate that how this war on terror resulted in shift in the socio-political structure of the *Pukhtun* society. In the line of the *Pukhtunwali*, these custodians have accommodated the terrorists like *Taliban* but later on this accommodation resulted not only in the alteration of the social and political structure but also lost of prosperity and lives.

**Key words:** War on Terror • *Pakhtunwali* • *Bajaur* Agency • Tribal Areas • Pakistan

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### INTRODUCTION

The bizarre developments the world is witnessing today under the banner of war against terrorism, has been stimulated by the events 9/11, the day when hijacked airplanes crashed into the symbols of United States of America (USA) economic power and military might, world trade centre and Pentagon. On September 20, 2001, in a televised address to a joint session of Congress, president George Bush of America summed up this policy with the word, "every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." After these attacks, fight against terrorism became the priority of USA foreign policy, since then it has directed its energy and resources to combat terrorism. In this war, USA was looking for partners and Pakistan was left with little choice but to join the coalition keeping in view its own priorities and national interests. United State of America declared Osama Bin Laden and his alleged *Al-Qaeda* organization as mastermind of the 9/11 attacks and demanded from the then *Taliban* government to surrender Osama to the USA authorities and to dismantle the terrorist training facilities. On the refusal of *Taliban* government, USA decided to attack Afghanistan to demolish the terrorist infrastructure over there.

Due to these terrorist attacks on the USA, Pakistan was left with a stark choice; either to make common cause with Washington in its war against Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network based in Taliban controlled Afghanistan or persist its pro-Taliban Afghan Policy and consequently suffers international condemnation of guilt of association [1]. The global environment had been dramatically altered after the incident of 11 September 2001. USA reoriented her strategic engagement directions. With the latest changes and alignment, USA had to bank upon Pakistan to support her drive against terrorism. Pakistani took a prudent and a calculated decision to support USA led coalition against terrorism. On September 13, President Musharraf announced that Pakistan would lend its unstinted cooperation to the international coalition against terror. Later after deliberations, President informed Washington that his regime would open Pakistani airspace for the USA air and missiles attacks, share information and intelligence and offer logistics support to USA military forces including use of two Pakistani airfields for emergency and rescue operations. These decisions marked a paradigm shift in Islamabad's thinking towards the *Taliban*. *Taliban* had become a strategic liability rather than an asset.



### Research Questions:

- To understand the early development of the War against Terrorism and its links to Pakistani Society with special reference to the *Bajaur Agency*.
- To investigate the role of War on Terror and displacement of the people living in *Bajaur Agency*.
- To study that how *Pukhtunwali* had been exploited by national and international for their vested interests during war on terror.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Present research paper is based on the anthropological fieldwork conducted in *Bajaur Agency* in 2009. Following were the major techniques for the data collection:

- Participant Observation Method
- Focus Group Discussions; and
- In-depth Interviews.

Further, these techniques were executed through the major tools as required in each one of the above mentioned techniques. The study was executed through major three tiers. Firstly, the researchers visited the study area and found the key informants and started knowing the local culture and structure of the society. Secondly, three FGDs were conducted on the group of people ranging from 6 to 9. And lastly on the basis of the FGDs and key informant a interview guide was constructed for In-depth Interviews. These tiers completed alongside the participant observation which is one the major techniques for the anthropologist to study any culture.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Military Operation in *Bajaur Agency*:** In August 2008, Pakistan armed forces launched a massive operation against the militants of *Bajaur* to restore the writ of the government. Indiscriminate shelling, aerial bombing and artillery barrages were used to literally depopulate *Bajaur*. Due to indiscriminate shelling and targeting of militants in population areas, about 300,000 native people were forced to flee from their homes to safer areas [2]. The primary cause for displacement had been the conflict between Pakistan armed forces and militants backed by *Al-Qaeda* fugitives and Afghani *Taliban*. On one hand the operation disturbed the whole *Bajaur* region and on other hand it had affected the individual life, hundreds of thousands of families left their homes in search of safe place. These families were compelled to cover mountains terrain and forest on foot to reach *Mohmmad Agency*<sup>1</sup> to hire vehicle for safer areas of the country.

*War on terror has completely changed the socio-economic and political structure of the Tribal area. The militants and Al-Qaeda members had a strong influence in the area before the events of 9/11. According to the respondents, “the Mujahideen, who came for Afghan Jihad from all over the world against the Russian invasion, were treated as guests in Tribal areas. These Mujahideen were not only provided shelters but the people of tribal area established matrimonial relations with them thus paving a way to part of pan tribal mechanism.”* After the demise of USSR in Afghanistan, some of the *Mujahideen* returned to their home countries while many others were not allowed to come back to their homelands.

<sup>1</sup>Mohmmad agency is adjacent to Bajaur agency, which connect it to the settled area of Pakistan.

Such *Mujahideen* preferred to stay in tribal belt of Pakistan. The emergence of *Taliban* in Afghanistan gave an opportunity to these *Mujahideen* to join the *Taliban* movement once again.

People of tribal area were not only provided shelter to these members of *Al-Qaeda* and *Taliban* but they raised armed *lashkar*<sup>2</sup> against those who pose threat to their guests. It is mandatory on the tribal people to protect the honour of those people who came into their asylum. The *Pakhtunwali* basic commandments, hospitality and *Panah* (refuge) were exploited both by Pakistani government and the militants. The government wanted to protect its policy of strategic depth in Afghanistan through these militants and *Taliban*. In the initial days these people were treated with great respect and they remain neutral and do not interfere in the affairs of local people.

The Tehrik-e-Nefaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi<sup>3</sup> involvement in *Afghan Jihad* and the USA drone attack on Damadolla seminary in 2006 in Bajaur provided a strong culture base to militants to recruit young people into their ranks. After getting maximum strength, they started to impose their brand of Islam on the people [3]. The *Khans*<sup>4</sup> *Maliks*<sup>5</sup> and people who opposed militants were killed and executed.

**Pakhtunwali (Pakhtun Code of Conduct):** Here in this section, a relation between *Pukhtunwali* and war on terrorism is being examined. What role it (*Pukhtunwali*) had played in the present war and how it had been exploited by the Pakistani government, militants and international actors in the past and now in the present for their vested interest. The *Pakhtun* in the North Western Areas of Pakistan constitute the largest tribal unit in Pakistan. Although there are many clans, lineages and tribes within the *Pukhtun* community but all of these units are connected with one another by the same value system. The normative structure of *Pukhtun* society is shaped by a cluster of values known as *Pakhtunwali* that is the unwritten code of conduct for an individual in the *Pukhtun* society. *Pukhtun* ideal type social organization and behaviour revolve around the concepts of *Pakhtunwali*. Moreover these concepts are unwritten and precisely undefined. So it is the bases of the creation of

the sorts of social grouping and alliances, in individual as well as the social life of *Pakhtun* community [4]. Moreover, the statutory law in general provides a strong cultural impetus to *Pakhtunwali*.

**The Basic Feature of *Pakhtunwali*:** The pillars of *Pukhtunwali* are *Panah* (refuge), *Melmastia* (hospitality), *Badal* (Revenge) and equality, respect, loyalty, purdah, pursuit of romantic encounters, worship of Allah and unselfish love for friends [4]. *Melmastia*, *Panah* and *Badal* are seen essential to the *Pukhtun* way of life in all these tenets. A man who does not act upon these focal rules has, in local thought, no right to call himself a *Pukhtun*. These three tenets were exploited in *Afghan Jihad* against Russian invasion with the collaboration of Saudi Arabia, America and Pakistani military establishment in 1980s and now once again in war against terrorism in the wake of 9/11.

***Panah* (Asylum, Refuge):** The principal of refuge is an important pillar of *Pakhtunwali*, by which the *Pakhtun* usually defines himself. The idea of refuge is also linked to the guest-host relationship. The guest must not only be entertained, fed and housed, but also kept as safely as the host's strength will allow. This principle extend to any guest, even unknown to the host, it operates, regardless of the rank of the guest, his nationality, religion or personal characteristics. If the guest is insulted, injured, or killed, it is considered as a stain on the honour of the host and such act must be revenged on the perpetrator. This code of the *Pakhtunwali* accommodated the *Al-Qaeda* fugitives fled from Afghanistan in wake of America invasion on Afghanistan. *Bajaur* share a porous border with Afghanistan province *Kunar*, the *Al-Qaeda* and *Afghan* militants infiltrated into *Bajaur* without any difficulty. The people of *Bajaur* provided them refuge and shelter according to *Pakhtun* code of conduct. In this way the *Al-Qaeda* enter the tribal belt on the pretext of guests. These *al-Qaeda* members were not only provided shelter but they were treated as brothers. The local people have great reverence for these *Arabs*, *Tajik*, *Chechen*, *Afghans* militants, as they were treated as heroes of Islam who fight against the Russian aggression for a decade and now the new infidel forces like USA and NATO.

<sup>2</sup> Voluntary armed group to fight for the cause of tribal people and to enforce the decision of *Jirga*.

<sup>3</sup> Movement for the enforcement of Islamic system in 1990s founded and controlled by Sufi Muhammad, a *Pakhtun* religious leader and activist based in *Malakund* agency.

<sup>4</sup> *Khan* is the title used for those people in *Bajaur* agency whose families exercise great authority in political affairs and dispute resolutions since centuries.

<sup>5</sup> *Maliks* are government servants have the same role as *Khan* have but they are less prestigious as compare to *Khans*.

The local not only share their homes with these war veterans, but promised to protect them according to *Pukhtun* code of conduct. The people of *Bajaur* provided every kind of support to these *Mujahideen* in their fight against the occupied forces.

According to the perspective of the different scholars of the subject, the Pakistani military intelligence agencies following its policy of strategic department in Afghanistan treated these militants as the assets of Pakistani military establishment through which it will establish its influence in Afghanistan and will also fight its proxy war in occupied Kashmir. Pakistan wants to curtail the involvement and influence of India in Afghanistan [1] and these militants can hurt the interest of India in Afghanistan. It is not in the interest of Pakistan that American forces control Afghanistan in short span of time and dismantles *al-Qaeda* and *Taliban* network. Pakistan wants to prolong war on terror to preserve its strategic status quo in Afghanistan. Pakistan does not want to eradicate the infrastructure of militants in tribal area once for all.

Militants were allowed to build their infrastructure and sanctuaries in the tribal belt. The activities of the militants were ignored by the government and they were allowed deliberately to get maximum strength. After that the militants started interference in the affairs of the local people. They imposed their brand of Islam on the people. Those who opposed the militants were brutally killed. Till that time *Jirga* system got infiltrated with induction of wealthy people and they failed to dispensate justice to local people. This dissatisfaction paved way for militants to intervention in the local matter to decide their disputes. These militants charge no fees and ensure speedy justice to all people who come to them. Those traditional local leaders who opposed the militants were kidnapped and executed publicly. The government became hesitant in ensuring security and safety of these notables of the area, but they rather were allowed to be targeted by the members of intelligence agencies in disguise of militants. Thus the *Afghan Taliban* and militants who come to tribal area as guests, ended up ruling the area. They challenged and fabricated the customs, tradition, values, culture and political system of the area. Those pan-tribalism mechanisms which helped these people to enter the tribal belt were disrespected and disrupted. So it was the hospitality tradition among *Pakhtun* which provided shelter to these militants and latter these militants disrupted the whole tribal customs and traditions. The various culture activities such as *Attan*

(cultural dance), celebration of marriages were banned in the area. In short those cultural aspects which provided space to the militants were disrupted and disrespected at large altogether.

**Melmastia (Hospitality):** Hospitality is another outstanding characteristic of the *Pakhtun*. *Melmastia* is an obligation, which could not be avoided. In *Melmastia* the guests are served with food and provided with boarding and lodging if required or asked for. *Melmastia* is not only offered to guests who are relatives, friends and acquaintances of the host but also to strangers and those who ask for. Elphinstone<sup>6</sup> notes that “a man, who traveled over the whole country with out money, would never be in the want of meal. *Pukhtun* lavishly spend on their guest and feel proud when the guest appreciates such hospitality. They do not necessarily feed the guest for any social or political gain even the best guest is the stranger and proper etiquette for the host is not even to inquire from guest how long he will stay.” Ahmad [5] claims the hospitality is a way of maintaining *Pukhtun* identity. “Hospitality, whether individually or collectively expressed, is one of the major cognitive, tangible and coherent symbols to *Pakhtun*... it serves to maintain cultural identity and ethnic boundaries. Hospitality exists because it is a part of *Pukhtun* behaviour and it is in practice because it differentiates the *Pukhtun* from other ethnic groups. Professor Barth is of the view that *Melmastia* is a source of building political power, wherein through hospitality and gift giving the local *Khans* draw the support of people at the time of need. It is very difficult to agree with the professor Barth that hospitality and honour that *Pakhtuns* pride themselves are only for maximizing political power. If political power is the only reason for hospitality then this argument of Barth can not be sustained in explaining the striking hospitality of the ordinary *Pukhtun* villagers to any passing stranger or foreigner.”

Another cultural construction promulgated with *Melmastia* is protection of the guest. If the guest had enmity or he needs protection due to some other reason, his protection is regarded responsibility of the host till the time he remains guest with him or in the limits of his house or in his territorial limits. The protection of a guest is considered obligatory to such an extent by the *Pakhtuns* that a British administrator, who had no good opinion about the *Pakhtuns*, had stated in his report that “for gold, they will do almost anything except betray a guest [6].”

<sup>6</sup> The first European visitor to write about *Pakhtuns*.

**Badal (Revenge):** *Badal* is one of the greatest, if not the greatest of all, commandments of *Pukhtunwali*. Although *Badal* means revenge, In *Pukhtu*, *Badal* is regarded the foremost obligation as well as liability in all cases of its meaning and a person who does not care for it or ignores it, is not considered a true *Pukhtun*. In case of revenge, whether of murder, beating, injury and damage to honour, *Badal* is considered liable and is taken without consideration for its consequences and costs. *Badal* is to be taken not only by the person who had received damages etc., in any shape, but also by other members of his family or even sub-tribe or tribe. Thus it depends upon the nature of the act committed and also on that of the aggrieved person or family or tribe, how to react and take revenge or to accept compensation or even to forgive. However, in cases of murder generally that person is murdered in *Badal* who is considered as the most influential and worthy in the family of the offender, called *da sar saray* (the leading figure), so as to give greater loss to the offender's family. There is no limit of time or place for *Badal*. Hence a famous *Pukhtu* saying is that '*Pukhtun cheh sal kaalah pas badal wakhli no hum taadi kawi*'. Although *Badal* in case of revenge had its negative effect and impact because it causes unending bloodshed, which might even continue for centuries, in which the innocent also loss lives and suffer in many ways, it no doubt has positive effects and impacts, which could not be under estimated. Having deterrent value *Badal* helps in maintaining and ensuring peace, order and respect of human life and honour in absence of organized government and governmental machinery, law enforcing agencies and courts. Such a repressive law compels a person to think, time and again, over the would-be consequences, not only for himself but also for his other family members, his tribe or even his offspring after him, before committing a murder, fighting or quarrelling with someone, insulting someone and so forth [7].

As *Badal* is main tenet in *Pukhtun* code of conduct and powerful institution of *Jirga* which make tribal area one of the most peaceful areas of the country, thus paving a way for collective conscience in a mechanical society. The tribal take revenge of what atrocities committed against them by the fellow tribes men or outsider. *Pukhtun* code of conduct is incomplete with out the basic tenet of *Badal*. *Pukhtun* code of conduct is ingrained in the lives of tribal people in such a way that they can not imagine living with out it, a phenomenon termed as mechanical solidarity. The local people are of

the view that they will not forget the atrocities committed against them either by militants or by the armed forces. They knew their enemies if they are in the rank of militants or in government. They are of the view that the militants will not remain powerful for ever, one day the drama of war on terror will come into an end and then they will take revenge of all cruelties committed against them. Their lives have been devastated in the name of war on terror. Today locals are anticipating civil war after war on terror come into an end.

**Political Structure of Tribal Area (Bajaur):** Politics plays a pivotal role in determining the social stratification in any society as it provides roots for the establishment of hierarchal order. The political system of *Pukhtun* operates on an egalitarian basis wherein the possession of socio-economic power and resources is considered less worthy as compared to an individual's adherence to *Pukhtunwali*. Abiding by the values of *Pukhtunwali* and close association with it is considered important while rating and scaling individual's social status. The value system of *Pukhtuns* and strong adherence to it provide space for the existence of a non-stratified and egalitarian social structure [8]. Hence every individual carries a self image; anybody will accept the domination of any sort by any one. Equality means that each man has an equal chance to subdue his fellows and each man struggles to conquer and rise in shallow hierarchies which the system allows [9].

As *Pakhtun* are egalitarian with respect to their social system, so there exist a perception and meaning of domination and leadership in their community which is different from that found among the non-*Pakhtuns*. The crucial difference between tribal society and that of feudal one was that in the former, the tribal segments constitute the basis for political mobilization, whereas in the latter the estates and their dependents were the key units in politics. *Pukhtunwali* promotes the independent individual who is free of any sort of domination and considers it a curse. The *Pakhtuns* detest the imposition of any outsider's and insider's domination. As political leadership is inevitable for all types' human groups, it also exists within *Pukhtuns*, but *Pukhtun* perception about leadership does not comprise domination. The leaders play the role of facilitator and arbitrator during the time of any dispute in rival groups. Also leaders usually are those people who follow the major socially desirable values of *Pukhtunwali* like hospitality and honour.

<sup>7</sup> When the *Pukhtun* takes revenge after a hundred years and then too he makes a hurry.

The *Pakhtun* society is the maintenance of all means and at all levels of its code of life, the *Pukhtunwali*; the value orientations on which it (the *Pukhtun* code) is based emphasize male autonomy and agility, self-expression and aggressiveness is a syndrome which might be summarized under the concept of honour (*Izzat*). The code sets up ideal standards of behaviour and acts as a constant yardstick to measure normative or deviant behavior [9].

*Pakhtun* society is an acephalous society and is not ruled by any outer government structure. Political structure of *Pakhtun* of tribal area (*Bajaur*) is traditionally based on kinship, tribal system and their informal leadership. Each *Qam* (clan) is represented in assembly of notable elders called *Jirga* which is responsible for resolving disputes and establishing peace in the area. The members of *Jirga* are local *Masharan* (notable leaders) from each tribe and are known for the wisdom, experience, sincerity, learning and ability to understand problems and finding best and most acceptable solutions. Although they have little political authority but their power of decision making is tremendous. *Masharan* are mostly pious people hailing from noble prestigious families. *Jirga* can be convened in any personal or tribal matter. The conflict mechanism resolution and speedy justice is the significant facet of *Jirga*. The tradition of *Jirga* is as old as the existence of *Pukhtun*. As the *Pakhtuns* always seek guidance and advice from the more experienced, wise and reliable leaders in every major or minor matters. Whatever decision made by *Jirga Masharan* is acceptable to every one. The Islamic law and *Pukhtunwali* is main guiding principle while taking any decision.

Inhabitants of tribal area strictly follow system of *Jirga*, which is enforced since centuries. Due to the strict enforcement of *Jirga* decisions, the crime rate was near to zero and the area was the most peaceful area of Pakistan before the arrival of militants from Afghanistan in the wake of American's war on terror. People of Tribal are very generous and famous for their hospitality and refuge. They provide shelter to all who seek even at the expense of their lives and properties. It is one of the important aspects of *Pukhtun* code of conduct to provide shelter even to the enemy if he or she request for it. When the *Al-Qaeda* fugitives sought shelter in the tribal belt they were not only provided shelter but were also treated as guests. The militants came to tribal belt in the guise of guests and captured the helm of power through various tactics.

There are many reasons of the failure of *Jirga*. The failure was explained differently by different people and strata. The explanation included the views of local leaders, new emerging leaders and ordinary people to present the holistic picture. Many traditional *Khans* were of the view that firstly government allowed corrupt people to become *Maliks*. Such *Maliks* were not properly trained for conflict resolution mechanism rather they were given the status of *Malikship* on the basis of wealth. Their families were not as prestigious and famous for justice as the traditional *Khans* families were who had sacrificed everything to upheld truthfulness, honesty and sagacity of their elders. In this way such *Maliks* used to take money from the people and give decision in their favour. As every *Jirga* dispute is decided on the bases of majority voting and consensus. Such corrupt *Maliks* soon get majority in the assembly of elders. In this way *Jirga* which was a tool for justice become a tool of injustice in the hands of these corrupt *Maliks* who seek money for their vote from the people, so *Jirga* lost its sanctity in the eyes of masses of tribal area, a connotation termed as deinstitutionalization.

The common view of the people about the weakness of *Jirga* system was the corrupt practices of the members. The *Maliks* and *Khans* received huge share of money for any dispute resolution from both aggrieved party and perpetrator. The both parties have to serve all the members with lavish meal which cost thousands of rupees, such expenses were beyond the bearing capacity of the ordinary people. The militants took very best of opportunity and utilized the weaknesses of *Jirga* system in their favour. They started to convene *Jirga* to solve the dispute of the people. They did not charge any money from the people, along with that no body could deter to challenge the decision of militants *Jirga*. In this way the people started to come to these militants for the speedy and free justice resulting in the never ending influence of the militants in the tribal belt.

There is another point of view of the people of *Bajaur* that they had defeated the para-military forces in 1990s under the banner of the *Tehrik-e-Nefaz-e-Sharaiti-Mohammadi*. The government wanted to take revenge from the people of *Bajaur*. War on terror provided an opportunity to the government to take revenge from the people of that defeat. The militants were allowed to target and kill the community leaders. Majority of the tribal leaders were killed and this deficit was created deliberately and new leaders intentionally created of militants. The strength of the people lies in shrewdness of their

leaders, where such leaders take wise decision to avert any untoward situation. People were rendered without leaders; they were terrified by the brutal killing of their leaders by the militants. In this way they were unable to take collective action against the militants.

The educated class of the region has their own perspective on it. In their view it is not the weakness of the Jirga that militant's captured power in tribal belt. The government wanted to maintain its strategic depth policy there in Afghanistan. For this purpose the *Al-Qaeda* fugitives and Afghan Taliban were allowed to enter into tribal belt. Local people were recruited when *Damdolla* seminary attack occurred in which innocent children were killed. Many emotional young people join the ranks of militants to take revenge of this attack. Those people who opposed the militants were executed and killed. According to this class this military operation is eyewash for the world community. Despite of so much causality of the militants, their leadership is still intact and controlling the major chunk of *Bajaur*, questions the sincerity of the government. The government miserably failed to establish its writ in *Bajaur*. In nutshell we can conclude that the tribal socio-political structure has been disrupted in such a way that the old institutions are unable to play any role in the present circumstances. With the passage of time new institutions will emerge to fill the present vacuum created by the insurgency.

### CONCLUSION

What the *Pakhtun* did under the umbrella of *Pakhtunwali* in tribal area by providing shelter to militants was quite normal and even appreciable in that society. It is obligatory on every *Pakhtun* to provide asylum all

those people who seek it. If you are not providing asylum so you are acting against the approved code of behaviour. In such a way your behaviour will be abnormal and against the ethics of *Pakhtun*. To provide asylum to Arab and Afghan militants a culturally accepted behaviour but for western people it was a deviant act by providing asylum to terrorists.

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