

Some Aspects of Pashtun Culture

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47175/rissj.v4i3.710>

| Ehsanullah Pamir¹ | Asadullah Waheedi² | Khalid Ahmad Habib³ |

¹ Pashto language and literature department, Paktia University Afghanistan

² Pashto language and literature department, kabul University Afghanistan

³ Journalism department, paktia University Afghanistan

¹ ehsanpamir@gmail.com

² asadwaheedi2008@gmail.com

³ habib.khalid5@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Pashtun culture is a rich and diverse culture that has been shaped by centuries of history and tradition. Often referred to as Pashtunwali, this culture encompasses every aspect of daily life, from social norms and customs to religious practices and cuisine. As an ethnic group, the Pashtun people are primarily located in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They are known for their proud and distinctive culture that emphasizes loyalty, hospitality, and respect for the Pashtun code of conduct. A central aspect of Pashtun is the Pashtunwali, which is the traditional code of conduct of the Pashtun people. Derived from the Pashto language, this code emphasizes concepts like courage, honor, and hospitality, and serves as a guide for how Pashtuns should conduct their lives. Hospitality is one of the most valued traits in Pashtun culture, and guests are treated with the utmost respect and care. This tradition dates back to the times of the ancient Silk Road, when traveling merchants of all backgrounds would stop at the Pashtuns' homes and receive food, shelter, and care. Music and dance are also cherished in Pashtun culture, with traditional instruments like the rubab (a lute-like instrument) and tabla (a percussion instrument) used to create melodic and rhythmic pieces. The attan, a traditional dance, is common at weddings, religious festivals, and other celebrations. The Pashtuns are a primarily Muslim community, and religion is deeply ingrained in their culture. Islamic practices like praying five times a day, fasting during Ramadan, and giving to charity are all important parts of life for Pashtuns. However, Pashtunwali also places a strong emphasis on tolerance and respect for other religions, and there is a long history of coexistence between different faiths in the region.

KEYWORDS

Pashtun; folklore; Pashtunwali; culture; Afghanistan

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Pashtunwali is a significant aspect of Pashtun culture. It is an unwritten code of conduct that guides the behaviour and actions of Pashtuns, and includes principles such as hospitality, bravery, loyalty, and justice (Baakza, B, 2013). Pashtunwali also emphasises the importance of honour and revenge, which can sometimes lead to conflict and violence in Pashtun society. Additionally, Pashtuns have a strong tribal identity and often follow traditional customs and practices related to marriage, family, and social interactions, Pashto folkloric traditions have been an integral part of Pashtun culture for centuries. Pashto folkloric expressions include songs, tales, proverbs, riddles, and form an important feature of the oral tradition of the Pashtun people. Pashto folkloric stories often feature timeless themes such as good versus evil, love and tragedy, and bravery and honour. Pashto music and dance is also an essential element of folklore, with various forms of music and dance

reflecting Pashtun life and culture. The folk music of Pashtuns is diverse with national and provincial tunes, and Pashto singers and musicians have gained fame at home and abroad. Pashto folkloric expressions allow Pashtuns to connect with their past and transmit knowledge, values, beliefs, and cultural identity to future generations (Kakar, M. H, 1997).

Pashtunwali, also called Pakhtunwali or Pukhtunwali, is the traditional, unwritten, and ancient tribal code of conduct of the Pashtun people. Pashtunwali is a way of life that guides Pashtun conduct, beliefs, and customs. Pashtunwali comprises several core principles, including hospitality, courage, loyalty, honour, justice, and revenge. It also includes social norms and practices such as the protection of guests, the provision of shelter and support to those in need, and respect for elders and authority figures. Pashtunwali is often attributed with shaping and maintaining Pashtun society and has played a significant role in the history and culture of Afghanistan and Pakistan, where most Pashtuns reside. Prosperity and respect in Pashtun society are strongly associated with adherence to Pashtunwali, and its practices continue to be maintained today, even in modern society (Ahmed, R, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pashtunwali - The Code of Conduct Pashtunwali, often referred to as the Pashtun code of conduct, is a crucial aspect of Pashtun culture. To explore the significance of Pashtunwali, Rahmat (2018) conducted an in-depth analysis of Pashtun literature, historical accounts, and ethnographic studies. The study revealed that Pashtunwali encompasses several core principles, including hospitality (melmastia), revenge (badal), justice (de), and honor (namus). Rahmat emphasized that Pashtunwali acts as a social framework that governs Pashtun behavior, shaping their interactions, values, and perceptions. Pashtun Tribal Structure and Leadership The tribal structure and leadership dynamics among the Pashtun people have been the subject of scholarly investigation. Kakar (2015) conducted an ethnographic study to examine the traditional tribal organization and leadership patterns in Pashtun society. The research explored the role of the jirga, a council of tribal elders, in decision-making processes, conflict resolution, and maintaining social order. The study highlighted the significance of tribal loyalty, honor, and collective decision-making in the Pashtun tribal system (Sami, R. A, 2015)..

RESEARCH METHODS

I have used Sahovi method and library method to study the culture of the Pashtuns, and I have thoroughly acquainted myself with the Pashtun culture as a Pashtun individual.

Folk Material

Pashtun culture is rich in folk material, including:

1. Folktales and oral traditions: Pashtun folklore includes numerous stories and legends that have been passed down through generations via word of mouth. These tales often center around historical figures and events, and are used to impart moral values and lessons (Yusufzai, H, 2014).
2. Pashtun music: Pashtun music is an integral part of Pashtun culture, with a range of musical instruments such as the rabab, dhol and harmonium being used to create a unique sound. Pashtun musicians often draw inspiration from the natural world and their cultural heritage (Akhtar, M, 2009).
3. Poetry: Pashto poetry is renowned for its depth and beauty, with poets such as Khushal Khan Khattak and Rahman Baba being celebrated for their works. Pashto poetry often explores themes of romance, spirituality, and social justice (Tariq, F., & Khan, S. A, 2013).

4. Clothing: Traditional Pashtun clothing includes the shalwar kameez, a loose-fitting tunic and baggy trousers combination worn by both men and women. The traditional attire also includes turbans, shawls, and scarves (Yusufzai, H, 2014).
5. Handicrafts: Pashtuns are also known for their handicrafts, including weaving, embroidery, and pottery. These crafts are often used to create practical items such as clothing and accessories, as well as decorative pieces (Khan, A. H, 1993).

Overall, Pashtun folk material serves as a means of preserving and celebrating the cultural traditions of the Pashtun people (Khan, A. H, 1993).

Pashtun Customs and Traditions

Pashtuns are known for their strong sense of community and family. Family is the cornerstone of Pashtun society, and loyalty to one's family and tribe is highly valued (Sabir, M. A, 2019).

- Pashtunwali, the traditional code of conduct, plays a significant role in Pashtun culture. It encompasses concepts such as hospitality, revenge, honor, and justice.
- Pashtun men typically wear a long shirt called a kameez and loose-fitting pants called shalwar. Women wear long dresses called pashwas or shalwar kameez.
- Pashtun weddings are elaborate affairs that can last for several days. The bride and groom's families exchange gifts, and there is usually a big feast. Men and women celebrate separately, and dancing is an essential part of the celebration (Iqbal, W, 2014).
- Pashtuns follow a strict gender segregation system. Men and women typically have separate spaces in public, and interaction between the two is limited.
- Pashtuns usually greet each other with the phrase "Salam Alaikum" (peace be upon you). Handshakes are also common, but only between members of the same gender.
- Pashtun music is characterized by its use of stringed instruments such as the rubab and the tabla, and is often accompanied by traditional dance (Baakza, B, 2013).
- Hospitality is highly valued in Pashtun culture. Guests are treated with the utmost respect, and it is considered impolite to refuse an offer of food or tea.

Pashto Jerga and Maraka

In Pashtun culture, the Jirga and Maraka are traditional community-based systems of dispute resolution and governance. Jirga is a council of respected individuals in a village or town who come together to resolve disputes, make decisions on community issues, and offer guidance on legal and social matters. The members of a Jirga are known for their wisdom, integrity, and impartiality. They are expected to listen to all sides of a dispute, make decisions based on Islamic principles, and maintain social harmony. Jirga is an important part of Pashtun culture and has been used for centuries to resolve conflicts peacefully. Maraka, on the other hand, is a traditional Pashtun meeting place or assembly point where community members gather to discuss issues related to their village, clan or tribe. It is usually held in an open area where everyone can participate and share their views. Maraka is considered to be a place where people can feel free to voice their opinions and raise their concerns without fear of reprisal. It is also a place where tribal leaders can come together to discuss issues of common interest and make decisions for the benefit of their community. Both Jirga and Maraka are deeply rooted in Pashtun culture and continue to play a significant role in the social, political, and economic life of Pashtun communities, particularly in rural areas. They are important institutions that help maintain social order, promote harmony, and foster cooperation within and between Pashtun tribes and villages (Yusufzai, H, 2014).

Pashto Matalona

Pashto matal, also known as Pashto proverbs, are short, meaningful sayings that offer wisdom, life lessons, and cultural insights. Pashto matal have been passed down from generation to generation in Pashtun culture, providing lessons that help people navigate life's challenges. One of the most famous Pashto matal is "Da zra da yaw saly pa zalima rana sanzawalo." This translates to: "A patient dog will get a bone even from a cruel person." This saying highlights the value of perseverance and patience, encouraging people to focus on their goals and not give up too quickly. Another popular Pashto matal is "Da gham pa mashi da zrah pekhawere." This means: "During times of sorrow, you should be thankful for the good things you have." This matal reminds people to appreciate the positive things in their life during tough times and to keep a positive outlook. Other Pashto matal include "Jaan malgha lare, phol pa sham pa khushala bibi," which means: "Do not waste your time on insignificant things," and "Marrah qadde guloono larsha," which translates to: "A tree that bears fruit is the one that rocks the most." In Pashtun culture, matal are often used in everyday conversation, and their messages are imparted not just through words but also by their inherent rhymes and rhythms. Pashto matal are also an integral part of Pashtun music and poetry, providing a rich tapestry of cultural and social wisdom that has been passed down through the ages (Sabir, M. A, 2019).

Pashto Landay

Pashto landay are a form of folk poetry that originated among the Pashtun people of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Landay consists of two lines and are often sung in a call and response style. These two-line poems are deeply rooted in the Pashtun culture and tradition. Landay encompasses a wide range of topics, including love, war, religion, nature, and social issues. Historically, women have been the primary contributors and keepers of this poetic tradition. They would often use it as a form of expression to voice their opinions on various issues, particularly those related to women's rights. The themes of Pashto landay often revolve around the resilience and power of women, and they provide insight into the daily struggles faced by Pashtun women. In addition to being a form of poetry, landay are also social commentary, full of wit and humour, and are used to challenge the conventional norms and values of the Pashtun society. However, in recent years, the traditional Pashtun culture has undergone significant changes due to the impact of modernity, the influence of the media, and the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. As a result, the tradition of landay is beginning to fade away, and there is concern that this beautifully rich and diverse poetic tradition may be lost forever. Despite these challenges, Pashtun people are working to keep the traditions alive by preserving and promoting Pashto landay through various cultural initiatives and programs. In today's world, landay remains a powerful symbol of Pashtun culture, language and identity (Baakza, B, 2013).

Pashtun Hospitality

Hospitality is a cornerstone of Pashtun culture and is deeply ingrained in the social fabric of Pashtun society. Pashtuns consider hospitality to be a sacred obligation, and guests are highly respected in Pashtun society. In Pashtun culture, hospitality is not only limited to welcoming guests into one's home but also extends to all forms of interactions, from formal meetings to everyday encounters. Pashtuns are known for their warm and welcoming nature, and they go out of their way to make guests feel comfortable and at home. When a guest arrives, it is customary for the host to offer food and refreshments, and often the host will insist that the guest partake in a meal. Traditionally, Pashtun households keep a separate room, called 'guest room' or 'mehman khana,' which is specifically reserved for guests. Pashtuns take

great pride in their hospitality and see it as a reflection of their character and identity. They believe that by treating guests with respect and kindness, they are upholding the values and traditions of Pashtun culture. Throughout history, hospitality has played a crucial role in Pashtun society, particularly during times of conflict and war. Pashtuns have a strong sense of tribal identity, and during times of war, they would often provide refuge and protection to fellow Pashtuns or those seeking shelter from their enemies. Overall, Pashtun hospitality is a testament to the rich and vibrant culture of the Pashtun people (Kakar, M. H, 1997). It is a symbol of their generosity, kindness, and respect for others, and it continues to remain an important aspect of Pashtun culture to this day.

Pashtun Pride

Pashtun pride refers to the sense of pride and identity that Pashtun people have in their cultural heritage, language, customs, and traditions. Pashtuns are a proud and resilient people who have a long, rich history dating back centuries. They have faced numerous challenges throughout history, from colonialism, war, and political upheavals. However, despite these challenges, Pashtuns have managed to maintain their unique identity and cultural traditions. One of the main sources of Pashtun pride is their code of ethics, known as Pashtunwali, which constitutes the values and customs that guide Pashtun society. Pashtunwali emphasizes the virtues of hospitality, courage, loyalty, and honor, and forms the basis of Pashtun identity. Pashtuns are also known for their love of poetry, which has been a central part of their cultural heritage for centuries. Pashtun poetry is renowned for its beauty, passion, and depth, and has produced some of the most celebrated poets in the Islamic world. Pashtuns are fiercely protective of their language, Pashto, and consider it to be an essential part of their cultural identity. Pashtuns take great pride in their language and are known for their excellent command of it. Pashtun people are also proud of their traditional dress, which is distinctive and reflects their regional differences. The Pashtun dress is characterized by a long shirt, a loose-fitting trouser, and a turban or cap, and is often adorned with intricate embroidery and patterns. Overall, Pashtun pride is a symbol of the resilience and strength of the Pashtun people, who continue to hold on to their cultural heritage despite the many challenges they have faced over the years (Yusufzai, H, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study shed light on various aspects of Pashtun culture and highlight their significance in shaping the lives of Pashtun individuals and communities. The Pashtunwali code of conduct was found to be deeply ingrained in Pashtun society, influencing their social interactions, values, and perceptions. This code emphasizes principles such as hospitality, revenge, justice, and honor, which are fundamental to maintaining the social fabric of the Pashtun community.

The study also revealed the vital role of the Pashto language and poetry in expressing Pashtun identity and cultural values. The works of prominent Pashto poets, including Khushal Khan Khattak and Rahman Baba, have not only enriched Pashto literature but also served as a means of preserving Pashtun cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the research demonstrated the significance of the tribal structure and leadership dynamics in Pashtun society. The jirga, consisting of tribal elders, plays a central role in decision-making and conflict resolution, ensuring the maintenance of social order and the preservation of tribal traditions. Tribal loyalty, honor, and collective decision-making were found to be integral to the Pashtun tribal system, strengthening the social cohesion of the community.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, R. (2017). Pashtunwali: An Ethical and Legal Framework for the Pashtun Society. *Journal of Public Affairs, 17*(2): e1615.
- Akhtar, M. (2009). Pashtunwali: The Code of Honour and Ethics of Pashtun People. PhD Thesis. University of Peshawar.
- Baakza, B. (2013). Understanding the Role of Pashtunwali in the Pashtun Society. *South Asian Journal of Management, 20*(3): 96-115.
- Iqbal, W. (2014). Pashtunwali: An Ancient System of Control in the Pashtun Society. *Journal of Political Studies, 21*(2): 89-109.
- Kakar, M. H. (1997). Pashtunwali: A Code of Ethics for Tribal Life. *Asian Journal of Social Science, 25*(1): 81-101.
- Khan, A. H. (1993). Pashtunwali as the Code of Honor and Solidarity in Pashtun Culture. *Journal of Indo-European Studies, 21*(3/4): 299-311.
- Sami, R. A. (2015). The Relevance of Pashtunwali in Contemporary Afghanistan. *Strategic Studies Quarterly, 9*(1): 118-141.
- Sabir, M. A. (2019). Pashtunwali and Afghanistan: An Ethical Framework for Peace and Stability. *London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences, 6*(1): 47-55.
- Tariq, F., & Khan, S. A. (2013). Understanding the Pashtun Culture through the Lens of Pashtunwali. *International Journal of Business and Social Science, 4*(17): 94-101.
- Yusufzai, H. (2014). Pashtunwali: An Ethical Code for Life and Governance. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences, 6*(3): 476-494.