

**GLIMPSES OF *PASHTUNWALI* IN HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER*, A  
*THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS*, HASHIMI'S *A HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS*  
AND ACKERMAN'S *GREEN ON BLUE***

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in English

University of Regina

By

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Regina, Saskatchewan

August 2018

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**UNIVERSITY OF REGINA**  
**FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH**  
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Rashid Jahan , candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in English, has presented a thesis titled, ***Glimpses of Pashtunwali in Hosseini's The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns, Hashimi's A House Without Windows and Ackerman's Green on Blue***, in an oral examination held on August 8, 2018. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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## Abstract

Writers and scholars have used a variety of approaches to understand novels written in English about Afghanistan. One approach that most of the writers have used is the sociocultural approach. My approach is quite similar to other researchers but my framework is different. My work focuses on an unwritten code of life, *Pashtunwali*, which the Pashtuns of Afghanistan have been practicing for centuries. This code strictly guides the lives of Pashtun people living in Afghanistan and North-West Pakistan. By using the framework of *Pashtunwali*, this thesis provides a new perspective and understanding of Hosseini, Hashimi, and Ackerman's novels. It not only provides a different perspective, but also helps readers to understand these texts in the Afghani cultural context. Some of the key topics that this thesis discusses using the framework of *Pashtunwali* are honor, revenge, blood feuds, hospitality, role of religion and culture, marginalization of Afghan women, and the system of justice. Thus, the goal of this thesis is to provide a new dimension for readers who are unaware of the cultural codes that people practice in Afghanistan and to highlight the social issues and problems that Afghan people face. Not only does it highlight those social concerns, but it also traces their root causes.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my primary supervisor Dr. Dorothy Lane for her support and guidance throughout this thesis. I also thank Dr. Susan Johnston for her valuable suggestions and comments. She was kind to extend her support throughout the course and research work. The completion of this project would not have been possible without her help. Additionally, I thank Dr. Marcel DeCoste for agreeing to be on my committee and for providing feedback. Lastly, I would thank my friend Harrison Otis, who gave his valuable time and suggestions on almost all my assignments that I wrote for my MA coursework.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to a beautiful and gentle soul, my mother Rakshanda Jahan, and my dear father Jehan Daraz Khan, who sacrificed their own comforts and supported me financially and emotionally throughout my academic career. I will always be indebted to the prayers of my mother and the guidance, encouragement, and motivation of my father. Last but not least, I am very thankful to them for giving me freedom and choice in my academic life, and for trusting and allowing me to do the things that I really wanted in my life.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

This thesis emphasizes Afghanistan's socio-cultural context—particularly the unwritten code of *Pashtunwali* that governs the Pashtuns of Afghanistan in novels written in English about Afghanistan. The focus of this study is to understand *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini, *A House without Windows* by Nadia Hashimi, and *Green on Blue* by Elliot Ackerman through the framework of *Pashtunwali*. The reason for choosing these texts is the wide range of socio-cultural issues which these texts cover and which have haunted Afghanistan for decades. Thus, by approaching these issues through the framework of *Pashtunwali*, I aim to understand these novels and the social issues which these novels portray. It is not only an attempt to understand these novels through *Pashtunwali* but also to provide a different approach to studying these texts, which will then reveal some important aspects of these texts, such as the importance of honor, the position of women in Afghan society, and the complex nature of revenge.

Other scholars have done important work on my primary texts as well: For example, David Jefferess has examined *The Kite Runner* from the perspective of a global ethical system. He writes:

I do not provide a critical reading of the novel as a window into Afghan culture or in relation to the long tradition of western representations of Afghanistan.

Instead, I am interested in how the text's apparent humanizing function reflects current theories of cosmopolitan ethics. (3)

This element of the “humanizing function” clearly distinguishes Jefferess’s approach from my emphasis on the specific ethnocultural lens of *Pashtunwali*. Similarly, Mir Hikamtullah Sadat, whose perspective is closer to mine, has worked extensively on Afghan diasporic writers; he notes: “through fiction, he [Khaled Hosseini] exposes the socio-political and socio-cultural infrastructure, which has beleaguered nation-state development and national identity formation in Afghanistan” (171). These two scholars thus give us an account of what Hosseini is trying to accomplish through *The Kite Runner*. For Jefferess, *The Kite Runner* is a morality tale which focuses on the theme of personal redemption, and the novel reflects “theories of cosmopolitan ethics” (390).<sup>1</sup> While I do not disagree with Jefferess’s ideas, I believe that “novel’s representation of ethics—as individual and personal” cannot be understood without bringing into consideration the cultural norms of *Pashtunwali* within Afghanistan. *Pashtunwali* and personal ethics are at war with each other, and we see this especially in the character of Amir. Although he reconciles with *Pashtunwali*’s code, he does not do so in a way Baba wants. And when we bring these cultural norms into discussion, then, the ethics in the novel which Jefferess describes as universal become more specific, and the war between personal ethics and *Pashtunwali* makes more sense to the reader.

Similarly, Mir Hikamtullah Sadat’s claim that the novel is a good way of understanding Afghanistan’s “socio-cultural infrastructure” (171) is true, but again, I would say that this infrastructure cannot be understood without understanding the rules

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<sup>1</sup> “Cosmopolitan ethics is based on the principle that all human beings belong to a single community. Cosmopolitan ethics envisage a society where inclusive morality, shared economic interest and social relationship are used to encompass cultural differences” (Musofer).

specifically, of *Pashtunwali* or studying the novel through the framework of *Pashtunwali* and Sadat does not do this.

Another scholar, Coeli Fitzpatrick, has criticized Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* because it presents "the Other in a particular and problematic way" (244). He further suggests that Hosseini's book misrepresents Muslims to satisfy his Western readership. He adds, "it serves to limit what kind of understanding Western readers have of the region; it promotes a simplistic and often racist depiction of Muslims, but primarily New Orientalist discourse by limiting how the West comes to 'know' and understand the Orient" (244). For him, *The Kite Runner* "reinforces mainstream media representations" (244). According to Fitzpatrick, New Orientalism is the propagation of images of Muslim men as the cruel oppressors of women and of the Orient, more generally, as irrational (244). This idea of New Orientalism comes from Edward Said's idea of the West versus East, where the former defines the latter in such a way as to place the West in a superior position, both morally and intellectually. Further, Western writers construct the "mystic" (mysterious, religiously rooted) East as a foil (Said 15). I do not agree with Fitzpatrick's claim of the problematic representation of the Other or misrepresentations of Muslims in Hosseini. Fitzpatrick himself is unaware of the social rules of engagement in Afghanistan, and he does not consider these social norms while discussing the representation of the Other. Similarly, I disagree with his claim that Hosseini misrepresents Muslims, because I think what Hosseini is doing in his novel is bringing into the debate the idea of "good" Muslim versus "bad" Muslim, exploring what he sees as a contradiction between Afghan social norms (*Pashtunwali*) and the religion of Islam. Fitzpatrick has limited understanding of the social norms of Afghanistan and because of

that, some of his critique, in my opinion, is not just. But, for the sake of argument, even if his critique of Hosseini's novels is valid, he still does not do them justice when he discusses them without bringing in the social norms or rules of Afghanistan, because the majority of the population of Afghanistan follows these social rules and norms because of the absence of state authority, especially in rural Afghanistan.

Another text by Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which focuses on women's experience, has been researched from a variety of viewpoints. Azam Kazemiyan has concentrated on the representation of Afghan women in this novel. He concludes that "Afghan women in the novel correspond with the images of Afghan women in the Western media," where according to him, they are shown to be "passive victims of war and violence, to be liberated only by Western military intervention" (4). This is the most common type of critique directed at Hosseini's work by scholars. However, I disagree with this critique, because Hosseini's female characters represent more than just victimization. Mariam and Laila represent resilience and the power to stand up to the cultural codes that oppress them.

Some other scholars have focused on the importance of Hosseini's texts for North American classrooms. Mary F. Agnello, Reese H. Todd, Bolanle Olaniran, and Thomas A. Lucey argue that *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are both important texts to teach North American students about multiculturalism. Their paper, "Afghanistan and Multiculturalism in Khaled Hosseini's Novels: A Study of Place and Diversity," explains: "Hosseini's novels as place-based literature illustrating the homeland of Afghanistan is now more accessible than ever before to international and US classrooms" (96). Although I agree that Hosseini's works do provide readers with

some insight into Afghan culture and traditions, his novels provide the reader with more in depth understanding of these traditions when looked at through the lens of *Pashtunwali*. His novels explain the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of Afghan culture and traditions. This lens also helps us in understanding the argument made by a few scholars that these novels reinforce stereotypes. When the novels are studied through the framework of *Pashtunwali*, readers are empowered for themselves to decide whether Hosseini’s work reinforces stereotypes or whether these stereotypes have actual roots in these cultural norms. This helps the reader understand the stereotypes in the cultural context. Gilang Adi Parsasti and Fransisca Ika Destia Putranti have both tried to understand *The Kite Runner* through *Pashtunwali*’s perspective; however, their focus is mainly on pedagogy—using *The Kite Runner* in high school classes to teach students about Afghan culture. Parsasti uses the character of Amir to explain *Pashtunwali*. Putranti, on the other hand, takes a general approach and involves other characters too, to educate her readers. My own study, however, is more complex than what Parsasti and Putranti have done. My study not only focuses on teaching *Pashtunwali* through the novels but focuses on the complexities of this code. For example, it talks about *Pashtunwali*’s role in ostracizing women; it talks about its conflicts with Islam. It also talks about blood feuds and their complex nature. Moreover, it talks about the justice system (*Jirga*) and its role in Pashtun society. So, my work goes beyond simply understanding these novels as if they were textbooks on *Pashtunwali*.

Furthermore, few scholars have looked at the struggles and resilience of Afghan women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. They have focused on how cultural and political structures encourage female subordination. Nanda Salimi writes:

The novel describes the struggle of the women to escape subordination imposed upon them by the society and culture of Afghanistan. It shows how these women are caught in the net of different political factions and cultural standards and how the clashes between them have devastating effects on their lives. (457)

Salimi focuses on Afghan women's struggles against systemic domination. She thinks this novel is a good example of understanding how women are marginalized.

Namita Singh shares similar notions about Afghan women. According to her, "A *Thousand Splendid Suns* shows the social and cultural—and, ultimately, political—structures that support the devaluation, degradation, and violence endured by Mariam and Laila" (90). These writers and critics have paid close attention to the everyday struggles of Afghan women; however, they do not fully examine the *Pashtunwali* code, which arguably is the primary cause of this systematic domination of Afghan women in Pashtun-dominated areas. Religion, social expectations, social structure, governmental machinery or laws, continuous wars, the Taliban, a tribal caste system, and foreign occupation are some other factors responsible for the domination of women. The main point that the above writers miss is that *Pashtunwali's* role in oppression of women is interconnected with all the other factors that ostracize Afghan women. These writers discuss the issues faced by Afghan women, but they do not identify the root causes of the oppression of Afghan women, which is *Pashtunwali*. For example, if critics want to write about the economic conditions of Afghan women, they cannot do so effectively without bringing *Pashtunwali* into discussion, because it is *Pashtunwali's* code of honor that restricts women to the confines of home. Chapter Three will demonstrate the need to understand women's oppression in the context of *Pashtunwali*.

Moving towards the other two texts in my study, *A House without Windows* by Nadia Hashimi and *Green on Blue* by Elliot Ackerman are novels published in 2016 and 2015, respectively; therefore, there are few critical examinations of these. A book review by Fatima Azam notes that *A House Without Windows* “isn’t a murder mystery, it is a political commentary on Afghanistan's culture and legal system. In that aspect, this novel accomplishes its goal and should not be overlooked as mere fiction; it is far more powerful than just a story of one convicted woman” (Azam). I agree with Azam in understanding this novel as a commentary on Afghanistan’s culture and legal system for this reason. The context of *Pashtunwali* is crucial to achieve that in-depth understanding of the systemic domination of Afghan women Hashimi’s novel displays.

Similarly, *Green on Blue* is a commentary on the war economy, on traditional blood feuds in Afghanistan, and on how they support one another. Tom Bissel in *The New York Times* writes,

Ackerman reminds us of Pashtunwali, the violently retributive code of honor that drives Aziz and many Pashtuns. It’s unclear how many readers will feel they have additional insight into Pashtunwali’s demand for revenge murder after reading this novel, but in Ackerman’s defense additional insight might well be impossible. “It is what it is” could have been coined to describe its ancient eye-for-an-eye ethics. (Bissel)

Bissel raises the question of understanding blood feud and revenge in the light of *Pashtunwali*. Since no research work has been carried out on this book through the lens of *Pashtunwali*, it would be useful to understand it in that context. Although some people

might criticize Ackerman's account and understanding of blood feuds in Afghanistan, his experience in Afghanistan as a soldier and as an advisor make his viewpoint credible.

Various scholars have provided readers with useful insight into these works by Hosseini, Hashimi and Ackerman. Be it a commentary on Afghan culture, on representation and domination of women, or the New Orientalist perspectives, all play a significant role in readers' understanding of the novels. However, most of the research so far on these texts offers us a simplistic view, and not a holistic one, and most researchers have missed the pivotal role that *Pashtunwali* plays in Afghan culture and society. This is the gap that my thesis attempts to address. Each section of the study examines different aspects of *Pashtunwali* and then tries to understand the social problems of Afghanistan through those specific characteristics of *Pashtunwali*. This chapter continues with a brief history of Afghanistan and then introduces the reader to *Pashtunwali*. Chapter Two discusses *The Kite Runner* and offers a general understanding of *Pashtunwali*. Chapter Three focuses on Pashtun women and discusses their marginalization through *Pashtunwali*. Most of the discussion revolves around an important tenet of *Pashtunwali*'s code of honor. It also discusses the overlapping of other different factors with *Pashtunwali* which ostracize Pashtun women. Finally, Chapter Four discusses the code of honor and revenge in Ackerman's *Green on Blue* from the perspective of blood feuds in Afghanistan. It looks at the issue in the context of *Pashtunwali*.

### **History and Geography**

Afghanistan is a country in Central Asia, home to people of distinct ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds. We do not know the precise population of Afghanistan due to

decades of conflicts that make a general census difficult, if not impossible. According to the US Central Intelligence Agency, it is estimated to be somewhere around 34,124,811 (July 2017 est.). Some of the major ethnic groups are Pashtun, Hazara, Tajik, and Uzbek. The World Atlas states that “Pashtuns make up an estimated 42% of the population of contemporary Afghanistan. They are also known as Afghans, and the name ‘Afghanistan’ translates to ‘land of the Afghans,’ equally meaning ‘land of the Pashtuns’” (Sawe). The Pashtun people speak the ‘Pashto’<sup>2</sup> language, one of the two official languages of Afghanistan. The other official language is ‘Dari’ which is spoken by many ethnic minorities. After Pashtuns, the second largest ethnicity are Tajiks. The Tajiks, who constitute 27 % of the nation’s population, are Iranian in origin, and speak Farsi (Sawe). In explaining the origins of Pashtun people, Abubakar Siddique notes that “The original Pashtun homeland was situated between the Hindu Kush mountains in central Afghanistan and the Indus River that bisects Pakistan, but Pashtun communities are now scattered over a vast territory” (Siddique 12). Because of numerous wars and conflicts<sup>3</sup> throughout the past two centuries, Afghan people are now scattered all over the world. The majority of them have migrated to Pakistan and Iran, and a few live in Europe and North America.

Historically then, a major part of the Afghans’ lives has been spent fighting wars. Afghans have repeatedly fought external invaders and have also engaged in a

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<sup>2</sup> Anyone who does not speak Pashto cannot qualify to be called Pashtun. Speaking Pashto is essential to be called a Pashtun, and those who do not speak are considered outcasts.

<sup>3</sup> Three Anglo-Afghan wars were fought in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Soviet-Afghan war, however, was the first major war that displaced millions of Afghans. It lasted for nine years from 1979-1989. The American “war on terror” in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11 also contributed to the displacement of a large number of Afghans. 9/11 was an attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon by an Islamist group known as the Al-Qaida. Many people were killed as a result of this attack. The US administration, under President Bush initiated a “war on terror” focusing primarily on eradication of Al-Quaida in Afghanistan.

number of civil wars staged between internal ethnic groups. One reason for such wars is Afghanistan's regional and geographical importance and its role in influencing central Asia. Trading routes to central Asia have been a single big influencing factor. Therefore, historically, Britain, Russia and America have tried conquering it, to control and influence central Asia and its rich mineral and oil resources. To explain the geographical importance of Afghanistan in Asia, Mir Hikamatullah Sadat quotes renowned philosopher and poet of the East, Allama Muhammad Iqbal: "If Asia is a body, then Afghanistan is its heart, and if the heart is in trouble, then so is the whole body" (qtd. in Sadat 32). Iqbal's metaphor reflects the significance of Afghanistan in Asia—not only its geographical importance but its role in maintaining stability throughout South Asia and the so-called Middle East. Because of its geographical significance and the tragic events of September 11, 2001, a renewed interest<sup>4</sup> in Afghanistan took hold, particularly in the United States. With this renewed focus, and concerned to address misunderstandings and ignorance, several creative writers took up the history and culture of Afghanistan as a subject of popular fiction. In a relatively short period of time, several books were published focusing on Afghanistan during the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Writers such as Khaled Hosseini, Nadia Hashimi, Nadeem Aslam, Åsne Seierstad and many others wrote novels focusing on the Taliban, Afghan women, Afghanistan's strong patriarchal structure, the political and social climate, and the effects of war.

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<sup>4</sup> Prior to this renewed focus in Afghanistan, fiction in English about Afghanistan was almost non-existent. Most of the fiction was in Pashto. Many non-fiction books were published on Afghanistan but few writers represented Afghanistan in their fiction. It was after 9/11 when scores of novels were published on Afghanistan, especially by Afghans residing in the west.

### ***Pashtunwali* and its Key Tenets**

The majority of the novels on Afghanistan display elements of *Pashtunwali*, an important unwritten social code practiced by Pashtun people in Afghanistan and the tribal belt of Pakistan. The word *Pashtunwali* consists of two words: ‘Pashtun’ and ‘Wali,’ literally meaning the way a Pashtun lives. Some elements of *Pashtunwali* are *Badal* (Revenge), *Melmastia* (Hospitality), *Nanawatai* (to take refuge in someone’s house), *Jirga* (*Assembly*), *Nang* and *Namus* (Pride and Protection of women). Despite the parenthesized translations, it is difficult to find equivalent words in English. This lack of translation also reminds the western reader of his or her position as an outsider.

For traditional Pashtuns, the *Pashtunwali* code is fundamental to living an honorable life. Akbar S.Ahmad, in his Pashtun ideal-type model, writes, “In the ideal, the pursuit of an honorable life, in the eyes of the actor, is equated with life approximating to the features of *Pukhtun-wali*” (91).<sup>5</sup> Those who do not possess the elements of *Pashtunwali* or fail to do ‘Pashto,’ are not “real” Pashtun. Similarly, Thomas Barfield, who conducted ethnographic research in Northern Afghanistan in the 1970s, writes,

Being born into a Pashtun lineage and speaking Pashto are the primary markers of Pashtun ethnic identity. But Pashtuns also insist that being a “real Pashtun” demands that one not just speak Pashto, but “do Pashto,” that is follow, the precepts of the *Pashtunwali*. (4)

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<sup>5</sup> *Pukhtunwali* and *Pashtunwali* are similar words but some people pronounce it differently. This difference in dialect depends on the area one is living in.

Therefore, to be an honorable member of a Pashtun tribe, it is important to follow *Pashtunwali*. Thus, this code of life has an enormous impact on the lives of people who follow this code.

To understand the novels examined in this thesis—*The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *A House Without Windows*, *Green on Blue* through *Pashtunwali*—it is important to discuss the main institutions associated with this way of life. Understanding this code helps the reader to analyze the behavior of various characters and events in these novels. In the words of the great Pashto philosopher and poet Ghani Khan:

He [Pashtun] knows his customs before he knows how to eat. It is bred in him. It is mixed in his bones and works in his liver. He does not have to go to a learned man in a wig to know the law against which he sinned. He knows it as soon as he does it. He is his own judge and jailer. His ancestors have seen to it that it is so.

(28)

This statement also suggests that almost every Pashtun learns *Pashtunwali* from their surroundings and that there is no formal way of learning it.

Some of the essential characteristics of *Pashtunwali* that I shall explore are as follows:

### **Revenge (*Badal*)**

*Badal* “is the means of enforcement by which an individual seeks personal justice for wrongs done against him or his kin group” (Barfield 5). Taking revenge in Pashtun society is a pre-requisite for manliness. A person who cannot take revenge is considered weak and looked down upon. Homicide is to be avenged at any cost. However, some exceptions can be made in case of children and women. Barfield writes about homicide,

Homicide generates the strongest demand for personal blood revenge. There is the obvious desire to punish the person who committed the act by the victim's family, but it also involves questions of honor and personal responsibility. Not seeking blood retaliation personally is deemed a sign of moral weakness, even cowardice, not just of the individual who was wronged, but his whole kin group.

(6)

Yet children and women should not be harmed while taking revenge. The protection of women and children is an important part of *Pashtunwali* which I will explain in detail in Chapter Three.

### *Nanawati*

While revenge holds an important role in *Pashtunwali*, there is a parallel practice that appears to be the total opposite of revenge. This is called *Nanawati* in the Pashto language. According to Tom Ginsburg, *Nanawati* is,

a formal apology that consists of symbolic submission of the wrongdoer to the victim's family. A sincere offer of *nanawati* is to be accepted. *Nanawati* can also involve the relatives of the wrongdoer. For example, in the case of a murder, the murderer's relatives may help carry the victim's body to the grave or accompany the wrongdoer to the victim's house to slaughter one or more sheep. (102)

*Nanawati* is rendered successful through sincere efforts from the community. Members of the community play an important role in defusing the situation between the victim and the aggressor. The reason *Nanawati* is acceptable is that the aggressor family, by their symbolic submission to the aggrieved party, lowers itself in the eyes of the victim's family and thus dishonors itself. The dishonor reinstates the honor of the victim's family

since the other way to restore the victim's family's honor is to kill one of the members of the aggressors. *Nanawati* brings a stop to bloodshed. We do not see any glimpses of *Nanawati* in the novels, because *Nanawati*, as noted earlier, needs sincere efforts from the community; however, in the novels we do not see a proper and stable community because of war. The rule of the Taliban, war, and external actors (Russians and Americans) are some factors which do not allow *Nanawati* to be practicable.

### **Honor (*Nang*)**

According to Palwasha Kakar, adherence to *Pashtunwali* is necessary for holding or possessing honor. She writes, "By adhering to *Pashtunwali* a Pashtun possesses honor (*izzat*); without honor s/he is no longer considered a Pashtun, and is not given the rights, protection, and support of the Pashtun community" (3). Honor is also repeatedly used in Pashto poetry. For instance, Khushal Khan Khattak in his "Ode to Spring" writes, "The whole of the other Afghans, from Kandahar unto Attak, / In honour's cause, both secretly and openly are one" (150). Khattak is pointing to the fact that when it comes to the honor of Pashtuns all of them behave similarly to defend their honor. Although they might have differences among themselves, they will unite to defend the honor of the tribe, community and country.

Revenge and honor are strictly related in a Pashtun society. A person who cannot avenge "himself or his family" is considered a dishonorable member of the community. According to Ho, "Face is lost when an individual fails to meet social expectations, either through her or his own actions or of those closely related to them" (867). Once the cycle of revenge begins in Pashtun society, it never ceases except with *Nanawati*. It is important to understand the concept of revenge in its specific cultural context, and

understanding *Pashtunwali* helps us in providing this cultural context for the novels studied here. Fida Mohammad et.al., in their article, “Honor, Revenge, in Socio-Geographic Space of Pashtuns,” write that “Honor, shame and revenge play an important social role in collectivistic communities where either there is no formal government, or they inhabit geography that is remote, mountainous and not easily accessible” (74). *Pashtunwali* plays a central role in the lives of Pashtuns because of the absence of law in most of the places they inhabit.

***Tor:***

In *Pashtunwali*, women’s honor is central to every aspect of their lives. Women and honor are strictly related, and that is why the code sometimes systematically marginalizes women. Women have to suffer the most if they elope or are charged with committing adultery. According to Sultan-I-Rome,

*Tor* literally means black but in this context it means the adultery and illicit relations, which do not, any more, remain secret. The male is called ‘*Tor shaway*’ and the female ‘*torah shaway*’. *Tor* is regarded as a great crime in Pukhtun society and those falling prey to *tor* are liable to death in hands of the female involved in the affair. (3)

However, if the elopement is settled and the family decides to marry the couple, the male partner has to give away two or three women of his own house in *badal* because the honor of the other house was taken away. So, sadly it is the women who suffer the most, even if they had nothing to do with the elopement. They have no say in whatever the *Jirga*<sup>6</sup> decides. It is also important to note that men can be dishonored as well, but

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<sup>6</sup> A village counsel consisting of tribal chiefs who make decisions when people cannot reach an agreement.

women's honor is more important than that of men, because in Pashtun culture women are considered "things" of honor—as a commodity.

### **Institution of Jirga in *Pashtunwali***

To uphold *Pashtunwali* or its values, there is a system of adjudication in place called *Jirga*. It can be regarded as a dispute resolution body. However, this body follows the rules of *Pashtunwali* and not the rules of the Afghan nation-state. It is also known as Grand *Jirga* or *Loya Jirga*. The working of *Jirga*, according to Tom Ginsburg, is as follows:

In a *jirga* procedure, each member of the *jirga* has equal status and deliberation is open. (Though *jirgas* are open to the public, women and children are not typically allowed to attend). A *jirga* involves people connected with one or the other side in equal proportions. All sit in a circle as formal equals, and each is permitted to speak. There is no fixed time period for deliberation: some cases take weeks. Sanctions can include ostracism, fines, and the specification of compensation. (97)

Often the decisions of *Jirga* collide with state rules and *Sharia*<sup>7</sup>. The state has banned some of the practices that were followed by *Jirga* such as *Baad*, which I will explain further in the second chapter. Two other parallel systems of dispute resolution are *Malik* and *Mullah*. "A *malik*, holds a kind of executive authority and may be a local notable or literate person whose function is to interact with the state on behalf of the community: and a *mullah*, is the repository of religious law" (99). According to Ginsburg, people can choose from any of the three systems to resolve their disputes. The *Mullah* derives his

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<sup>7</sup> Laws based on the Quran and Hadith (Sayings of Prophet Muhammad PBUH). Different interpretations of *sharia* law exist depending on which school of thought one follows.

authority from *sharia* and *malik* from various other sources. A *Jirga* can decide disputes using either Sharia law or *Pashtunwali* (99). The *Jirga* plays an important role in local disputes; however, *loya Jirga* plays its role on national level too. The elements discussed above are mostly brought to light by the texts that I am analyzing. The only element that these novels do not highlight is *Nanawati*.

### **Limitations in Defining *Pashtunwali* and Using it as a Framework**

Since *Pashtunwali* is an oral tradition, it is hard to find a document where all the rules of *Pashtunwali* are written down. However, to overcome this difficulty, only those aspects will be discussed which my primary texts depict. Then, I will take help from the works of renowned scholars on *Pashtunwali* to formulate a framework for *Pashtunwali* on the aspects selected from my primary texts. It is also important to note my own reading position as Pashtun. I have first-hand experience of *Pashtunwali* and have grown up seeing these codes being practiced. My own knowledge of *Pashtunwali* will thus be useful to augment the works of other scholars on *Pashtunwali*. Also, my background as both Pashtun and Muslim gives me a better understanding, to some extent, of the intersection and tension between Islam and *Pashtunwali*. Another limitation in applying *Pashtunwali* is that it varies from place to place. This limitation can be removed through understanding urban and rural Afghanistan. *Pashtunwali* is practiced in extremes in rural areas, where state authority is missing, and practiced moderately where state rules apply. In Chapter One, this working of *Pashtunwali* will be illustrated by examples from the novel, *The Kite Runner*.

### ***Pashtunwali* and Islam**

The role of religion in my primary texts is minimal if not non-existent, which surprises many people. This is because religion would have made things more complex for the reader. For example, in an interview, Ackerman expressed his fear that religion would have made the plot of his novel far too complex (*The Bridge*). Thus, he focused specifically on the working blood feuds in *Pashtunwali*. It is important to discuss the relation between Islam and *Pashtunwali* for a better understanding of the novels. Since Islam is the official religion in Afghanistan, readers might analyze these texts keeping the religious factors in mind, and ignoring other important cultural influences. Also, when the conflicts in Afghanistan are discussed in mainstream media, the general conception is that religion plays a pivotal role and again the cultural aspects are often sidelined. In most cases, however, culture plays a dominant role over religion. The reason for this preference lies in the historical roots and the majority Pashtun culture. According to Kakar,

Afghanistan first became an independent state ca. 1747, through a coalition of a number of Pashtun tribes under one leader, Ahmed Shah Durrani. He did not claim legitimacy through religious means, as many Muslim rulers of the day did. Rather, his legitimacy was based on his tribal genealogical heritage and the nomination and guarantee of a Sufi leader, Sabir Shah. Though the Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school of law, it was their Pashtun tribal code, *Pashtunwali*, which governed them before all else. (2)

So, historically, Pashtuns have been guided as people by *Pashtunwali* rather than by Islam alone and have practiced *Pashtunwali* rigorously. Over the passage of time the

overlap between *Pashtunwali* and Islam became complex once Taliban gained political power in Afghanistan. With the introduction of *sharia* in Afghanistan, the *Pashtunwali* and Islamic laws overlapped which made things more complex. The point that I want to highlight here is that *Pashtunwali* and *sharia* laws are two different things and that Pashtuns have traditionally preferred *Pashtunwali* over *sharia* law. The consequence of this preference of *Pashtunwali* over *sharia* law under Taliban rule made things worse for Afghan people. The Taliban did not approve of any *Jirga*; rather they introduced their own version of *Jirga* called *Shura*. The Taliban destroyed the existing social order and made things even worse for Afghan females by introducing stricter laws.

The above elements that I have discussed will serve as a lens for the rest of my thesis. This will generate a discussion on honor and the society's upholding of the rules of honor. It will also highlight women's position in Pashtun society and how the rules of honor lead to their marginalization. Lastly, it will focus on the concept of revenge, and its complex nature, especially when coupled with war.

## Chapter Two

### Critical Analysis of *The Kite Runner* through the Lens of *Pashtunwali*

As I have outlined and discussed some tenets of *Pashtunwali* in my introduction, this chapter helps us in understanding the novel, *The Kite Runner*, by Khaled Hosseini, through this unwritten code. This critical analysis focuses on the interpretation of characters' individual and social behavior, their actions, and interactions in the light of *Pashtunwali*. Although *The Kite Runner* might not be an attempt to introduce *Pashtunwali* to the world, or to explain to readers the vital role that this code plays in the lives of Afghan people, we certainly find glimpses of the code in the text, and awareness of that code enhances the reader's appreciation both of the novel and of the complexity of Afghan society. Hosseini explicitly mentions tenets of *Pashtunwali* in various parts of the novel, and most of his characters adhere to the *Pashtunwali* code of life. Although Hosseini himself is an ethnic Hazara and has lived most of his life in America, his characters in the novels abide by the rules of *Pashtunwali*, which points to the fact that anyone writing about Afghanistan, consciously or unconsciously, introduces this code in their writings.

*The Kite Runner* tells us a story of Amir and Baba, who are both ethnic Pashtuns, and Ali and his son Hassan, who are from the Hazara ethnic minority. Baba is a wealthy merchant and an influential personality in Kabul. Ali and his son, Hassan, are poor and serve Baba and Amir. After the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, Amir and Baba first escape to Pakistan and later, to California. After many years, Amir comes back to Afghanistan in response to Rahim Khan's call. Rahim Khan is Baba's best friend who stayed in Kabul and looked after Baba's house. Amir finds out from Rahim Khan that

after he left Afghanistan with Baba, Hassan married and had a son named Sohrab, who is now in an orphanage administered by the Taliban. Amir also comes to know that Hassan was his half-brother. Rahim Khan tells him that he should fulfill his duty and rescue Sohrab. Although Amir is reluctant at first, he eventually agrees to Khan's plans, because he realizes that he owes Hassan a debt from his childhood and that he should follow *Pashtunwali* and prove to be a man who can honor his debts. He then rescues Sohrab after great struggle and takes him to America. By rescuing Sohrab, he finds peace and redemption according to *Pashtunwali*.

### **Ideal Pashtun Behavior**

The first element of this chapter is the discussion of ideal or typical Pashtun behavior in the novel. The novel proposes ideal Pashtun behavior, but it also highlights deviation from *Pashtunwali*. Baba and Hassan's behavior conform to the ideals of *Pashtunwali*. Although Hassan is a Hazara, he still adheres to the *Pashtunwali*. People who are from the Hazara minority do not necessarily have to follow *Pashtunwali*; however, if they are living in Pashtun dominated areas then they do follow *Pashtunwali*. Hassan is technically a Pashtun (if looked at from Pashtun traditions) because at the end of the novel we learn that he is the son of Baba and not of Ali, though born out of wedlock. In Pashtun culture, the blood of the father determines ethnicity, and that makes Hassan a Pashtun because Baba is a Pashtun. Furthermore, Hassan has the typical characteristics of a Pashtun, quite similar to those of Baba. Baba is fierce and powerful, and refuses to depend on others in the novel. Rahim Khan gives him a famous nickname, "Toophan agha, or Mr. Hurricane" (9). He is described as "a force of nature, a towering Pashtun specimen with a thick beard, a wayward crop of curly brown hair as unruly as

the man himself, hands that looked capable of uprooting a willow tree” (9). Although Hassan and Amir do not have their father’s strong physical features, Hassan’s behavior has Pashtun characteristics similar to Baba’s, while Amir’s behavior lacks the ideal Pashtun characteristics. For example, Hassan is brave just like his father and has the ability to confront people. He has the ability to sacrifice. Moreover, he keeps his word throughout the novel and displays loyalty to his friend, Amir. Amir, on the other hand, is weak. He does not have the ability to stand up to people. He leaves Hassan and does not help him, when he is raped by Assef and his friends. Furthermore, he betrays Hassan by falsely accusing him of stealing a watch.

This contrast between the behavior of Baba and Amir, and the similarity in Hassan’s and Baba’s behavior highlights *Pashtunwali* in the novel. Amir’s behavior does not adhere to *Pashtunwali*, which according to *Pashtunwali*, makes him a weak man. The dissatisfaction of Baba with Amir’s behavior and the absence of Pashto<sup>8</sup> in Amir’s character tells us how a typical Pashtun should act. We learn *Pashtunwali* not only through the contrast between Baba’s and Amir’s characters, but also through their dialogues throughout the novel. For instance, when Amir tells Baba about the things that he learned from Mullah Fatiullah Khan (Amir’s teacher, who taught him Quran), Baba teaches him something about honor. “A man who takes what is not his to take, be it a life or a loaf of *naan*. . . I spit on such a man. And, if I ever cross paths with him, God help him. Do you understand?” (14). It is a dishonorable act to steal anything in *Pashtunwali*. This conversation of Baba with Amir also establishes a fact that although *Pashtunwali* is an unwritten code of life, it is passed on and learned from parents and society. It is

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<sup>8</sup> Doing Pashto means adhering to *Pashtunwali*. Pashto is used as a noun here (behavior).

important to note here that Baba offers *Pashtunwali* to Amir, instead of religion, because he knows the importance of cultural codes in Pashtun lands. He is aware that if he has a strong Pashtun character, people will listen to Amir and his son will be able to take his position.

### **Honor**

Honor (*Nang*) is an important tenet of *Pashtunwali*. Almost every aspect of a Pashtun's life is influenced by the honor code, and every Pashtun should lead an honorable life. Reputation in Pashtun society is built on accumulating honor. Barfield<sup>9</sup> states that this honor is accumulated through such "positive acts as physical courage, generosity, outstanding public speaking, success in building political alliances, or winning disputes" (8). We see these positive traits in the personality of Baba. He shows considerable courage when a Russian officer tries to assault an Afghan woman at a check post. When Amir and Baba are leaving Afghanistan due to the Soviet war, a Russian soldier tries to assault a woman in the truck. Amir's father, however, does not let it happen. Here the concept of *Nang* (honor) plays its part. Though she is not related to Baba in any way, he puts his life at risk. He does not let the soldier touch the woman, because according to *Pashtunwali* it is the responsibility of every Pashtun to look after the *Nang* of every other Pashtun, and Baba fulfills this responsibility:

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<sup>9</sup> Barfield conducted ethnographic fieldwork in northern Afghanistan in the mid-1970s. He is currently serving as a president of the American Institute for Afghanistan Studies.

[Baba] said it to Karim, but looked directly at the Russian officer. “Ask him where his shame is.” They spoke. “He says this is war. There is no shame in war.” “Tell him he is wrong. War does not negate decency. It demands it, even more than in times of peace.” “Tell him that I will take a thousand of his bullets, before I let this indecency take place.” (122)

Baba fulfills his responsibility by risking his life. Lutz Rzehak states: “the call for *nanga* is not limited to personal honor because the honor of an individual and the honor of the lineage or tribe one belongs to are interdependent” (9). The call for *Nanga* refers to defending rights of a tribe or oneself and honor comes under collective responsibility in *Pashtunwali*. That is why Baba intervenes to save the woman; he not only saves the honor of that woman, but also the honor of the tribe. Collective responsibility means ensuring that the honor of a tribe or lineage is not harmed by anyone, and if it is harmed then ensuring that honor is restored.

Honor can be restored through actions: for example, when Amir goes back to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab from Taliban’s captivity. His going back to Afghanistan is an attempt to restore his honor. Although he is reluctant to do so at first, Rahim Khan convinces him that it is his duty to do so. He then finally rescues Sohrab.

### ***Namus***

As discussed, *Namus* (the sexual integrity of a family member, especially a woman) is another important aspect of ideal Pashtun behavior. It plays a vital role in *Pashtunwali*, and many other ideas of *Pashtunwali* are linked to this concept, which will be discussed in later chapters. *Namus* also comes under the umbrella of collective responsibility. Rzehak defines *Namus* as “‘honor,’ ‘reputation,’ ‘esteem,’ ‘conscience,

‘and ‘chasteness-’” (9). For a Pashtun woman, all is lost—her social standing, her place in the family and society—if a male touches her, or even sees her face. The idea of honor is interconnected with the idea that men are responsible for women’s honor. This is a collective responsibility which every Pashtun man should fulfill. This idea of collective responsibility is also expressed in the poetry of Hamid Baba (1660-1732). Lutz Rzehuk translates Hamid Baba’s couplet in prose as, “He who cannot defend the honor and reputation of another person does not defend his honor and reputation” (10). Another poet, Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1689)<sup>10</sup>, had similar views. In one of his couplets, which was translated by Raj Wali Khan Khattak,<sup>11</sup> he writes that “To me, death is far better than life, if mere living is not with respect and honor” (6).

As *Nang* and *Namus* are typical Pashtun characteristics and are part of the ideal of collective responsibility in *Pashtunwali*, Baba wants to see these qualities in Amir. He feels that his son is lacking a strong Pashtun character and complains to his friend Rahim Khan about Amir’s weak character: “A boy who won’t stand up for himself becomes a man who cannot stand up for anything” (24). His dissatisfaction with Amir’s *Pashtunwali* highlights how important this code of life is to the people of Afghanistan. According to Michael Cohen and Paul Sims, “An Afghan male should be hailed for his strength, bravery, cunning, self-reliance, virtue, and most importantly, self-control – if he comes off petty, dependent, overly sensitive, emotional, or hot-tempered, he will likely lose the respect of his peers and influence in his community” (Para 14). That is exactly

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<sup>10</sup> Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1689) was a poet, warrior, and chief of the Khattak tribe. He wrote approximately 45 thousand poems and numerous books. He is considered a renowned Pashtun scholar of his time.

<sup>11</sup> Raj Wali Khattak is a well-known Pashto researcher, critic and writer. Khattak worked as Director of Pashto Academy, University of Peshawar from 1995 to 2004.

what Baba fears for Amir, that he might prove to be weaker than an Afghani-male should ideally be. And Baba's fear is justified, because Amir is weak and overly sensitive. It is difficult to survive in Afghani society with a weak character like that of Amir. It is not that he would not survive at all, but to live a respectable and honorable life, it is important to have a strong Pashtun character.

Another incident that can be understood through the *Pashtunwali's* idea of *Nang* and *Namus* (honor) occurs when Amir's family reaches America and is registering for food stamps. It is considered dishonorable for an Afghan to eat food that he did not earn by his own hands. Baba returns the food stamps as soon as he is able to earn his own money:

Mrs. Dobbins blinked. Picked up the food stamps, looked from me to Baba like we were pulling a prank, or "slipping her a trick" as Hassan used to say.

"Fifteen years I have been doing this job, and nobody's ever done this," she said. And that was how Baba ended those humiliating food stamp moments at the cash register and alleviated one of his greatest fears: that an Afghan would see him buying food with charity money. Baba walked out of the welfare like a man cured of the tumor. (138)

Begging and living on welfare are considered the same thing in Afghan culture and are looked down upon. Ghani Khan, while explaining the behaviour of Pashtuns in his book, *The Pathan*, says that a Pashtun would never disgrace himself by begging. He would rather get what he needs by force than by begging (47).

**Promise and Friendship in *Pashtunwali***

Keeping one's word, or a promise, is tantamount to upholding honor. People who cannot keep a promise cannot do Pashto in their lives, and are looked down upon. Hassan in the novel is a good example of keeping his promises. For instance, Hassan promises Amir to bring him the last kite of the tournament and he fulfills his promise in the end. Hassan's promise to Amir is so important to him that he risks the anger of Assef and his friends, and is raped by them. The last kite of the tournament had significant value and was the most coveted prize for everyone: "It was a trophy of honor, something to be displayed on a mantle for guests to admire" (Hosseini 55). Hassan not only keeps his promise, but also shares the honor of the last kite with Amir; ironically, he loses honor when he is assaulted by Assef and his friends. This points to the fact that keeping a friend's honor and promise is preferred over personal honor. Amir, on the other hand, fails to save his friend from Assef and his group. The guilt of not defending the honor of his friend stays with Amir. We see this guilt when Hassan and Amir are playing together and Amir hits him with a pomegranate in the chest: "'Hit me back!' [Amir] spat. 'Hit me back, goddamn you!' I wish he would. I wish he'd give me the punishment I craved, so maybe I'd finally sleep at night'" (98). The burden of not saving his friend and not acting according to *Pashtunwali* disturbs Amir to the core. He is unable to face Hassan, so he falsely accuses Hassan of stealing, in order to get him and his father sent away, but this tactic fails. As a result, he becomes insomniac because he is unable to face Hassan and his father after a false accusation (91).

***Pat***

Hassan is loyal to Amir, but Amir fails in his duty to Hassan and thus fails to uphold an important characteristic of *Pashtunwali*, *Pat*. According to Sultan-I-Rome, “Under *Pat* it is required not to forsake a friend or relative or a person with whom one had some links or relations, but with justifiable reason” (14). This means one can only abandon a friend, relative or a person when their behavior is against the rules of *Pashtunwali*. *Pat* is linked with honor, and one who cannot keep *Pat* does not qualify as Pashtun. The role of *Pat* can be sensed from the fact of its important role in Pashto folklore songs called *Tapah*<sup>12</sup>. Sultan-I-Rome has translated a couplet from the *Tapah* which states that a “Pukhtun is Pukhtun on keeping pat/the standard of pat will always fly high in the world” (Para 4).

At the beginning of the novel, Amir is weak and fails to honor his friendship with Hassan in the manner prescribed by *Pashtunwali*; however, he later realizes all the things his father had been teaching him all his life—especially about honor. When Rahim Khan, his father’s close friend, calls Amir to Peshawar, and tells him about the sacrifice his friend, Hassan, had made for his family by looking after their house, and ultimately forfeiting his life, Rahim Khan convinces Amir to keep *Pat*. *Pashtunwali* requires sacrifices, and that is what we see from Hassan in the beginning of the novel and from Amir in the last part of the novel. Amir decides to go back to Afghanistan to look for Hassan’s son Sohrab. Though he knows that he might get killed in Afghanistan, he leaves everything behind (his family and wife) and flies to Afghanistan. He is

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<sup>12</sup> According to Hanif Khalil, Pashto folk poetry is the true representative of Pashtun Culture. Among all the folk genres “*Tapah*” is the most fluent and effective in reflecting the norms and traditions of Pashtun society. Raj Wali defines Tapa as a form of folk poetry, usually with no authorial ownership.

severely injured in a fight with the Taliban to rescue Sohrab. This was the only way for Amir to remove the guilt of not adhering to *Pashtunwali* when he was a child. And by going to Afghanistan and rescuing Sohrab, he finally acts according to his father's teachings.

The importance of one's word in Pashtun culture is shown through another incident that happens inside a grocery shop, owned by the Vietnamese couple, Mr. and Mrs. Nguyen. When they ask Baba for cash he writes a cheque instead; therefore, Nguyen asks him for identification, which makes Baba furious: "Does he think I'm a thief" Baba said, his voice rising" (135). The reason Baba gets upset is because he thinks that since he has been buying from this shop for the past two years, the shopkeeper should trust him with the cheque. In *Pashtunwali*, nothing is worse than breaking somebody's trust. Keeping one's word means keeping trust, and keeping trust means keeping one's honor. Thus, all three of these elements of the code are interrelated.

Although Baba lives in America, he still finds it hard to live by the new rules. He still stubbornly follows the rules associated with *Pashtunwali*. He even refuses to be treated by a Russian doctor because Russia had attacked his country, and so his honor. Even though Amir keeps telling him that Dr. Schneider, the pulmonologist, was born and raised in Chicago and that he was more American than Baba's own family, Baba refuses to get treatment from him and warns Amir that "I swear on your mother's face I'll break his arm if he tries to touch me" (164). Had the Russian doctor been in Afghanistan, Baba would have killed him without any second thoughts because to him the doctor was his enemy. The idea of collective honor explains this situation—the honor of my fellow countryman is my honor as well and I have to keep it at any cost. Another approach to

understanding Baba's refusal to be treated in general is that he wants to die with honor. He does not want to be a burden on someone or to lie in bed feeling useless. He wants to live his life bravely, and he thinks that being needy and lying in bed is not an honorable way to live. That is the reason why he keeps on refusing medication.

### **Accumulation of Honor and the idea of *Pighur***

As we have discussed in detail, honor is accumulated but it can also be lost. When honor is lost, people start giving *Pighur* (displays of dishonor) to the one who loses it (Jansson, 222). "Taunt" is a suitable translation for *Pighur* in English; however, taunts have some significant consequences in Pashtun culture and one can get killed for giving *Pighur* to another Pashtun. *Pighur* is an offence the family of the insulted would feel bound to avenge. *Pighur* can thus result in death for the one who gives it. The concept of *Pighur* can be seen in the novel in the taunts directed at Hassan. When Hassan and Amir are walking to a cinema to watch the new Iranian movie, soldiers stop them in the way and mock and taunt Hassan: "In and out. I knew your mother; did you know that? I knew her real good. I took her from behind by the creek over there" (7). Hassan was given *Pighur* because they knew his mother had run away with a clan of singers and had done a dishonorable thing. This *Pighur* is worse than death and should be avenged to retain honor. If one cannot take revenge for this *Pighur*, one must leave the village or town. If revenge can be taken immediately that is ideal but if not, it should be left for some other time as the famous Pashto proverb goes, "revenge is a dish best served cold" (unknown). Hassan does not take revenge at that point and leaves it to some other day. The reason why he does not take revenge is because he is just a child. It should also be noted that Pashtun culture is collectivistic, and a mistake made by one

person brings shame to all the members of family, clan or tribe. According to Michael Cohen and Paul Sims,

most Afghan men are intensely conscious and perpetually vigilant to the faintest slight or compromising situation. Because of the very public and communal nature of social relations here, both men and women are under constant personal, familial, and public scrutiny to abide by specific codes of conduct and meet certain social and religious standards. As such, most Afghans are particularly sensitive and attuned to matters of honor and social reputation. (1)

Although Hassan does not do anything dishonorable, he is given *Pighur* because of his mother's dishonor. Note that status is not merely a matter of adhering to the code but a matter of social and economic dominance. *Pighur* is usually given to people who have weak social standing. Although in *Pashtunwali* everyone is considered equal, Hassan, an ethnic Hazara, is considered weak because of his ethnic background, and the soldiers know that neither Hassan nor his family members can avenge the *Pighur*. Similarly, Hassan and Ali leave Baba's house after Amir accuses them of stealing. Although they were cleared of the charges, they decided to leave because they did not want to be given *Pighur* about stealing things. By leaving Baba's home, Ali and Hassan do the honorable thing while Amir loses his honor by falsely accusing them.

To further understand the concept of honor, we shall study the behavior of women in the novel and how they are treated. Women are associated with ideas of honor in Pashtun culture. In *Pashtunwali*, women are not supposed to leave their husbands, or run away with another man. Sanubar, the mother of Hassan, did what most "Afghans considered far worse than death: She ran off with a clan of traveling singers and dancers"

(Hosseini 6). It is a great insult to a family, and the consequence of such action is death in *Pashtunwali*. According to Barfield, “any sexual improprieties by women themselves are deemed such serious violations of the honor code that they can and should be killed by their male relatives” (8). The running away of Sanubar with a clan of traveling singers is considered an act of grave sexual impropriety, thus bringing shame to the family.

According to Bernt Glatzer,

In the narrower sense *namus* refers to the integrity, modesty and respectability of women and to the absolute duty of men to protect them. In a wider sense *namus* means the female part of the family, of the clan, tribe and of the Afghan society; in the widest sense it is the Afghan home-land to be protected. (4)

Baba warns Amir of *Nang* and *Namus* when he feels that Amir is getting too close to Soraya Taheri, daughter of General Taheri, who was his close friend in Afghanistan.

Baba tells Amir, “The man is a Pashtun to the root. He has *Nang* and *Namus*. Honor and pride. The tenets of Pashtun men. Especially when it came to the chastity of a wife. Or a daughter.” Amir replies: “I’m only going to get us drinks” and Baba tells him, “just don’t embarrass me, that is all I ask” (153). Violating the *Namus* of a woman brings shame to the entire family, and to the tribe one belongs to, and it can have serious repercussions, such as death.

The dire consequence of losing *Nang* and *Namus* is highlighted in the fear of General Taheri’s wife that her daughter, Soraya, would never be able to marry again because she has run away with a man and thus lost honor. Amir, by marrying Soraya, “had relieved her of the greatest fear of every Afghan mother: that no honorable

*khastegar*<sup>13</sup> would ask for her daughter's hand. That her daughter would age alone, husbandless, childless" (187). Anyone who marries a girl who has eloped loses his honor too. In areas where *Pashtunwali* is followed to an extreme or where the state has less reach, women who elope are killed by their family members, and if they can kill the man as well it is considered far more honorable. The redemption of Soraya by Amir violates the rigid tenet of *Namus*. This can be understood, though, because Amir is living in America where there is no social pressure on him from his tribe or his extended family members. He does not face any threat of alienation from his fellow Pashtuns as he is living in a foreign country. This situation might have been different had he been living in Afghanistan.

### **The Relationship between Father and Son in *Pashtunwali***

As honor occupies every aspect of a Pashtun's life, it certainly also has an impact on how a father should raise his child. A child should be brought up by his father in such a way that he will be able to learn and practice *Pashtunwali*. The mother's role is non-existent when it comes to teaching *Pashtunwali* to a son; however, it is the duty of the mother to teach a daughter to live a life according to the rules of *Pashtunwali*. In *The Kite Runner*, we certainly see a strong bond between Baba and Amir. Baba continuously teaches him and trains him according to the rules of *Pashtunwali*. A Pashtun child never questions his father and agrees to what he directs. It is considered dishonorable for a child to go against the wishes of his father.

It should be noted that the culture, which is very conscious of status, makes strict divisions between children and adults. A child never sits between elders and that is why

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<sup>13</sup> Coming of the suitor or the meeting of two families to discuss a marriage offer.

Baba does not allow Amir when he and Rahim Khan begins their conversation:

“Sometimes I asked Baba if I could sit with them, but Baba would stand in the doorway. ‘Go on, now’ he would say. ‘This is grown up time. Why don’t you go and read one of those books of yours?’” (5). The only context in which a child is allowed to sit in a gathering of elders is *Jirga*, because that is when he learns from the important decisions his elders make in a *Jirga*. A father who is a part of *Jirga* would take his son so that he might get trained and possibly take his position. However, taking a father’s position is not automatic, and the child will have to show extraordinary *Pashtunwali* (as his father had shown) and acquire *Pashtunwali* to be able to take his father’s position.

Moreover, not much freedom is given to a Pashtun child in making decisions. Parents tend to decide for them. We can see in the novel that Soraya wants to become a teacher, but her father forces her to pursue law. Similarly, Amir wants to become a story writer while his father wants to send him to law school but in the end, he becomes a novelist and goes against the norms of *Pashtunwali*, by defying his father.

### **Deviation from *Pashtunwali* in the Novel**

There are then a number of instances where characters deviate from *Pashtunwali*. Baba himself provides the most significant deviation. On one hand, Baba tells Amir to take care of *Nang* and *Namus* of his friend, General Taheri. He tells him to be careful when interacting with Soraya Taheri, General Taheri’s daughter, and to keep the honor of his family. On the other hand, however, he has bedded Ali’s wife, which is the worst form of dishonoring someone—the worst form of breaking *Nang* and *Namus*. Similarly, General Taheri, by not killing the Afghan boy with whom his daughter, Soraya, had eloped, deviates from *Pashtunwali*. And Amir, by accepting Soraya after knowing that

she had run away with another man, goes against the honor code of *Pashtunwali*. “A space where men and women who are either unrelated or not married mix, opens them up to dishonor” (Kakar 8), and Soraya has entered this kind of space with an Afghan man. Her elopement with a man who is not related to her in any way is considered open rebellion and is a shameful act in Pashtun culture. Moreover, both General Taheri and Baba leave Afghanistan and run away to America and do not defend their country. Again, this is an act of cowardice, and cowards have no honor in Pashtun culture. According to Khattak., “*Qami Nang*, national honour, is accorded great value among Pakhtuns” (10). Similarly, Khattak has translated a poem of Khushal Khan Khattak, (known as the father of Pashto poetry) that highlights the importance of revenge in *Pashtunwali*: “unless he takes revenge from his enemy, the real man does not sleep, neither eats, nor takes rest.” (10). General Taheri and Baba, however, instead of taking revenge, flee Afghanistan. Both of them abandon *Pashtunwali*'s code of honor by leaving Afghanistan. It is ironic that both Taheri and Baba preach *Pashtunwali* but they themselves deviate from it on several occasions.

There are two possible reasons for such deviations from *Pashtunwali*. The first reason is the working of *Pashtunwali* in different geographical contexts. The effects of *Pashtunwali* are different in urban areas from the rural areas or people who live in the mountains farther away from any kind of influence of the state. Akbar S. Ahmed explains, “The ideal model exists within Pukhtun society when interactions with the larger state system is minimal and in poor economic zones” (3). General Taheri does not kill Soraya when she elopes because he now lives in a different cultural space. In America, he has to follow state rules, and he cannot break the rules because he knows he

will go to jail if he kills Soraya. Similarly, Amir marries Soraya and deviates from *Pashtunwali* because he does not live in a geographical space where *Pashtunwali* is practiced to the extremes. *Pashtunwali*'s influence drastically diminishes in a foreign space. However, in general, Amir has deviated from *Pashtunwali* all his life. There is no specific reason why he does that but the only reason that might explain the deviation is that the writer wants to move the plot of the novel, and not only move the plot, but to highlight the difference between those who adhere to *Pashtunwali* and those who do not. Similarly, by introducing these deviations, Hosseini is trying to highlight *Pashtunwali*'s virtues and its negative consequences.

The second reason for deviation from *Pashtunwali* in the novel might be the inherent contradiction that lies in *Pashtunwali* when it comes to dealing with honor related to women. Soraya Taheri and Ali's wife are good examples of such inherent contradictions in *Pashtunwali*. Soraya complains to Amir about this contradiction:

Their sons go out to night clubs looking for meat and get their girlfriends pregnant, they have kids out of wedlock and no one says a goddamn thing. Oh, they are just men having fun! I make one mistake and suddenly everyone is talking *Nang* and *Namus*, and I have my face rubbed in it for the rest of my life.

(188)

Similarly, the contradiction lies in Baba's practice of *Pashtunwali*. Baba had a child out of wedlock with Sanubar, Ali's wife, and did not think of her honor, or his friend, Ali's honor. No one knew that Hassan was his son, because if people had known that Hassan was Baba's son, Baba and Hassan would have been looked down upon and Baba would have lost all his honor. He even loses Hassan when Ali and Hassan leave the house after

they are accused by Amir but even then, he does not reveal Hassan's identity. For the sake of his personal honor, he lets go of his son. On the other hand, he dishonored Sanubar, and never cared for her honor. That was the primary reason why Sanubar left after Hassan was born, because she knew that if people came to know about this, she would be killed anyway. Although running away was equally disgraceful and dangerous, she ran away because she could not have faced her own child once he had known that he was born out of wedlock. Furthermore, Baba in the beginning of the novel teaches Amir that stealing is the worst thing a man can ever do to another person; however, he himself violates his own teachings stealing Ali's wife.

These deviations also provide us an opportunity to understand the author's position on *Pashtunwali*. Hosseini's position is divided between the virtues and negative consequences of *Pashtunwali*. On one hand, he highlights the virtues of *Pashtunwali* through Baba's character: for example, the brave act of Baba saving the Afghan woman from being humiliated by the Russian soldier. Similarly, there is nobility in his abandoning the food stamps given to him by the government and living an honorable life by working and earning money. We also see virtues of *Pashtunwali* in Hassan's loyalty to Amir. Hassan, by following *Pashtunwali* code of honor shows exemplary friendship, loyalty, and bravery. Similarly, Rahim Khan takes care of Baba's house when Amir and Baba flee the country because of war. Rahim Khan shows exemplary loyalty by taking care of Baba's belongings.

However, on the other hand, Hosseini is critical of the *Pashtunwali's* code and highlights some negative consequences as well. For example, Hassan is raped by Assef and his friends. He is here the epitome of loyalty but sacrifices part of himself in the

process. Similarly, Hosseini is critical of how women are treated by the code. Soraya's protest of how men can go out and enjoy sex, but if women do one thing wrong it becomes a matter of honor (188). These examples clearly illustrate that the author appreciates this code but he is also critical of it.

These examples not only tell us the author's position on *Pashtunwali* but also tell us that the ideal *Pashtunwali* does not exist; however, we can strive for it, and there is room to interpret *Pashtunwali* in a complicated modern world. Baba and Amir are not wholly bad people who deviate from the ideals of *Pashtunwali*; thus, it is difficult to fulfill all the requirements of *Pashtunwali*. Amir throughout the novel strives to adhere to *Pashtunwali*. For example, he gets beaten by Assef when he is trying to release Hassan's son from his captivity. He lets Assef punish (beat) him badly because this way he can overcome his childhood guilt for not saving Hassan from Assef. Thus, by rescuing Sohrab, and getting beaten by Assef, he tries to redeem himself and tries in a positive way to adhere to *Pashtunwali*.

General Taheri's character also demonstrates that it is difficult to stick to ideal *Pashtunwali*. Although he is a great Pashtun general, he unlike Baba, keeps living on food stamps. There is a huge contradiction in the behavior of Baba and General Taheri when it comes to living an honorable life. This contradiction leaves room to interpret *Pashtunwali* in a modern world.

As we have seen in this chapter, *The Kite Runner* demonstrates several elements of *Pashtunwali*, and shows both how integral this code is to Afghan culture, and yet how it becomes diluted in an urban or international setting. This chapter then helps us understand the behavior of differing characters in the light of *Pashtunwali*. It also helps

us to understand different incidents in the novel through the lens of *Pashtunwali*. We understand that honor plays a central role in the lives of Afghan people in general, and of Pashtuns in particular; almost every idea and behavior is linked with the notion of honor. We also learned that the notion of honor in Pashtun society is different from other parts of the world. The framework of *Pashtunwali* provides readers a chance to understand *The Kite Runner* from a totally different perspective—one that also provides a fuller understanding of Afghanistan social structure.

The next two chapters will build on this discussion by focusing on these and other elements of *Pashtunwali*. Chapter 3 will focus specifically on women and the honor that is associated with them in Pashtun communities. The general discussion in this chapter will help us understand the complex nature of honor in Pashtun society.

### Chapter Three

#### Understanding the Marginalization of Afghan Women through the Lens of

##### *Pashtunwali*

Writers and scholars have paid close attention to the everyday struggles of Afghan women, commenting on their oppression in both fiction and non-fiction. Multiple factors, such as religion, social expectations, social structure, governmental machinery, laws, continuous wars, the Taliban, a tribal caste system and foreign occupation, are responsible for such struggles. Although the marginalization of women is rooted in several socio-cultural and economic factors, scholars often overlook the intersection of these factors with the code of *Pashtunwali*. Because of this complexity, the Theory of Intersectionality, developed by Kimberle William Crenshaw, is useful in unpacking the multiple causes of Afghan women's oppression. Her theory is a result specifically of studying Black women's feminism and urges that the oppression of white women and women of color is different on many levels. This theory lets us focus on ways domination can work on multiple fronts, keeping race, religion, identity, and color in mind.

Some scholars have used a unitary approach in studying the domination of Afghan women. This can be useful in understanding the plight of Afghan women; however, it does not give us a comprehensive understanding of the marginalization of Afghan women. For example, in her article, "In the Shadows and Behind the Veil: Women in Afghanistan under the Taliban Rule," Anastasia Telesetsky writes about one single factor of domination—the Taliban. She focuses specifically on the role of Taliban in oppressing Afghan women. Similarly, D. Alice Ligorina studies and looks at the

marginalization of Afghan women because of radical fundamentalist Islam. She thinks religion has an important role in the marginalization of Afghan women (3). She looks at it in the light of some of the verses of Quran. Although I agree with both these scholars who have looked at the marginalization of Afghan women from a single perspective, I think this marginalization can be better understood if it is studied from multiple positions. I believe it is important to understand the intersection of all the factors, and not to focus on just one single factor; that is the reason why I choose to look at these novels from the viewpoint of intersectionality.

This theory is useful for my study because Afghan women are fighting domination on multiple fronts and their struggles cannot be understood from only one perspective. According to Olena Hankivsky, “inequities are never the result of single, distinct factors. Rather, they are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations, and experiences” (2). The unitary approach makes it difficult to understand the plight of Afghan women. Class, religion, race, birth, and disability are factors that contribute to the domination of women in Afghanistan. We cannot only focus on one factor alone because it might lead to misrepresentation. According to Kaltrina Kelmendi, mono-method studies, “are rather vague and superficial” (564). She recommends that violence against women should be assessed through “social contexts, individual differences and multiple realities based on social, political, cultural, ethnic, gender and disability values” (564). Using this approach, I will examine the female characters and their struggles in Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Hashimi’s *A House Without Windows*. In addition, since both novels depict Islam and the role of the Taliban, I will link these two forces to the code of *Pashtunwali*.

Social customs, laws, and traditions limit the freedom of Afghan women. In her book *The Kids of Kabul*, Canadian writer Deborah Ellis mentions that “Social customs make it very difficult for women to have independent economic power, and without that, they must depend on men for their survival . . . When a woman is forced to be dependent on an abusive man, her choices are often limited” (30). Because of economic dependency on men, women are exploited in the name of cultural codes and are reminded of *Nang* (honor) and *Namus* (pride) whenever they try to question male authority.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a story of an illegitimate girl named Mariam. Her father Jalil, a wealthy businessman, marries her off to a shoemaker, Rasheed. He is an ethnic Pashtun and wants Mariam to follow the rules of Pashtu. Rasheed, later on, marries another girl named Laila. Both Laila and Mariam try to escape Rasheed because of his violent attitude towards them. However, they are soon returned home by the authorities; Rasheed then violently beats Mariam and Laila with a leather belt. Laila meets her childhood lover Tariq, whom she thought dead. Rasheed, however, knows about their meeting and he starts beating Laila. Mariam then hits Rasheed with a shovel and kills him. Later on, to save Laila’s life, she hands herself over to the Taliban and tells Laila to go with Tariq to Pakistan. Laila and Tariq then escape to Pakistan and after US intervention in 2002, they restart their life in Kabul.

Hashimi’s *A House Without Windows* is set in a female prison called Chil Mahtab. Zeba, the primary character in the novel, is convicted of killing her husband. She is sent to Chil Mahtab where we see other women who are sent to jail for petty reasons such as falling in love or running away with a lover. These reasons may be petty

for outsiders; however, they are serious issues in *Pashtunwali*. Yousaf, an Afghan-American lawyer, tries to save Zeba but he soon learns that it is not easy to defend a woman in Afghanistan because of the broken judicial system. Zeba accepts her crime because she does not want people to know the real reason she killed her husband, Kamal. If she tells the real reason, it will put a little girl in great danger because of the code of *Pashtunwali*—the little girl's *Namus* was compromised. The little girl was raped by Kamal in the yard in his house. She was his daughter's age. When Zeba saw him committing this crime, she could bear no more and struck Kamal with a hatchet. The novel is full of women struggling against cultural norms. Both Hashimi and Hosseini provide intriguing glimpses of *Pashtunwali* for Western (primarily North American) readers, who tend to generalize about the role of women in Islamic countries.

Multiple factors in marginalization of Afghan women are evident in these two books. For instance, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* portrays elements such as honor, governmental institutions, and religion. It also demonstrates how the honor code of *Pashtunwali* is embedded in all other factors which marginalize Afghan women.

Nana and Mariam in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* help us understand women's dilemma, since they are both victims of the rigid Afghan patriarchy. Mariam, who is born to Jalil and Nana out of wedlock, has to suffer because she is a *harami*,<sup>14</sup> “an unwanted thing; [...] she, Mariam, was an illegitimate person who would never have a legitimate claim to the things other people had, things such as love, family, home, acceptance” (Hosseini 4). She suffers for a crime she has not committed and is given away like a slave to an old man in marriage—in accordance with *Pashtunwali* code of

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<sup>14</sup> Bastard.

honor. She was married far away from home because she would bring *sharm* (disgrace) to Jalil if people recognized her as Jalil's daughter. Although it is Jalil who should be ashamed of what he has done—stripped Nana of her honor—it is the other way around. This is an inherent double standard in *Pashtunwali*. Hosseini not only in this novel, but in *The Kite Runner* also, highlights these double standards in *Pashtunwali*. He is trying to emphasize the point that *Pashtunwali* treats women differently from men, and the rules of honor do not apply as they would to men.

### **The Institution of Marriage in *Pashtunwali***

The institution of marriage is sacred to Pashtuns, and they have strong familial bonds; however, women suffer because of the strict rules of honor that are connected with this institution. Thus, among all other factors, marriage becomes the key factor in their marginalization. The marriage of Mariam to Rasheed, a Pashtun, illustrates the wretched state of Afghan women in marriages, especially of those women who live in areas where *Pashtunwali* is practiced to extremes. Mariam is married to a man who is forty years older than her. Her husband, Rasheed, explains to her slowly and gradually how she should spend her life. The first lesson that he gives after marriage is by telling her that he abhors “the sound of a woman crying. I am sorry. I have no patience for it” (59). By saying this, he prepares Mariam to stop expressing her feelings in any shape or form. Similarly, he tells her about the type of customers he receives in Kabul—customers who have no honor and control over their wives. He explains to Mariam that such customers “who bring their wives to my shop...they think nothing of a stranger touching their wives' bare feet!...they're spoiling their *nang* and *namoos*, their honor and pride” (70). And then he tells her that such men embarrass him and tells her that he is a

different kind of man. He reminds Mariam that, in the area he comes from, “one wrong look, one improper word, and blood is spilled. Where I come from, a woman’s face is her husband’s business only. I want you to remember that. Do you understand?” (70). For Mariam, this is something new because she comes from a different ethnic (Persian) background. Persian people do not necessarily practice *Pashtunwali*. Although Mariam is aware of the treatment of women in Afghan culture, she is not aware of the strict rules of honor in *Pashtunwali*. Rasheed trains her to become subservient to him. He wants her to be like a robot—without feelings and emotions. *Pashtunwali* rules of honor keep women’s role limited to the private sphere, because if they step into the public sphere their honor may be at stake.

Polygamy is another factor which is responsible for the marginalization of Afghan women and which is incorporated in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *A House Without Windows*. The need for polygamy lies in the patriarchal urge of Afghan men and their culture of honor. For instance, in the book *Polygamy in Afghanistan*, some cited factors responsible for polygamy are power and wealth, childlessness, the absence of a male child, and customs and traditions (17). We see these factors in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in the characters of Jalil and Rasheed, who are both polygamists. It is interesting to note that in both cases, it is the honor code and patriarchal urge of these men that justify their polygamy, and these factors overlap and lead to the ostracizing of Afghan women. For instance, Jalil is rich and powerful. In order to accumulate honor, he marries three women. By displaying that he can look after the honor of many women, he is displaying power and wealth in the community. While he does not marry Nana (a poor woman with whom Jalil indulges out of wedlock), he does still keep her, though

separately. He could have made her a part of the family too. He, however, does not marry Nana because as he says, it was Nana who came after him, rather than the other way around. Moreover, she was from a poor family—meaning that people would look down upon him if he married a woman who was a daughter of a farmer, below his social status.

Rasheed, on the other hand, marries Laila because his first wife, Mariam could not bear him a child. A report issued by Society Institute on Children and Women in Afghanistan notes that “In the traditional society of Afghanistan, sonlessness (not having a male child) is intolerable” (14). A male child is preferred, but no child at all means that the husband is deemed impotent and is thus considered weak. Actually, the men feel themselves under considerable pressure to show their power, so social pressure then encourages men to marry more than once in order to have a child and thus show their power. Polygamy also symbolizes the many options men have, signaling that they can choose other women whenever they desire and put them in a position of servitude. For instance, when Rasheed marries Laila, Mariam is no longer desired by Rasheed, and he tells her to work for Laila and do the chores of the house.

### **The Role of Religion and State in Domination of Afghan Women**

Thus, we clearly see, it is the intersection of many codes and expectations that leads to the domination of Afghan women. Jakeet Singh, quoting Patricia Collins, writes:

Identities and oppressions of women cannot be understood simply in terms of gender; rather, the categories of race, class, sexuality, ability, nation, and so on, all play an important role in women's lives, and have to be taken into account in order to understand the experiences and confront the oppression(s) faced by

women. Furthermore, these various types of identity and oppression do not remain discrete and distinct within women's lives, as "additive" accounts of difference and oppression would have it, but mix in such a way as to constitute and shape one another, interlocking to form a type of "matrix." (qtd. in Singh 659)

Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* demonstrates this "matrix" described by Singh, since religion, state authority, and unwritten cultural codes result in the oppression of the women in the novel. That matrix operates, for instance, in that polygamy is both permissible in Islam and embedded in the Afghan Civil Code. Article 86 of the Civil Code of Afghanistan mentions that

Marriage with more than one woman is permissible upon realization of the following circumstances: 1 – When there is no fear of injustice among the wives. 2 – When the person has sufficient financial ability to sustain alimony of the wives, such as food, clothing, residence and appropriate medical treatment. 3 – When there is a legitimate interest, such as infertility of the first wife or her having difficultly curable illnesses. (25)

Similarly, Islam, which is the state religion in Afghanistan, allows polygamy under certain circumstances. Although it is difficult to fulfill the requirements outlined in the Islamic code for taking more than one wife, people nevertheless indulge in polygamy and play loose with the state and religious laws. When religion and the state allow polygamy, and their traditional codes are strictly patriarchal, then women are the ones who suffer the most. People like Rasheed do not pay any heed to such rules. For example, when Rasheed informs Mariam that he is going to marry Laila, she does not

give him permission as required by Islamic law, but he marries Laila anyway. The problem with religion and the state legitimizing polygamy with certain rules is that it is easy for people like Rasheed to bypass restrictions in the Islamic code in the name of culture and traditions. It is noteworthy that since Rasheed does not have legal or religious grounds to marry Laila, he resorts to the code of *Pashtunwali*. Rasheed wants to legitimize Laila's stay in his house. He reminds Mariam that "people will talk. It looks dishonorable, an unmarried young woman living here. It's bad for my reputation. And hers. And yours I might add" (214). Rasheed brings the code of honor into play to get married to Laila. He reminds her that people would think less of her for allowing a young unmarried woman to stay in her house—a woman with no honor. According to Rubina Saigol,

In the Afghan situation, the religious and ethnic identities are so conflated or interwoven that many Pashtun 'traditions' and/or 'customs' are perceived as being Islamic. The Pashtunwali code, a tribal code of honor, tends to override the considerations of Islam, and many Pashtuns believe that they are more Pashtun than Muslim. (5)

This is true in the case of Rasheed. He overrides the considerations of the religion of Islam and the Civil Code of Afghanistan that a husband should ask the permission of the first wife to marry another and thus his Muslim identity takes a back seat and *Pashtunwali* dominates.

When Mariam refuses his request to take Laila as his second wife, he plays another card which is "fear of survival" and "fear of war." He keeps reminding them that it is because of him that they are safe. He threatens Mariam that if she does not allow

Laila to be married to him, she will be left alone and she will die of hunger, and if not, she will be raped and killed by the Taliban. Rasheed uses fear of the conflict to get married to Laila. He tells Mariam that Laila can leave, “But I suspect she won’t get far. No food, no water, not a rupiah in her pockets, bullets, and rockets flying everywhere. How many days do you suppose she’ll last before she’s abducted, raped, or tossed into some roadside ditch with her throat slit? Or all three” (215). Rasheed instills fear of the war in Mariam, and she fears for the safety of Laila and lets Rasheed marry Laila.

Rubina Saigol explains such scenarios of patriarchal control in war time. She writes,

In times of conflict, when the group is threatened, and the situation is more fluid than normal, the need to protect and defend the moral frontiers of the besieged group becomes intensified. As a result, patriarchal controls on women intensify as the group attempts to mark its identity on the bodies of its womenfolk. (7)

This is exactly what Rasheed achieves from the conflict which surrounds them. He successfully marries Laila and uses the fear of conflict to fulfill his desire. Furthermore, he then feels justified in imprisoning the women in the house. Also, it should be noted that whatever happens inside the boundaries of the house, nobody cares enough to intervene because the outside world is in the conflict, so no one cares what happens to women in the confines of a home. The women inside the home bear everything and live as slaves because they know they are weak and would be killed or raped outside the confines of home. They thus give complete power to their husbands.

Laila’s oppression at the hands of Rasheed in the novel is a perfect example of how different factors come together in the lives of Afghan women to oppress them. In the case of Laila, conflict plays this role of ostracizing women. Although she is from a

relatively progressive and educated family and is not a Pashtun, she experiences a terrible life because of the war. Babi, her father, was a teacher and supported Laila's education. However, when all her family members are killed in a rocket attack, she is left alone. She was at the mercy of Rasheed, and if not Rasheed then she could have been at the mercy of some other men. Once she enters into marriage with Rasheed, then *Pashtunwali* is another factor that starts to make her life miserable. Thus, one factor supplements the other and forms a complex net, which is hard to break or escape.

### ***Purdah***<sup>15</sup>

As polygamy stems from the overlapping of cultural norms and religion so does *Purdah*. It is also an important factor which restricts women inside the boundaries of home. The word *Purdah* has different connotations and meanings. In Islam, it has its own rules and directions; however, I will not go into those details because different sects have different views on the subject of *Purdah*, and it might get complicated to understand. I will focus instead on the cultural meaning of *Purdah*. Since *Purdah* appears both in Islam and in *Pashtunwali*, it becomes that much more powerful and complex. In the case of Pashtuns, as we have discussed earlier, they follow cultural norms rather than religious principles whenever overlapping occurs. *Pashtunwali*'s honor code demands the protection of women. As noted earlier, the honor code does not allow a woman's face to be seen by a stranger and strictly forbids any physical contact. Azam Kazemiyani writes that "the wish to protect women has resulted in *Purdah*, which is restricting women's movements so that they have limited contact with men outside family or village community. This has been particularly the case in the Pashtun society"

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<sup>15</sup> Seclusion of women or covering their bodies.

(10). In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, we see the cultural form of *Purdah* in the shape of shuttlecock *Burqa*.<sup>16</sup> After Mariam gets married to Rasheed, the first thing he does is buy a *Burqa* for her. When she tries it for the first time the *Burqa*'s "padded headpiece felt tight and heavy on her skull, and it was strange seeing the world through a mesh screen. She practiced walking around her room in it and kept stepping on the hem and stumbling" (72). This *Burqa* is given to her by Rasheed so that he can restrict her movements. He does not want her to leave the house. By restricting her movements, he cuts her from the outside world and therefore achieves complete control of her freedom. Surprisingly enough, Mariam likes the *Burqa* because it hides her identity—her identity as a *harami*: "It was like a one-way window. Inside it, she was an observer, buffered from scrutinizing eyes of strangers. She no longer worried that people knew, with a single glance, all the shameful secrets of her past" (73). It is ironic that the garment which completely segregates her from outside world is the only thing which provides her a space where she can enjoy freedom.

Similarly, Laila finds comfort in wearing the *Burqa* as it protects her from the outside world and its judgment. When Laila wears it for the first time, she is fearful that she might fall into a ditch or break her ankle because of the poor vision that the *Burqa* shows her; however, she is happy since, because of the *Burqa*, "she wouldn't be recognized this way if she ran into an old acquaintance of hers. She wouldn't have to watch the surprise in their eyes, or the pity or the glee, at how far she had fallen, at how her lofty aspirations had been dashed" (232). Mariam and Laila's desire to hide under the *Burqa* is a testament to the fact that Afghan women have very little space to breathe.

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<sup>16</sup> A cloth that completely covers the entire body of a female. She can only see through the net around her face.

And that little space comes from the *Burqa*, which itself is oppressing. It is oppressing in that it segregates women, and as a result, they cannot work in public spheres openly.

Also, the *Burqa* only underscores the oppression of women, since the only safe and private space beyond society's judgment is inside its confines.

Although the concept of veiling a woman (*Purdah*) gets its inspiration from Islamic faith and the urge for patriarchy, its primary encouragement comes from *Pashtunwali's* honor code. According to Bo Huldt and Erland Jansson,

Among the Pashtun, seclusion in *Purdah* is an ideal, closely connected with the concept of family honor, despite the fact that not all groups in society are able to achieve it in practice. The 'necessity' of confining women to the house in order to protect the honor of the family seems to be related to the male view of women as socially immature. (224)

In the novel, Rasheed repeatedly expresses the need to keep the *Nang* and *Namus* of the family intact. Wearing a *Burqa* and observing *Purdah* for both of his wives thus safeguards his *Nang* and *Namus*. He makes sure to buy a *Burqa* for Laila as soon as they are married—and by wearing the *Burqa*, Laila takes the first step towards safeguarding Rasheed's honor.

### **The Role of the Legal System of Afghanistan in Oppression of Afghan Women**

If *A Thousand Splendid Suns* demonstrates the control of women in Afghan society, and the role of the legal system and the state, Hashimi's *A House without Windows* brings these struggles to the forefront through her focus on the female prison population. Although it is a work of fiction, Hashimi claims in her acknowledgments that her novel is an authentic portrait of the penal and procedural codes of Afghanistan.

(413). Her novel is a window on how Afghan women are oppressed by the legal system under the guise of *Zina* (adultery), and when they are charged for adultery, they usually do not get a fair trial.

Two problems are connected with adultery. The first is vague and confusing state law, and the second is the notion of honor associated with adultery; the linking of these two problems simply solidifies women's oppression. For instance, in *A House without Windows* Zeba kills her husband, Kamal, because he raped a little girl and Zeba saw it with her own eyes. To keep the honor of the little girl intact, Zeba does not explain why she has killed her husband. When Yusuf, Zeba's attorney, presses her to tell her the truth so that he can find a way to save her life, she replies,

Anything I say will ruin her. I don't know if her family knows. What if they don't know? What if she's okay now. The possibility is everything to me. I know what they might do to her if they find out. You may not, but I do. Every woman in Chil Mahtab knows. Every woman and girl in Afghanistan knows! (234)

Zeba wants to save the little girl who was raped by Kamal because she knows that if she reveals the truth about the murder of Kamal, people will come to know about the little girl, and as a result of the harm that Kamal inflicted on her body, nobody would ever marry her, and she might even be killed in the name of honor. This would not only bring shame to the girl but her family as well.

Moral crimes in Afghanistan are a primary cause of women's ostracism and lack of power. In part, these crimes figure prominently because the bases for such charges are rooted in both religious and cultural norms. Men are equally responsible for these moral crimes, but women suffer the most since they are considered as objects of honor—they

are held up as figures to be honored, and thus bear the weight of impossible expectations. The most common crimes are running away and indulging in *Zina*<sup>17</sup>. Hashimi in her novel displays through her characters how Afghan women are easily charged, and once they are in prison, prolonged delays in the trial make it impossible for them to be released from the prison. It should also be noted that this is the situation in areas where state law has some reach. In areas where *Pashtunwali* is practiced to extremes, women are not imprisoned but are simply killed.

According to the Human Rights Watch Report, *Zina* is a crime in Afghanistan. The Penal Code of Afghanistan Article 426-7 throws light on this moral crime. However, according to the report,

The Afghan law making *Zina* a crime lacks any definition or explanation of the elements of the offense, or even what *Zina* is. This vagueness makes it easy for a husband or father angered by a woman or girl fleeing from home to allege if she has spent any time in the company of a man after having fled, that *Zina* has occurred. While both men and women face arrest and prosecution for *Zina*, women who seek to escape forced marriage or domestic abuse are likely to be accused of *Zina* as a result. This does not happen to men. (37)

In the novel, Nafisa is faced with a similar situation to those outlined in the Human Rights Watch report on Afghan women. Although she has not committed any moral crime, she is accused by her relatives. She is easily targeted because she is a woman in her thirties, and unmarried, and therefore the object of suspicion and animosity. Her extended family accuses her of an improper relationship with a man and appeal to the

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<sup>17</sup> *Zina* includes all forms of sex and not just infidelity. It includes sex outside of marriage, premarital sex, rape, etc.

dishonor such a relationship would bring upon the family as a whole (44). In addition, Nafisa's rejection of a marriage proposal makes her an open target for criticism. While such proposals and rejections are typically rooted in rivalries and competitions between families, it is the woman who is outcast as a result. Nafisa, who does not commit adultery, is seen in a park in a man's company, and her mother, "fearing her sons would see no way to restore their honor except by spilling Nafisa's blood, decided to report the crime to the police herself" (44). Nafisa is therefore sentenced to three years in prison for sex outside of marriage. As I have mentioned earlier, since the state laws are vague or lack any proper explanation, women suffer the most. In the case of Nafisa, the adultery never happened, but she was charged and convicted anyway. The sentence for three years is not the worst possible form, but now she will not be able to find a good suitor all her life: she has lost her honor. And that is why, when men's marriage proposals are rejected, women are often accused of adultery so that they cannot get married ever. It is a form of revenge. This begins a long war among the families and women are the ones who suffer the most.

In case of Nafisa, her honor can only be restored if the man she was seen with accepts her as a wife: "if he could convince his family to see past this scandal, Nafisa could be released and, more important, her honor might be just recovered" (45). The problem here is that these laws, and the honor code and religion they refer to, are factors which make the lives of Afghan women difficult; they are subjected to worst of oppression and marginalization.

As discussed earlier, these laws regarding *Zina*, which are not clear enough, create room for false accusations and are used in a number of different way to accuse

women of moral crimes. According to Human Rights Watch, “Such an accusation can also be leveled by a man who seeks to protect himself from prosecution after assaulting a woman or forcing her into prostitution” (37). In the case of Mezhghan, a nineteen-year-old who shares a cell with Zeba, *Zina* laws were used against her because she refused a marriage proposal. She refused to get married to her sister's brother-in-law, thus the suitor's family became indignant and accused her of adultery. Mezhghan's brothers-in-laws were “aware that she was in love with a boy in her neighborhood and, in retaliation, had pointed their angry fingers and had her arrested” (46). Later she is taken for a virginity test to confirm her moral crime and, as usual, the verdict goes against her. As a result, she brought dishonor and disgrace to her family. Her father stayed at home for weeks because he could not face the shame his daughter had brought upon on the family (157). Such situations create more problems for the accused because most of the time the family cuts off the relation in order to meet social expectations or in this case to abide by the rules of *Pashtunwali*.

Running away from home is another moral crime that women are frequently falsely accused of. This moral crime is also related to the honor code of *Pashtunwali*. In the novel, Latifa and her sister manage to run away from home. However, they are stopped by the police because they are traveling without a man. The police, instead of helping them, then charge them with prostitution. Latifa is sent to jail for the moral crime that she has supposedly committed. She is another example of Afghan women who run away from home because of domestic abuse or forced marriages. For Latifa, the prison was a much better place than her own home. She “had no interest in leaving Chil Mahtab, a place where she was treated better than she'd ever been treated in her life”

(45). Although prisons are the worst places to live in, she finds it much better than her own home—she enjoys peace and tranquility inside the walls of the prison. She can at least breathe freely there and live with other women freely. It is a place where she can live without losing her honor. Again, it is ironic that women feel more secure inside prison cells than outside, in the world. The prison also helps build communal power and loyalty among the women, and demonstrates not only the way resistance is enacted through the code and rules themselves, but the resilience and strength of Afghan women.

### **The Concept of *Baad* in *Pashtunwali***

Most of the cases in the novels discussed are treated according to the Afghan legal system, although factors like honor play a central role in the outcome of the cases and the lives of the characters. Not all the cases, however, are treated under state law. Most of the cases regarding moral crimes are treated under customary laws, which makes it even more difficult for Afghan women. One such practice that Hashimi has brought to light is the concept or traditional practice of *Baad*. Although *Baad* was banned by the Afghan government in 2009, it is still widely practiced in Afghanistan, especially among Pashtuns. *Baad* also contradicts sharia law; however, as I have stated earlier, Pashtuns favour following customary laws over sharia laws where the two conflict. According to LandInfo's report, "Afghanistan: Blood feuds, Traditional Law (*Pashtunwali*) and Traditional Conflict Resolution," the practice of *Baad* is a form of restorative justice, in which disputes are resolved among two aggrieved parties by exchanging women or girls (14). The Country of Origin Information Center notes that "girls are often preferred as compensation instead of financial assets" (14). Hashimi introduces this concept to her readers through the character of Bibi Shireen, whose son has run away with a girl. He

was killed by the family of the girl for destroying their family's honor. His killing, however, was not enough for the family of the girl. To restore the family's honor, they wanted the boy's sister in compensation. Thus, *Baad* leads to the worst form of injustice to Afghan women. They pay for crimes which they did not commit in the first place. They are slaves to the family they are given to, and they are reminded time and again why they were given to them, which makes it even worse for them to live.

This chapter outlined that both writers depict oppression, but also emphasize the women as strong, resilient, and innovative in navigating and using the systems. Also, both of these books add complexity to the standard Western notion that women in Islamic societies are oppressed, and depict the variety of struggles they face. Similarly, we learned that while the domination of Afghan women is a result of different factors, *Pashtunwali* stands out as the central one. Not only is it central, but it is connected with all the other factors responsible for the marginalization of Afghan women. Hosseini and Hashimi's works provide insight to the problems faced by Afghan women in general, and by Pashtun women in particular. *Purdah*, the practice of *Baad*, *Zina*, revenge, honor and the institution of marriage are all different factors which Hosseini and Hashimi's works examine, opening windows to the social problems of Afghanistan. Hosseini and Hashimi's stance is different on *Pashtunwali*. Hosseini seems to propagate the idea that *Pashtunwali* is responsible for the oppression of women. Thus, for example, Hosseini stresses how violent Pashtuns can be and how the code can be used to suppress women. His focus is specifically on the cultural codes and their effects on Afghan women. Hashimi, however, propagates the idea that *Pashtunwali* is not the only factor responsible for the domination of women; rather, multiple factors are responsible. Her

intent is to bring to surface the problems that are faced by Afghan women, and she sees the root cause of this in the cultural codes; however, these cultural codes work parallel with other factors and thus have devastating effects on women in Afghanistan. She also suggests that it is not religion alone that marginalizes Afghan women, but the problem has deeper roots—which are the cultural codes. Also, she thinks that there is no good for Pashtun women in *Pashtunwali* and that *Pashtunwali* is inherently bad—unlike Hosseini who thinks that *Pashtunwali* can sometimes be good. Hashimi thinks that *Pashtunwali* is particularly harsh for women as compared to men. For example, when it is a matter of honor, *Pashtunwali* treats the two genders differently.

As this chapter focused on Honor and revenge with regards to women, the next chapter discusses the concept of blood feuds and revenge in Afghanistan.

## Chapter Four

### The Concept of *Badal* (Revenge) in Elliot Ackerman's *Green on Blue*

This chapter of my thesis focuses specifically on the role of *Badal* (revenge) in Elliot Ackerman's *Green on Blue*. *Badal* is closely related to honor in Afghan society. I have chosen the novel *Green on Blue* by Ackerman mostly because it focuses on the blood feud associated with revenge. While *A Thousand Splendid Suns* explores the concept of revenge and honor with respect to the treatment of women, *Green on Blue* specifically draws on the place of the blood feud in *Pashtunwali*. By adding this text, my study then encompasses all aspects of revenge in *Pashtunwali*.

Ackerman's primary purpose seems to be providing context for something that his audience has difficulty understanding. In his interviews, he mentions that the sole purpose of the novel is to show another side of war in Afghanistan for his American readers. He writes,

None of the nuance ever gets conveyed. So, I wanted to take an action which, when you first hear about it, sounds completely reprehensible—a 'green on blue' attack, an Afghan soldier trained by Americans shoots him in the back. You see it in the media all the time. I wanted to roll that back and take the reader on a journey such that, by the time that action is happening at the end of the book, not only will you see why he does that at the end, but you will actually see why he couldn't do anything else. (The Rumpus)

To further build on what Ackerman says here, I would draw the attention of my readers to the title of this novel. The term "Green on Blue" is often used in mainstream North American media. It refers to attacks between allied forces. In the Afghan context, the

term “Green on Blue” points to attacks by Afghan soldiers on allied American or NATO soldiers. The reference to the color is important, too; the color green represents Afghan security forces, as it is the color of their uniform, while blue represents the US military forces. I will argue that these attacks between supposed allies mostly arise from the cultural code of honor, which demands taking revenge on one’s enemies for any harm done to Afghans, their families or their land. Although Afghan soldiers are allies of the American military, a slight mistake made by an American soldier can get them killed, especially if the mistake invokes the honor of the Afghan soldier.<sup>18</sup> Ackerman’s Jack makes such a mistake by trying to exploit the code of *Badal*. He, however, pays the price for it and is killed by Aziz in the end.

Most Afghan characters in the novel adhere to the code of *Badal* in one way or the other. In fact, deviating from the code is rooted in the ongoing war. The first instance of *Badal* in the novel is Aziz’s encounter with an older boy who had split his lip in a fight. Aziz’s father goes to the boy’s house to ask his father to punish his child. His father, however, refuses to do so. Aziz’s father then hits the father of the other boy and splits his lip, thus taking *Badal* for Aziz’s split lip. Aziz’s father then teaches Aziz that “a Pashtun man had an obligation to take *Badal* when his *Nang*, his honor, was challenged” (Ackerman 7). Revenge and honor are strictly related in a Pashtun society. A person who cannot avenge wrongs is considered a dishonorable member of the community—and loses face. To “lose face” is to lose both one’s voice and one’s honor; such people cannot speak on matters that are important to the community.

Anthropologist David Ho puts the idea of losing face in the following words: “Face is

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<sup>18</sup> *The New York Times* reported in June of 2017 that seven soldiers were wounded in such insider attacks (A 10).

lost when an individual fails to meet social expectations, either through her or his own actions or of those closely related to them” (867). In order to save his face (honor) and the reputation of his family, Aziz’s father had to take revenge. Since *Pashtunwali* does not allow adults to harm children while taking revenge, another member of the family must be harmed instead. As Barfield explains, “women and children are excluded as targets of revenge in all cases” (6). That is the reason Aziz’s father does not harm the boy and instead asks the child’s father to punish his son. However, this does not happen and then Aziz’s father decides to take revenge on the father, because he could not harm the child according to *Pashtunwali*. On the other hand, as we saw in the last chapter, women can get caught up in this execution of *Badal*, as when they are exchanged to resolve disputes.

The second instance of *Badal* that we see in the novel occurs when Ali is carrying Aziz in a wheelbarrow and a grocer named Rafi Jan confronts them and throws Aziz off the wheelbarrow. Everyone in the crowd laughs at them. Ali cannot bear this contempt and “threw his fist into Rafi Jan’s groin” (10), telling him that next time he would kill him if he insulted his brother. In both the above cases, it should be noted that *Badal* was taken by the family members. In the first case, Aziz’s father took *Badal* on behalf of Aziz—on behalf of another family member. In the second case, Ali takes *Badal* for his brother. This points to the fact that *Badal* is not limited to one person; rather, anyone can take *Badal* in the family for another family member. Sometimes if a family member is weak, a stronger member of the family will take *Badal* for them, so that the reputation and safety of the family is emphasized and maintained, and other people might not transgress against the family in future.

Revenge in Pashtun culture upholds *Pashtunwali*. On successfully recruiting Aziz to the Special Lashkar,<sup>19</sup> Taqbir tells Aziz that “we fight against the Taliban to uphold *Pashtunwali*” (25). He tells him that “in Badal there is *Nang* for you” (25). Taqbir motivates Aziz to fight and take revenge against Gazan because Gazan was responsible for the blast that almost killed Aziz’s brother, Ali. Taqbir tells him that if he fights for the Special Lashkar he will gain two advantages: First, by following the code, and second, by ensuring that hospital treatment is provided for his brother. Moreover, by joining the Special Lashkar he will uphold *Pashtunwali* as his father had taught him through a personal example from his own childhood. Aziz, therefore, decides to join the force and starts fighting with the Special Lashkar. It should be noted that Taqbir uses *Pashtunwali* to manipulate Aziz and the other recruits and that is the reason Taqbir is killed by Aziz in the end when he realizes it.

Aziz, however, is not the only one who is seeking revenge against Gazan. There are other people too in the Special Lashkar who want to avenge harms done by Taqbir, during training, constantly reminds them of the injuries and insults. He tells Aziz that your “brother, once strong is now a legless cripple, another of Gazan’s victims. Your *Badal* should be feared” (46). By reminding Aziz constantly, Taqbir fuels Aziz’s desire for revenge. In fact, the entire Special Lashkar is constituted on the principle of revenge. Commander Sabir’s brother Jazeem, with the help of American money, started the Special Lashkar, and when he was killed his brother Sabir took over the command. As I have mentioned earlier, once the cycle of revenge starts, it never ceases and can remain for an extensive period of time. It should be kept in mind that unintentional blood feuds

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<sup>19</sup> A group of locals who team up against the Taliban and are supported either by the government or American forces.

are rare because those who practice *Pashtunwali* know the rules and adhere to them strictly. In the case of the novel, Ackerman is trying to provide context for the unintentional blood feud.

The first chance that Aziz gets to take revenge within the force occurs when Commander Sabir assigns him the duty to go to Atal's house to spy on him because Sabir thinks that Atal has a secret link with Gazan. Although spying is unacceptable in *Pashtunwali*, as informants are considered dishonorable, not only for stealing secrets but also for breaking the trust of the host, the chance for *Badal* is vital. Aziz believes that "to be an informant was shameful, thieving others' secrets, but the opportunity to strike at Gazan had nang" (147). Thus, he decides to take revenge—to kill Atal inside his home. According to Thomas Barfield, it is not the most honorable form of revenge to kill someone in ambush, but it is acceptable, if the killer takes public credit for the killing. The most honorable form of revenge is to inform the enemy and then kill him face to face (6). An example of such revenge is depicted by Ackerman through the hired killer of Mumtaz's brother, where the killer, after killing Mumtaz's brother brings the news to Mumtaz's family and takes public credit for it (165). The reason why it is important to take public credit is because it is considered brave. Also, sometimes people are involved in blood feuds with more than one family; therefore, by taking public credit, people know which specific family took the revenge.

Commander Sabir tries to convince Aziz to kill Atal along with Gazan. Although Aziz is reluctant because Atal has not harmed him in any way, Sabir tells Aziz that Atal was "Hafez's cousin and part of that kinship which killed my brother and crippled yours" (203). Atal has not harmed Aziz, but Sabir, according to the rules of *Pashtunwali* is right

in telling him that Hafez was a part of that kinship and in *Pashtunwali*, *Badal* extends to the kinship group. Barfield writes that “revenge should ideally be directed at the murderer alone, but under some conditions the *Pashtunwali* makes his brothers or other patrilineal kin legitimate substitute targets” (6). Atal is Hafez’s cousin and that makes him a legitimate target according to rules of *Pashtunwali*. It is not just a feud, but a blood feud, where all blood relatives can become a target, as in the case of Atal.

When the opportunity arises, Aziz kills Gazan, Jack, and finally Atal. All three were killed for revenge. Jack’s killing was an example of “Green on Blue.” This shows the complexity of maneuvering within the code, since while the American soldier Jack is not a member of the community as a whole, he has participated in organizing the special force in order to exploit the code of honor. Aziz kills him because he comes to know that the conflict which has been going on has been fueled by Jack. The Special Lashkar was just a pawn in the hands of Commander Sabir and his American friends. Thus, Aziz takes revenge, because indirectly they are all responsible for the harm to the village and his brother Ali.

The rules for blood revenge are clear in *Pashtunwali*. According to Barfield we must first answer the question of whether a certain crime or transgression falls in the category of blood revenge. He writes,

If the death is the result of an accident or involuntary, the victim’s family may be entitled to compensation but not revenge. Blood revenge may also be prohibited if the victim was engaged in a dishonorable act, such as a thief killed in the night or a man caught engaged in adultery. Personal blood revenge cannot be taken in time of peace for a man killed in battle because the fight was group against

group, although if hostilities are renewed then each side tries to even the score.

(6)

There are two deviations from the rules of blood revenge represented in the novel. The first instance is where Mumtaz explains to Aziz his family's blood revenge, its consequences and the way it affected his family. Mumtaz and his brother set a landmine aimed at Russians on the information provided to them by their father's informant. That specific night, however, the Russians do not use that road; instead, a local truck becomes the target of the truck. This puts Mumtaz's family in a complex situation because the landmine is intended for the Russians and not for the local truck. So, to settle the matter the village elders (*Jirga*) call Mumtaz's family and the family of the victims. *Jirga* decrees that Mumtaz's father was responsible, and they ask Mumtaz's father to replace the damaged truck, as well as to buy an extra truck to cover the damages for the cargo and the driver's son death. The victims, however, decide to take revenge instead of taking the money and do not comply with the decision of *Jirga* elders (164). This was a deviation from *Pashtunwali*. The decision of elders cannot be rejected, modified or overruled, because decisions of elders are the decision of the whole community. Similarly, since the incident was a result of an accident and not intentional, the affected family cannot choose to take revenge. The rationale behind this is that the affected family's honor is not harmed in any way, shape or form. Honor is only harmed when a person is insulted or wronged intentionally.

The second deviation is holding Aziz accountable for the unintentional murder of Tawas. As Barfield mentions, *Badal* is forbidden if the killing is unintentional or on the battlefield (6), and so Aziz cannot be held accountable for Tawas's killing when they

ambush him in the madrassa. The reason he cannot be subjected to rules of *Badal* is that Tawas's killing was unintentional. The second reason is that Aziz was there to fight on the orders of his superior and was not engaged in something personal. Aziz's commander, on the other hand, did violate one of the rules of *Badal* when he attacked Atal inside the mosque.

This rule of guest protection is related to an important component of *Pashtunwali* called *Melmastya* (hospitality). Once you become a guest of someone, you are under the protection of the host, and your enemy cannot attack you because this action would violate the honour of the host. Sultan-I-Rome writes, "If the guest has enmity or he needs protection due to some other reason, his protection is regarded as the responsibility of the host till the time he remains guest with him or in the limits of his house or in his territorial limits" (18). Since Atal is a guest inside the madrassa and is therefore under *Melmastya*, he should not have been attacked. This attack, then, is an outright violation of multiple different components of *Pashtunwali*. This violation makes the crime greater in the novel.

The violations that occurred can be explained in the light of ongoing conflict. Gazan in the novel represents the Taliban, and Aziz represents the local forces. The Taliban has no sympathy for the rules of *Pashtunwali* or local traditions and that is why this violation of the code occurs. Although Aziz tries to play according to the rules of *Pashtunwali*, the context challenges his compliance with the rules. That is why ideal *Pashtunwali* fails in wars, or at least, it is not fully complied with, and Ackerman's novel is a good depiction of such failures. Most of the deviations in the novel that we talked about earlier were because of war. As war makes legal and cultural codes complex,

nothing works smoothly and thus the glue (legal and cultural codes) that bind society vanishes.

Another rule to understand the concept of *Badal* is the rule of leaving the village or where a person is living. According to Barfield, “if revenge cannot be carried out the victim’s family will often leave the village to avoid the public shame of having to live in proximity to the killers” (6). In the novel, Mumtaz’s brother leaves the village because he knows his own father would protect him. He does not want his father’s protection, so he leaves the family and the proximity of his enemies. By leaving his family, he ensures that his family members will no longer be the target of his enemies because he is not living in their refuge (similar to *Melmastyra*). However, if his family supported him and he stayed within the proximity of his family, then his family would have been the target of his enemies as well, because that would mean that they are providing a refuge for him. Usually, it is the victim who leaves the village; however, in certain cases the offender leaves as well. This is common where the offender is weak, or he does not want to make his family a target or as in Mumtaz’s brother’s case, where the transgression was unintentional.

Hiring a person to take revenge is also acceptable in *Badal*. If the family does not want to take up weapons, or engage in violence themselves, they can hire a killer; as Barfield notes, “the person taking the revenge should be a close relative of the victim, although in some Pashtun traditions it was legitimate to hire a substitute to take revenge in the name of the victim” (Barfield 6). In the novel, we see this in practice; Mumtaz tells Aziz that “to honor *Pashtunwali*, the family hired a *qatal* to hunt down my brother” (164). Furthermore, Barfield states that the *qatal* should give a quick notice of the death

so that a member of the family can take the body and his belongings. He further states that it is not permissible for the hired killer to take anything from the person he kills (164). The reason the killer is not allowed to take anything from the person he kills is because such theft goes beyond addressing the offence. The idea is to harm the other person as he himself did harm and no more. Mumtaz's brother is killed by a hired killer and the killer, according to the rules of *Pashtunwali*, comes to the family's house to give the notice of the death of their family member. The killer who had killed Mumtaz's brother stands in front of Mumtaz's father and informs him about the death of his son:

a week ago, your son was killed. The *Badal* was sanctioned by the orgun Jirga of two months past. Your son is buried in the communal graves outside the Blue Mosque in Spin Boldak. If you go there and ask for the undertaker, he can help you arrange the body's transport here (165).

Thus, the killer performs his duty according to the rules of blood revenge and informs the family. It should be noted that the hired killer is being protected under the *Pashtunwali* rule of honor. Revenge should only be directed towards the person who hired the man. The reason the family should be informed and why the hired killer's identity should be known is to avoid complications. If the families have grievances against each other on multiple fronts, any aggressions made against a particular family should be publically announced so that there are clear boundaries against each other.

### **Reasons for *Badal* in Afghan Society's cultural context**

It is also important to understand the concept of revenge in the cultural context, and understanding the novel through *Pashtunwali* helps us in providing this context. While explaining the concept of honor and revenge in Pashtun communities, Fida

Mohammad mentions that “Honor, shame and revenge play an important social role in collectivistic communities where either there is no formal government, or they inhabit geography that is remote, mountainous and not easily accessible” (74). The temporal and spatial setting of Ackerman’s book exemplifies this collectivism. The characters have strong family relations and are thus bound to take revenge if any of their family members are hurt. In case of homicide, revenge becomes important for Pashtuns to live honorably.

As Barfield states,

Homicide generates the strongest demand for personal blood revenge. There is the obvious desire to punish the person who committed the act by the victim’s family, but it also involves questions of honor and personal responsibility. Not seeking blood retaliation personally is deemed a sign of moral weakness, even cowardice, not just of the individual who was wronged, but his whole kin group.

(6)

If a family does not seek revenge, it is often ostracized, and it is difficult then to forge marriages and other alliances within the community.

### **Does Blood Revenge Work/Function in Afghan Society?**

As noted earlier, there is no formal government or working judicial system in many parts of Afghanistan, so customary laws help in running the affairs of the people. Although blood revenge is not an ideal way of resolving disputes, it has worked well in Afghan society, especially in times of peace and in the absence of the Taliban. The presence of the Taliban confuses the idea of *Badal*, because they do not respect the social codes of *Pashtunwali*. Also, it conflicts with their version of Islamic laws which are contradictory to *Pashtunwali* on many levels. For example, the idea of harming a family

member in blood feuds contradicts Islamic laws. Similarly, as we discussed earlier, resolving disputes through the exchange of women is also strictly forbidden in Islamic law.

Another reason that *Badal* works is the consequence of committing a crime or any form of transgression is thereby made immense and impacts not only the offender but the whole kinship group. Therefore, people rarely cross established lines.

The reasons people have been sticking to these social codes are manifold. For instance, the majority of people in Afghanistan are extremely poor and the gap between rich and poor is wide. *Pashtunwali* or the institution of *Jirga* provides quick justice for the poor people and, in many ways, protects them. It should be noted that a working judiciary or effective state laws are almost non-existent in rural areas and that is where *Pashtunwali* plays its role. We see this non-existent judiciary in Ackerman's novel, and not only his novel; we also see it in Hosseini's and Hashimi's works as well. In all three writers' novels, we see that *Pashtunwali* plays a dominant role in the lives of the Pashtun people. Another reason for sticking to this code is that it provides a check and balance system in the Pashtun communities. It keeps a check on any transgressions made by individuals and those transgressions can be dealt with collectively if they are made. *Jirga* has been an excellent source of justice to these small communities for many centuries. However, this code (*Jirga*) only works in smaller communities and fails in larger communities because it does not have any formal set up. Also, the Taliban have harmed *Pashtunwali* greatly because wherever they establish their strongholds, people have to follow Islamic laws according to their interpretation.

To sum up, Ackerman has tried to explain the complex nature of blood feuds in Afghanistan. His assessment of the code is not as harsh as Hashimi but again they are looking at different things. Ackerman's novel suggests that the *Pashtunwali* code of *Badal* leads to conflict which then never stops and keeps going. He also suggests that the code is not corrupt, but can easily be corrupted, that outsiders can easily use it to fuel war, and that this is the weak point of this code. Its rules can be reversed and can be seen in form of oppression, cruelty, and hypocrisy. We saw this in the case of Aziz and other recruits easily dragged into war by outsiders and in the devastating effects that this produced. Ackerman also criticizes the *Jirga* and thinks of it as another flaw of the *Pashtunwali* code. He highlights the shortcomings of the *Jirga* through his characters—Mumtaz's opponents do not accept the decision and go against it.

Ackerman also seems to suggest that the sole rationale for conflict in Afghanistan is *Pashtunwali's* code of revenge. I think his idea is a little simplistic. Although *Pashtunwali* certainly plays its role, it is not solely responsible for conflict in Afghanistan. Overall, his presentation of *Pashtunwali* in the novel brings out the weaknesses of the code and gives us another perspective to think about the conflict in Afghanistan.

## Conclusion

*The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns, A House Without Windows and Green on Blue*, all display tenets of *Pashtunwali*. In these novels, we see how the code of honor underscores all other aspects of *Pashtunwali* in Afghan culture, and how this code continues to guide popular behavior in spite of complications that result from recent war and upheaval.

Understanding the code and studying the novels in the context of the code provides us deeper understanding of the novels. It helps us understand the characters' behavior and the way their behavior is shaped by *Pashtunwali*. There are deviations from the code, and even non-Pashtun characters are affected by the code, but those deviations are for deeper understanding of the code. The code of honor is central, and affects all other elements in the novels. We learn that without honor a Pashtun does not have any space in Afghan society. Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* emphasizes this element most clearly. The code of honor puts significant pressure on people, and to uphold honor, one can go to any extreme. Such extremity is seen in Hassan's and Baba's behavior. Moreover, we note that there is a great tension between *Pashtunwali* and Islam; however, we notice that characters prefer culture over religion. For instance, the treatment of women (exchanging them to settle disputes), the ideas of revenge (especially the idea that other family members can be harmed even though they did not commit any crime), are *Pashtunwali* practices at odds with Islamic teaching. We saw the dominance of culture over religion in all four texts where characters were more tilted towards cultural norms rather than religion.

As we learned in the novels that *Pashtunwali* is a guiding principle for Pashtuns, we also learned that the writers focus on the way women's lives are negatively affected by this continuing code. This code remains a nightmare for most Pashtun women, especially where it is practiced to extremes. Although it is true that the plight of Pashtun women and their marginalization cannot be understood from only one angle, *Pashtunwali* remains the central and most important factor in ostracizing them. For instance, we saw this marginalization and bad treatment of women in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* in the form of Sanubar. Similarly, Mariam and Laila's treatment in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Zeba's treatment in Hashimi's *A House without Windows* shed light on the institution of marriage, *Purdah*, Afghanistan's legal system, and the concept of *Baad*. If one does not understand *Pashtunwali*, it is difficult to understand the problem of honor killing or blood feuds in Afghanistan. The identification of the problem lies in the customary laws and that is where things need to be changed. Again, as stated earlier, there are several factors involved in the marginalization of Pashtun women; however, in blood feuds and honor killings, *Pashtunwali* has a central role and conflicts with other factors.

The most common reason for blood feuds in Afghan society is related to the honor of women; however, there are other reasons as well. For example, as earlier noted in Barfield, homicide generates the desire for blood feuds and such blood feuds are depicted by Ackerman in his novel *Green on Blue*. Ackerman's novel shows the complexity of the blood feud in ongoing violence. His novel shows that blood feuds or revenge in Afghan society are more complex than just killing. It is a long chain of social rules and involves great social expectations related to honor. The study of Ackerman's

novel through the lens of *Pashtunwali* enables us to understand the complex nature of revenge in Pashtun society. It helps us in understanding that blood feuds are not limited to individuals; rather they involve the whole family and sometimes the tribe as well.

To sum up, these writers suggest that in the context of contemporary society—living in other parts of the world (e.g. America), operating during a time of war, and in multiple and multi-cultural urban and rural settings--strictly following the code impedes the characters' ability to adapt, when its purpose is arguably to establish guidelines for behavior and interaction. The characters are often left negotiating difficult territory in which multiple cultural, religious, military codes are operating. While life for Afghan people would likely never be “easy,” modification of *Pashtunwali* is one element that might aid their resilience in the face of ongoing conflict and hardship.

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