



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>
 Vol. 05 No. 02. April-June 2026. Page# 1390-1402
 Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)
 Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)



From Colonial Silencing to Post-9/11 Stereotypes: Reclaiming Pashtuns' Voice in Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone* (2014)

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Abstract

*Since the colonial era, Pashtuns have been subject to persistent stereotyping, a pattern that intensified during the War on Terror. Once created by the British Raj's historians as colonial tropes about Pashtuns, these stereotypes have been revived and reproduced during the last two decades by global media, academia, and policy narratives. Pakistan in itself is the victim of the War on Terror; but, Pashtuns as an ethnic group in Pakistan faced double marginalization: internationally as well as domestically within Pakistan. Pashtuns are often depicted by Pakistani media as violent and terrorists after the War on Terror. Apart from the deaths and displacement of thousands of Pakistani Pashtuns in the wake of War on Terror, they also suffered emotional and psychological pain due to their negative stereotyping in the international world as well as within Pakistan. The present study employs Spivak's (1988) "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as theoretical framework, to investigate Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone* as an attempt to reclaim Pashtuns' marginalized voice since colonial era to their post-9/11 stereotyping. Shamsie tries to reclaim voice of Pashtuns in *A God in Every Stone* as subaltern ethnic group in Pakistan against their negative stereotyping in the wake of War on Terror. The novel tries to reclaim Pashtuns' voice by representing the nuanced image of Pashtuns through their portrayal as peace-loving, cultured, and talented people. In contrast to the current stereotyping of Pashtuns as extremists, intolerant, and uncivilized, an attempt has been made in the novel to reclaim Pashtuns' voice through their historical linkage with an ancient civilization and by portraying the Peshawar of colonial India as center of religious and cultural harmony.*

Keywords: *A God in Every Stone* (2014), *The War on Terror*, Pashtuns' stereotyping, Epistemic violence, Textual analysis

Introduction

Pashtuns, also known as Afghan, Pathans, or Pakhtoon, are an ethnic group living on both sides of the North-West Pak-Afghan border. Pashtuns make up the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, almost fifty two percent of the total population. Similarly, they are the second largest ethnic group in Pakistan, making up almost nineteen percent of the total population (Kakar, 2023). In the wake of War on Terror, leading to the insurgency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, more than fifty thousand Pakistani civilians have lost their lives. According to Global Terrorism Index, Pakistan is the second most affected country of the War on Terror. As per the study conducted by Pakistan Political Science Association (PPSA), out of the fifty thousand Pakistani civilians who lost their

lives in the War on Terror, an estimated 37, 211 were Pashtuns (Safdar, 2018).

The insurgency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, also known as Pakistan's War on Terror, is an ongoing military conflict between Pakistan's Armed Forces and militant groups. Following the United States invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Taliban and members of al-Qaeda infiltrated into the erstwhile FATA of Pakistan to seek refuge. They formed different militant groups including Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as a major militant group, and ultimately established control over seven tribal agencies of erstwhile FATA and four settled districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including Buner, Dir, Shangla, and Swat (Abbas, 2004). The TTP emerged as one of the most lethal group attacking Armed Forces and civilians. Only in the year 2008, twenty nine suicidal attacks by TTP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were recorded resulting in 247 deaths and 695 injuries. Similarly, non-suicidal cases of attacks registered in 2008 were 483 resulting in 533 deaths and 1290 injuries (Khan, 2009). Pakistani Armed Forces launched a series of military campaigns to recapture the areas controlled by militants. These campaigns included *Operation Sherdil*, *Operation Zarb-e-Azab*, *Operation Raah-e-Nijaat*, and *Operation Raad-ul-Fasaad*. As a result of military campaigns from 2007 to 2016, Pakistan successfully recaptured four settled areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and seven tribal agencies.

Though, Pakistan recaptured its lost areas, but, Pashtuns, particularly those living in Waziristan and other districts of the former FATA suffered the most as an ethnic group due to the militant's violence on one hand, and military operations on the other hand. Apart from the death of thousands of Pashtuns in Pakistan's War on Terror and U.S. drone attacks, they also suffered displacement, extrajudicial killings, and forced disappearance. On one hand, Pashtuns are direct victim of Soviet-Afghan war (1979 - 1989) and America's War on Terror; on the other hand, they are negatively stereotyped as violent and terror oriented internationally as well as domestically within Pakistan on the basis of their ethnic similarity with Taliban. Pakistani media has played a worst role in the negative stereotyping of Pashtuns. For example, Pakistani media carefully omitted the mention of Punjabi Taliban until their presence was acknowledged by the government around 2010 and 2011 when police stations in Punjab were attacked (Shams, 2017). Similarly, Pakistani mainstream media and political elites criticized Donald Trump's announcement of partial ban on the entry from certain Muslim countries at a time when Pakistan had gone one step ahead of Trump by profiling its own Pashtun citizens on the basis of their dress and physical attributes. After terrorist attacks in Lahore in 2016, a widespread crackdown had been started against anyone who only 'looked Pashtun or Afghan.' Apart from the crackdown, the police was distributing official and unofficial notices and circulars against the Pashtuns portraying all of them as 'suspected terrorists' (Yousaf, 2017).

The Pashtuns, usually referred to as 'Pathans' in most colonial documents, posed unparalleled resistance to the British Raj during British colonial rule in India. The unfriendly contact between the British and the Pashtuns is evident in the colonial literature, memoirs, travelogues, and administrative documents. As a result, Pashtuns earned tropes of exotic and demonic otherness in colonial India. Many colonial travelogue and literature presented Pashtuns as wild, turbulent, against women, simpleton, and deceitful creatures (Kakar, 2023). America's War on Terror resulted in revival of these tropes about Pashtuns. During the last two decades, the global media, academia, and policy narratives have been using these stereotypes. Pakistani Pashtuns are facing double marginalization as they are negatively stereotyped as terrorist not only by the Western media, but within their own country too. Pashtuns are often depicted as illiterate watchmen or simpleton characters with no intelligence in Pakistani mainstream media, movies and dramas. The late night shows on private TV channels represent Pashtuns as Taliban, violent extremists, and human traffickers (Kakar, 2023).

Recent Urdu dramas on Pakistani TV channels like “*Sang-e-Mah*” (2022), “*Sang-e-Marmar*” (2016), “*Meray Hamnasheen*” (2022) earned millions of views through the distorted image and stereotyping of Pashtun characters and culture. One recent example of portraying Pashtuns as violent is another Urdu drama “*Khaie*” (2024). Similarly, Pakistani movies are no exception in stereotyping Pashtuns as violent and terrorists. Almost all the characters depicted in the movies as terrorists are ethnically Pashtuns. Shoaib Mansoor, a seasoned director, depicted Pashtun culture as the root cause of extremism and violence in Pakistan in his famous movie “*Khuda Kay Liye*” (2007). Another movie, “*Karachi Se Lahore*” (2015) associates Pashtuns with human trafficking and homosexuality. Pashtuns consistent negative stereotyping has created a sense of otherness, discrimination, and alienation in the mind of Pashtuns (Kakar, 2023).

Media and literature across the world and within Pakistan, however, has also responded to the Pashtuns stereotyping and the discrimination they face internationally and domestically. For example, “*My Name is Khan*” (2010) is a Bollywood movie that responds to Islamophobia and Pashtun stereotyping following the 9/11 attacks. The movie is directed by Karan Johar and stars Shahrukh Khan and Kajol in lead roles. After suffering discrimination on the basis of his Pashtun surname, Rizvan Khan (Shahrukh Khan) sets out on a road trip to meet the President of United States and to tell him that “his name is Khan and he is not a terrorist.”

Kamila Shamsie’s *A God in Every Stone* (2014) is also a response to Pashtun stereotyping in the wake of War on Terror. By choosing Peshawar of colonial India as a setting for the plot of her novel, Shamsie tries to reveal a rich cultural and historical link of Pashtuns with the great ancient civilization dating back to Herodotus (484 - 425 BC). In contrast to the modern day tropes of terrorists and extremists associated with Pashtuns, Peshawar has been portrayed in the novel as the center of religious harmony.

Literature Reviews

Sami et al. (2021) in their article, *The Resistance of Unarmed Characters in Shamsie's A God in Every Stone*, highlight the harsh realities of colonialism and war through the study of Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone*. The researchers explore the struggles of weak individuals caught in the crossfire between war, family, and empire. The article aims to explicate the plot construction to highlight resistance of various characters in the colonial era. By using New Criticism theory, the article investigates the role of resistance through characters like Qayyum, Najeeb and Vivian Rose who are oppressed in spite of their loyalty towards the Empire. The article justifies resistance of unarmed Qayyum, who being a loyal subject ultimately feels the oppression of the empire. This sense of awareness of being exploited by invaders plays vital role in expressing resistance in the text. The analysis focuses on New Criticism principles of “text itself,” which emphasize the importance of the text to describe the tragic revelation through the plot and its premises.

Liaqat and Akhtar (2019) in their article, *Repression and Resistance: A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Power Structures in the Novel A God in Every Stone by Kamila Shamsie*, highlight various form of domination and power. The article uses Foucauldian theory of power to shed light on manifestation of dominations by foregrounding Shamsie’s brilliant depiction of power-relation and colonised response to it in the text. According to the researchers, Shamsie’s *A God in Every Stone* narrates two parallel set of stones side by side. On one hand it depicts women like Vivian Rose Spencer, and on the other hand it is story of two brothers, Qayyum and Najeeb and the various form of domination they encounter. The authors maintain that Shamsie portrays the manifestation of power and Resistance through social structure, historical figures, hegemonic structures, individual subjugations, and spatial domination. The title “*A God in Every Stone*” explicates the presence of a tyrant god in every stone of Indo-Pak in the colonial era. The

researchers conclude that the English woman Vivan realizes that every stone of Peshawar is ruled by a tyrant gods/ruler of different religions. Furthermore, the article argues that the character of Scylax being a historical figure, reveals the manipulation of power in the text.

Ayaz et al. (2023) in their research article, "Analyzing Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone: Colonialism and Resistance*," shed light on the importance of nationalism as a serving force during independence movement in the text. The article aim to highlight the undeniable role of nationalism in the context of Caria, Armenia, and Indian subcontinent by focusing on theory of nationalism to highlight national attachment in the text. According to the authors, Shamsie depicts the Indians', Carians', and Armenians' struggle for independence against the power structures. The protagonist Qayyum and Najeeb become the prominent member in Bacha Khan Khudai Khidmatgar movement and struggle to gain freedom. Similarly the Carians and Armenians were unified for the sake of their countries and to attain independence from invaders. Armenians show great resilience and resistance against Ottoman Empire. The article concludes that the nationalistic sentiments became the guiding force for these three nations to gain an autonomous nation for their people and helps to resist imperial power in shape of Persia, the British, and Ottoman Empire. Shamsie portrays how the concept of nationalism unities and motivates these three colonised nations to resist colonisers and to preserve their national heritage.

Naz et al. (2022) in their article, "Manacled Identity of Pashtuns: An Analytical View of Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone*," attempt to analyze Shamsie's novel thematically to explore conditions of Pashtuns, by focusing on their identity and voice in the colonial era. Using Spiavk's theorization of *Can the Subaltern Speak?* the researchers claim that the Pashtuns in colonial era were subalterns who were unable to speak. They have been portrayed in the novel as oppressed and exploited at hands of the empire. Although the Khudai Khidmatgar movement led by Bacha Khan was based on non-violence, yet the Pashtuns were brutally killed by the British army. The article concludes that Shamsie gives voice to Pashtuns in the novel highlighting their struggle in colonial era which ultimately led to independence from the British.

Inam et al. (2020) in their article, *Colonisation and Decolonisation of the Indian Subcontinent: A Colonial Discourse Analysis of A God in Every Stone*, examines the establishment of British Empire in the Indian subcontinent through the help of colonial discourses. Using Homi K. Bhaba's theory "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" as theoretical framework, the article investigates the use of colonial discourses in the novel. The researchers argue that the British Empire had taken its roots in the Indian subcontinent not due to military might but because of colonial discourses. However, the anxiously repetitive nature of the same discourses gave rise to anti-colonial resistance, and ultimately to the collapse of the British Empire.

Khan et al. (2017) in their article, *A Critique of Resistance Shown by Pashtun Leaders to British Raj in Kamila Shamsie's A God in Every Stone*, examine the resistance of Pashtun leaders like Ghaffar Khan and Haji Sahib Taurangzai to the British Raj in colonial India. The article analyzes the parted ways of Haji Sahib's and Bacha Khan's resistance in the light of Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone*. Haji Sahib has been portrayed in the novel fighting battles against the British rulers in tribal areas. On the other hand, Bacha Khan's resistance towards the empire was based on non-violence. The researchers argue that Haji sahib has been first devalued in the novel through Bacha Khan, and then Bacha Khan's political movement in itself has been devalued as the author of the novel believes that social change is more important than political movements. The article concludes that the novel belittles importance of Pashtun leaders' resistance and indirectly justifies the colonisers' claims.

Methodological and Theoretical Framework

The present study is qualitative in nature. Reclaim of Pashtuns' voice has been analyzed in Kamila

Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone* through textual analysis. Textual analysis is a research methodology or a data gathering process for researchers to gather information about the ways other human beings are making sense of the world (McKee, 2003). It is a research methodology that involves interpreting text data and addressing various research questions. It "allows us to see how similar or different the sense-making practices that different people use can be (McKee, 14). Textual analysis can be applied to different types of texts, including written, visual, audio, and digital. A text is anything that we interpret or make meaning from. It can be a book, a television programme, a film, a magazine, a graffiti, an advertisement, a piece of furniture or ornament, and so on (McKee, 2003). The methods used for textual analysis vary depending on the type of text and research question. According to McKee (2003), "when we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text (p.1). The process involves selecting the text, coding the text, analyzing the text, and interpreting the text.

The present study employs Alan McKee's (2003) *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* as a methodological framework for textual analysis. McKee's book frames textual analysis as a qualitative research method to investigate how meaning is made in a context. McKee focuses on the function of texts within culture instead of just what texts say. According to McKee (2003), all texts are polysemic i.e. they are open to multiple meanings. He believes that meaning is not fixed or inherent in the text. He further asserts that the social and cultural context of both the text and the reader should be considered in textual analysis. The analysts, instead of being objective or attached, should know about their interpretive position. According to McKee, while doing textual analysis, we are not interested in deciding the right interpretation, rather, we are interested in finding out "likely interpretation" (p. 63).

The reclaim of voice in the novel has been addressed using Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) as a theoretical framework. Spivak uses the term 'subaltern' for individuals or groups considered inferior in society due to their class, gender, caste, or other reasons. Subaltern, which means 'of inferior rank', is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci for those particular groups in society who are victim of "the hegemony of the ruling classes" (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 186). Spivak's essay critically examines the representation of marginalized groups in postcolonial contexts. Spivak argues that the subaltern is always spoken for by the dominant discourse and that their voice can never be truly heard. Though Spivak has focused on use of the term 'subaltern' for lower class workers and women, it, however, can be used for ethnic groups in certain contexts. The present study explores Pashtuns as subalterns on the basis of their marginalized voice in post-9/11 era.

Results and Discussion

Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone* tells the story of two Pashtun brothers living in colonial India. The plot of the novel covers the time span from 1914 to 1930. Qayyum Gul and Najeeb Gul are the protagonists in the novel living in Peshawar of colonial India. Qayyum is a Lance-Naik in 40th Pathans of British Indian Army who is discharged from the army after losing his eye in World War I while fighting on the front at Vipers, France. Najeeb, the younger brother of Qayyum, is guide to Miss Spencer as a twelve years old boy in first half of the novel. He is being taught by Miss Spencer. The second half of the novel portrays Najeeb as Herodotus of Peshawar who is an Indian Assistant at Peshawar Museum after completing his B.A. in History from Islamia College Peshawar. Miss Spencer is an English archeologist who has come to Peshawar during World War I in search of an ancient Circler which belonged to Scylax, a Greek explorer and historian in 6th BC. She has also worked as an archeologist with her mentor, Tahsin Bey, in the Ottoman Empire before the war, and as a VAD nurse in England when the war started. Both, Qayyum and Najeeb,

are initially loyal subjects of the British Empire and feel proud serving the Empire. As the novel progresses, Qayyum realizes the oppression of Pashtuns at hands of the British Empire. He, however, is not a passive victim of colonial oppression; instead, being an active agent of change he tries to reclaim his agency by resisting the Empire. He joins *The Khudai Khitmatgar* movement led by a Pashtun nationalist leader, Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Bacha Khan) to educate and mobilize Pashtuns against the British. It leads to the massacre of unarmed Pashtun protesters on April 23, 1930 in the Street of Storytellers. The incident is historically known as Kissa Khwani Massacre, in which hundreds of unarmed Pashtuns were killed by the English. Najeeb, who is otherwise not interested in politics, ultimately joins the movement when he finds and wears the Circlet. Miss Spencer goes back to England foreshadowing the freedom of Pakistan and India in 1947.

The study focuses on voice of Pashtuns living in Pakistan as subaltern in the context of War on Terror. Spivak's (1988) *Can the Subaltern Speak?* has been used as the theoretical framework for analysis of Pashtuns' voice. Subalterns are individuals or groups considered inferior in society due to their class, caste, gender, or other reasons (Spivak, 1988). Spivak's essay focuses on various ways through which scholars and media inadvertently reproduce hegemonic structures in their work (Riach, 2017). This study analyzes Pashtuns as subaltern lacking voice and representation since colonial rule in India to the War on Terror.

The novel was published in 2014, the peak time of suicide attacks and bomb blasts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The perpetual militancy and insurgency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has taken the lives of "thousands of people in the Pashtun belt" (Wasai et al., 2019, p. 116). According to *Dawn News* report, more than a hundred people were killed when a tribal Jirga at Ekka Ghund Bazaar, Mohmand Agency, came under attack from the Taliban on July 9, 2010 ("Suicide attacks in Mohmand kill 104," 2010). Similarly, in Darra Adam Khel, forty tribesmen, including prominent elders, were killed when a suicide bomber targeted a Jirga on March 2, 2008 (Shakoor, 2013). In the same way, in September 2016, a suicide bomber targeted a Friday congregation in Payee area of Mohmand Agency in which at least 25 worshipers were killed. (Momand & Ahmad, 2016). The adverse impacts of the War on Terror on Pakistani Pashtuns is also highlighted in title of Pashto poems in the wake of War on Terror. Wasai et al. (2019) states in this regard:

Following the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror, which adversely affected Pashtun land, Pashtu literature has experienced substantial changes. The violence, explosions, suicide attacks, drone strikes, and aerial bombardment on Pashtun areas became dominant subjects in Pashto poetry. '*Pa Jung De Oor Olagee*' (May the war go to Hell), '*Daa Parharoonah Ba Gandal Ghawaree*' (The wounds need to be stitched), '*Ukhkay Ukhkay Musketub*' (The Teary Smile), '*Zamung Pah Kalee Ke Shar Mah Jurrawai*' (Do not create chaos in our village), '*Pah Guldaru De Warawal Orronah*' (Raining bombs on floral valleys) '*Khudaya Daa Ba Sah Kegee*' (O God! what will happen now) '*Da Baarudo Pah Loogo Ke*' (In the smoke of explosives) are but a few examples of poems composed by Pashtun poets in the wake of War on Terror (p. 20).

The same year was also the peak time of Pashtuns' stereotyping as extremists and terrorists in both international and Pakistani media. Pashtuns' negative stereotyping started in the wake of War on Terror which was initially waged against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001. The Oxford Dictionary (2005) defines stereotype as "a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality and may cause hurt and offence." Since, most of the Taliban are ethnically Pashtuns, it led to the stereotyping of all Pashtuns as terrorists in the national and international media. Western media and Hollywood movies started depicting terrorists wearing shalwar kameez, the traditional dress of Pashtuns. Rehman et al. (2017) asserts in this regard:

The term 'Pashtun' is an ethnonym, idealized for its association with bravery, dignity, love of honour, and hospitality. However, the term began to lose its ideal shades after 9/11. The cause has its connection with violence, misogynist attitude, suicide, and terrorism erroneously attributed to it in the print and non-print media of the West (p. 41).

Once created by the British Raj's historians as colonial tropes about Pashtuns, these stereotypes have been revived and reproduced during the last two decades by global media, academia, and policy narratives (Kakar, 2023). Pakistan in itself is the victim of the War on Terror; but, Pashtuns as an ethnic group in Pakistan faced double marginalization: internationally as well as domestically within Pakistan. Pashtuns are often depicted in Pakistani media as violent and terrorists after the War on Terror. Apart from the deaths and displacement of thousands of Pakistani Pashtuns in the wake of War on Terror, the Pashtuns, including the researcher himself, suffered emotional and psychological pain due to their negative stereotyping in the international world as well as within Pakistan. Spivak's (1988) calls it "epistemic violence," which is a violence inflicted through thought, speech, writing, and representation rather than actual physical harm (p. 280).

By choosing Peshawar of colonial India as a setting for her novel, Shamsie responds to the negative stereotypes about Pashtuns since colonial rule to the War on Terror by making the readers glance into the rich history of Pashtuns. The three major characters in the novel are: Qayyum Gul, a Pashtun Lance-Naik in British Indian Army; Najeeb Gul, Qayyum's younger brother and Indian Assistant at Peshawar Museum; and Vivian Rose Spencer, an English archeologist who visits Peshawar in 1915 during World War I in search of an ancient Circllet. Shamsie tries to reclaim Pashtuns' voice by representing the nuanced image of Pashtuns through their portrayal as peace-loving, cultured, and talented people. In contrast to the current stereotyping of Pashtuns as extremists, intolerant, and uncivilized, an attempt has been made in the novel to reclaim Pashtuns' voice through their historical linkage with an ancient civilization and by portraying the Peshawar of colonial India as center of religious and cultural harmony. Kaur (2014), in her review of the novel, notes:

In evoking Peshawar's fragrant orchards, storied bazars, as well as its layered history as a once thriving seat of Buddhism, the novel complicates the one-sided representation of Afghanistan in the Western media today as a strife-torn region embroiled in the 'War on Terror.' By presenting Peshawar through a historical lens as an ancient city which has been an important part of several great empires, including the Gandhara, Kushana and Mughal empires, and the Hellenic empire under Alexander the Great, among others, *A God In Every Stone* forces the reader to take a long view and re-vision the city and its people as complex, multi-layered, cultured (p. 2).

The plot of the novel covers the time span from 1914 to 1930. Qayyum Gul and Najeeb Gul are the protagonists in the novel living in Peshawar of colonial India. Qayyum is a Lance-Naik in 40th Pathans of British Indian Army who is discharged from the army after losing his eye in World War I while fighting on the front at Vipers, France. Najeeb, the younger brother of Qayyum, is guide to Miss Spencer as a twelve years old boy in first half of the novel. He is being taught by Miss Spencer. The second half of the novel portrays Najeeb as Herodotus of Peshawar who is an Indian Assistant at Peshawar Museum after completing his B.A. in History from Islamia College Peshawar. Miss Spencer is an English archeologist who has come to Peshawar during World War I in search of an ancient Circllet which belonged to Scylax, a Greek explorer and historian in 6th BC. She has also worked as an archeologist with her mentor, Tahsin Bey, in the Ottoman Empire before the war, and as a VAD nurse in England when the war started. Both, Qayyum and Najeeb, are initially loyal subjects to the British Empire and feel proud serving the

Empire. As the novel progresses, Qayyum realizes the oppression of Pashtuns at hands of the British Empire. He, however, is not a passive victim of colonial oppression; instead, being an active agent of change, he tries to reclaim his agency by resisting the Empire. He joins *The Khudai Khitmatgar* movement led by a Pashtun nationalist leader, Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Bacha Khan) to educate and mobilize Pashtuns against the British. It leads to the massacre of unarmed Pashtun protesters on April 23, 1930 in the Street of Storytellers. The incident is historically known as Kissa Khwani Massacre, in which hundreds of unarmed Pashtuns were killed by the English. Shamsie's portrayal of Pashtuns as non-violent, cultured, and civilized people, and Peshawar as a centre of religious and cultural harmony is a testament to the fact that Pashtuns' stereotyping in the wake of War on Terror as violent, uncivilized, and extremists is not based on facts.

Pakistan as a country is one of the leading victims of America's War on Terror. Pashtuns, as an ethnic group in Pakistan, have suffered the most in the War on Terror. As per the study conducted by Pakistan Political Science Association (PPSA), out of the fifty thousand Pakistani civilians who lost their lives in the War on Terror since 2003, an estimated 37, 211 were Pashtuns (Safdar, 2018). Pashtuns living in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have particularly faced the most trouble and agony in Pakistan's War on Terror. In spite of being the direct victim of the War on Terror resulting in the deaths of thousands of Pashtuns and displacement of millions; Pashtun's voice has been marginalized by Western narratives through their stereotyping of Pashtuns as extremists and terrorists. The traditional dress of Pashtuns is portrayed in Hollywood movies and Western media as symbol of terrorism. Unfortunately, Pashtuns' stereotyping is not limited to the international media only, but, being double marginalized, they are negatively stereotyped within Pakistani media too. They have often been portrayed in the wake of War on Terror as violent, extremists, and terrorists in Pakistani movies and TV dramas. Kakar (2023) notes that Pakistani films and dramas seldom represents Pashtun characters with civilized attributes. They are often depicted as low wages illiterate watchmen or simpleton idiot with no intelligence. The late night shows on private TV channels represent Pashtuns as violent extremists, human traffickers, and as Taliban. Shamsie has tried to reclaim Pashtun's voice in *A God in Every Stone* by painting Peshawar as a center of religious and cultural harmony and by portraying Pashtun characters as peace loving people. Through the use of subversive practices, this novel responds to the massacre and stereotyping of Pashtuns in the wake of War on Terror. Similarly, by contesting colonial discourse and revealing the double standards of the West, the novel responds to marginalization of Pashtuns' voice since colonial era to the War on Terror.

By revealing the double standards of the British Empire, Shamsie has tried to counter colonial discourse which represented the English as civilized and Pashtuns as barbaric, exotic and uncivilized. The counter of colonial discourse in the novel can be taken as counter of dominant Western discourses in the twenty-first century which represent the modern day Pashtuns as extremists and terrorists. Apart from the aesthetic purposes of the novel as a story of love, struggle, and valor in colonial India; Shamsie's purpose is also to respond to the attacks on modern day Pashtuns living in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The attacks included both attacks on their lives and properties, and also verbal attacks, which were at peak from 2008 to 2014. By building her plot around Qissa Khwani Massacre of Pashtuns in the colonial India in 1930, Shamsie is indirectly trying to remind the continuity of Pashtuns' massacre in the twenty-first century in form of War on Terror. The people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were massacred almost on daily basis in severe suicide attacks and bomb blasts from 2008 to 2014. Only in the year 2008, twenty nine suicide attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were recorded resulting in 247 deaths and 695 injuries. Similarly, non-suicidal cases of attacks registered in 2008 were 483

resulting in 533 deaths and 1290 injuries (Khan 2009). Pashtuns' massacre on a small scale is continued even to this day.

Colonial discourse considered Pashtuns as violent people who fought over little things. Similarly, the discourse represented the English as protector of Peshawar from barbaric Pashtuns in the tribal areas. Miss Spencer, being the victim of colonial discourse, also thought like that when she came to Peshawar as a young girl. One night she is standing in her garden looking towards the distant mountains of Peshawar. She imagines Tahsin Bey standing behind her with his fingers making circles on her skin. Tahsin Bey was her father's friend and her mentor when she was working with him on an archeological site in Labraunda, Turkey, before World War I. Later, she fell in love with him, but she had to leave for England as the war started. The outer circle she imagines is the tribal areas where she thinks men killed each other before breakfast over petty things like, a chicken, a bad dream, or even a smile. Getting further in i.e. in the second circle, she imagines "the British troops protecting Peshawar" from the people of tribal areas (Shamsie, 2014, p. 124). This passage is an example of colonial tropes about Pashtuns the way Miss Spencer has been made to think of them. Similarly, Miss Spencer has been made to think by the colonial discourse that the British troops are protecting Peshawar from the people of tribal areas as if they are some bloodthirsty animals. However, the reality is completely different. In the name of protection, Pashtuns have been enslaved within walls who are not allowed to leave the Walled City as portrayed in the novel in the subsequent chapters.

Second instance of colonial tropes about Pashtuns as portrayed in the novel is in Qayyum's thoughts about his own self as a Pashtun. Pashtuns are considered inferior since the time of colonial India till this day. Certain colonial tropes were attached with the Pashtuns which have been revived in the twenty first century by 9/11 attacks and subsequent War on Terror. Shamsie has highlighted the inferior position of Pashtun in the novel. When Qayyum gets to know about Najeeb's lesson from Miss Spenser, he is worried about his brother as he is in his adulthood changing from boy to man. Qayyum stops him from going to Miss Spenser as he knows the inferior position of Pashtuns. His thoughts have been narrated in the novel as he thinks that even a Pashtun honoured with Victoria Cross could not give him the right "to deserve" the attention of an English woman (Shamsie, 2014, p. 169). The passage shows inferior position of Pashtuns in the colonial India who had no right to deserve an Englishwoman's attention even if that Pashtun is honoured with Victoria Cross, the greatest award in the colonial India. Unfortunately, the same inferior position of Pashtuns can be seen in 2014, the year of publication of the novel. They are being stereotyped as terrorists, and made fun in Pakistani media by portraying them as doing petty jobs.

The third instance of colonial tropes about Pashtuns as violent people has been portrayed in the novel through Miss Spencer's conversation with Mr. Forbes. Back to the Peshawar after fifteen years, Miss Spenser gets to know from Mr. Forbes about the unfortunate incident that happened in the Walled City. The Walled City, as portrayed in the novel, is the city of Peshawar separated from the cantonment by a railway track. Shamsie has created two different worlds side by side. The Walled City has been portrayed in the second half of the chapter like a prison where the Pashtuns live. The Cantonment has been described in the novel as Najeeb, a twelve years old boy, saw it while coming back from Peshawar Museum. The streets were wide with single-storied houses surrounded by gardens, barracks for soldiers, and the Governor's House with large gardens like a park was opposite to the Museum. Najeeb has always felt that he did not belong to this place. It's after Miss Spenser that he has developed belonging to this place as he thinks that after Miss Spenser's arrival, this place no more seems like a place in which "he didn't belong" (Shamsie, 2014, p. 157). Najeeb's feeling of not belonging to place in his own city

is a question to ponder over. The unfortunate incident was the massacre of unarmed Pashtuns in the Street of Storytellers, which is historically known as “Kissa Khwani massacre”. Outside the Walled City everything was fine as the evening wore on and Mrs. Forbes thinks it is “perfectly pleasant” (Shamsie, 2014, p. 274). Later when Miss Spencer is alone in the Garden listening to two English who “delivered warnings of the Murderous Pathans Awakened” (Shamsie, 2014, p. 276). Unarmed Pashtuns are being called ‘murderous’ by the English. In reality it were the English who are murderous as portrayed in the novel. This passage shows colonial tropes about Pashtuns. The younger of the two men further called the protest of unarmed Pashtuns as ingratitude. He said that apart from the roads and the railways they have built, they have kept India in a state of peace. Keeping India in a state of peace for so long was the greatest of all gifts. If the Indians have forgotten to recognize it as the greatest of all gifts is simply “ingratitude” (Shamsie, 2014, p. 277). This passage can hardly be interpreted in any other sense than just one i.e. colonizing India was the greatest of all gifts according to colonial discourse.

Shamsie has tried to reclaim Pashtuns’ voice as civilized, cultured and peace loving people through the use of subversive practices such as linking Pashtuns with ancient civilization, portrayal of Pashtuns as cultured and peace loving people, and by representing Peshawar as the centre of religious harmony during the colonial rule. Pashtuns’ linkage to an ancient civilization has been portrayed in the novel through description of Peshawar. As narrated in the novel, Peshawar has been described in the novel as the city of Caspatyrus once. It was a place from where Scylax started his great voyage down the Indus. It is a place from where journeys “begin and end” (Shamsie, 2014, p. 46). It has been described like this in a Christmas card sent to Miss Spencer by Tahsin Bey. She has been asked to read D. B. Spooner’s detailed account of the excavation on the outskirts of Peshawar at a place called Shahji-ki-Dheri. Tahsin Bey has asked Miss Spencer to go to Peshawar to see the Sacred Casket of Kanishka discovered by Spooner. As her mother was not in favour of Miss Spencer’s working as a nurse during war, she is glad that her daughter is going, yet asks her why she wishes to go specifically to Peshawar. Miss Spencer replies that there is two and a half thousand years of “history” beneath the soil of Peshawar (Shamsie, 2014, p. 52). These passages from the novel show a link of Pashtuns with an ancient civilization. It means that Shamsie has tried to portray Pashtuns as civilized people who were stereotyped as uncivilized in 2014, the year of publication of the novel. Similarly, Peshawar valley has been described as part of an ancient civilization on Viv’s first glance at the valley from train compartment in 1915. As she looks at Peshawar, she thinks that it was here, “two and a half thousand years ago”, from where Scylax sailed in on the muddied arm of Cophen (Kabul) River (Shamsie, 2014, p. 81).

Another subversive technique used by Shamsie to reclaim Pashtuns’ voice as civilized, cultured, and peace loving people is through the portrayal of Peshawar as the centre of religious and cultural harmony. Pashtuns were stereotyped as extremists in the second decade of Twenty First century. Shamsie actually tries to tell the world that how can the people be extremists whose capital was once the centre of religious and cultural harmony. The first instance of Peshawar’s portrayal in the novel as centre of cultural harmony is through the different languages spoken in Peshawar of colonial India. Miss Spencer asks Najeeb about his language, and he answers that at home they speak Hindko. They are more Peshawari than Pathan, but they are also Pathan. But people of Peshawar speaks both Hindko and Pashto and many people can speak Urdu and also English and “every language of the world someone here can speak” (Shamsie, 2014, p. 100). Religious and cultural harmony has been further stressed in the novel in Najeeb’s description of Peshawar as he tells Miss Spencer that “that man is from Tashkent, and that one from Tibet; there’s a Punjabi, that’s an Afridi Pathan and that one is Sikh and those two Hindu” (Shamsie,

2014, p. 100). Through these people from different cultures and religions living together peacefully in Peshawar, Shamsie has tried to reclaim Pashtuns' voice against their stereotyping as extremists and terrorists.

The second instance of portrayal of Peshawar as a centre of religious harmony is through the title of the novel i.e. a 'god' in every stone. The novel has been titled so because the onlookers in Peshawar could see god of one or another religion carved in stone when they looked around. As narrated in the novel, there was the statue of Buddha everywhere a traveler looked. It was in an age when the people of Peshawar could see "the god in every stone" (Shamsie, 2014, p. 102). On one hand, it links Peshawar with ancient civilizations, but on the other hand it reveals religious harmony in Peshawar. How can the people be extremists and intolerant to other religions who have grown up seeing gods of different religions carved in stones around them. Yet, Pashtuns have been stereotyped as extremists and intolerant to other religions. Through the title of her novel, Shamsie has tried to reclaim Pashtuns' voice as an ethnic group who have seen a god in every stone.

The third instance of Peshawar's portrayal as a centre of religious and cultural harmony is through the rich history of Peshawar. Pashtuns' rich history has been revealed in the passage where Miss Spencer takes Najeeb to Peshawar Museum for the first time. The boy takes interest in everything he sees, and asks questions the way Miss Spencer herself used to ask Tahsin Bey when she was almost his age and Tahsin Bey had taken her to British Museum. Pointing towards different statues, Najeeb kept asking questions, trying to confirm that all the statues and artefacts are from Peshawar. Miss Spencer responds that yes, all of it are from Peshawar. She further said that they have left it there instead of taking them back to London so "you can see your own history" (Shamsie, 2014, p. 108). The Passage shows the rich history of Pashtuns. Similarly, Peshawar has been portrayed as a centre of religious harmony through the statues of various gods and goddesses in the gallery of Peshawar Museum excavated at "Shahji-ki-Dheri and Takht-i-Bahi" (Shamsie, 2014, p. 108). The different gods mentioned in the passage have been excavated from Pashtun lands showing a greater influence of these figures on Pashtuns. For example, taking Buddha's influence on Pashtuns, the Pashtuns have been portrayed in the novel as peace loving people.

The final instance of Peshawar's representation as a centre of religious harmony is through Najeeb's imaginative creation of a new historical figure, "Maya." Coming back to Peshawar after fifteen years on the day of Pashtuns' massacre in the Street of Story Tellers, Miss Spencer visits the excavation site at Shahji-ki-Dheri, which was supposed to be called "the Spencer excavation." However, no one was there, not even a watchman, as the excavation had become victim to the trouble in Peshawar (Shamsie, 2014, p. 278). She descended into the trench, and standing there around the base of the statue she looked at the figure of Buddha. Then she crouched and pressed the back of her hand against the soil, the exact place the Circllet should have been if it were really here. She did not find the Circllet as it has already been found by Najeeb a day before, and pulling her hand away she thought that the Circllet wasn't really here but her main purpose in coming was for Najeeb whose imagination could trace the Circllet through thousand years from Alexander the Great to an unnamed girl till he gave her a name, Maya, which "was Buddhist and Greek and Hindu and Muslim in origin" (Shamsie, 2014, p. 279). This passage can have two different interpretations. One interpretation is that Pashtuns have been portrayed as champions of religious harmony. As Najeeb's imaginatively created girl has been named which is Buddhist, Greek, Hindu, and Muslim in origin; similarly, the Pashtuns too have all these influences. These influences make Pashtuns the only ethnic group who can be anything but not extremists or intolerant to others' religion. Because of these influences, they

can be the only ethnic group that can live in a religious harmony in the best way. Yet modern day Pashtuns are labelled as extremist, which is against the Pashtun's nature. The second interpretation of the above passage can be that if a gun is handed over to a Pashtun the world will have a militant; however, if pen is handed over, the world will have an intellectual like Najeeb Gul, Ghani Khan, Hamza Baba, and Parishan Khattak to name a few. In case of Najeeb, he has been given a pen in hand, and portrayed as Herodotus of Peshawar. In case of the modern day Pashtuns, they have been given guns in hands during the Soviet-Afghan war, and the result is twenty years war in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021, and in Pakistan from 2004 to this day.

Conclusion

Although Shamsie has tried to reclaim voice of Pashtuns as peace loving and non-violent people, yet, the situation of Pakistani Pashtuns has remained the same many years after the publication of the novel. Spivak concludes in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* that the subaltern "cannot" speak (p. 308). They are never able to represent themselves because they are always spoken for by those in positions of power. Further, even if they do speak, they are not heard. Spivak understands speaking as a transaction between a listener and a speaker. Pashtuns' negative stereotyping in the national as well as in the international media did not stop even after publication of *A God in Every Stone* in 2014. Analysis of Pakistani Pashtun's voice in *A God in Every Stone* reveals that Pashtuns as a subaltern ethnic group are misrepresented by prevailing discourses. The War on Terror played worst role in revival of colonial tropes regarding Pashtuns. As a result, Pashtuns became victims of negative stereotyping in the wake of War on Terror both in national and international media. Shamsie's reclaim of Pashtuns' voice has not been heard as their subaltern situation remained the same many years after publication of the novel in 2014. Pashtuns are misrepresented and negatively stereotyped as extremists and terrorists in the national and international media to this day.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that other novels or literary texts may also be explored to understand how other writers tackle the reclaim of voice in the wake of post-9/11 sociocultural and geopolitical scenarios. Similarly, the researcher recommends legislation in the National Assembly of Pakistan against negative stereotyping of Pashtuns in Pakistani media to help stop epistemic violence faced by Pakistani Pashtuns.

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