Original Article

Pashtun memoirs of war from Af-Pak: Literary resistance and the struggle for peace in Ghulam Qadir Khan Daur's *Cheegha—The call* and Qais Akbar Omar's *A fort of nine towers*

JHSS
1-16

Vol. 29 (1), 2021

Aiman Khattak

Abstract

The Durand Line cuts through tribal lands of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pashtun tribes on both sides of this border have centuries-old mutual ties which go deeper than sect, religion, land or race. Despite partition in mid-twentieth century, both regions have retained a proximal relationship in global socio-politics. Ranging from Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to 9/11, one finds this relationship frequently being reiterated and reinforced. This paper attempts to highlight the firm bond the indigenous people of these regions, collectively seen as Af-Pak, hold along with the similar challenges they faced during the "war on terror". It will also stress that the particular way of life of Pashtuns draws the two regions together, but the same way of life also leaves them vulnerable to foreign interventionism. Anglophone writers from both countries have drawn attention to this shared fate through their post-war narratives, including novels, memoirs, autobiographies, and journalistic writing. These writers include Khaled Hosseini, Nadeem Aslam, Ghulam Qadir Khan Daur, Qais Akbar Omar and M. Salahuddin Khan, to name just a few. This paper, however, specifically brings forth some of the intricacies of the American "war on terror" that Daur and Omar relate in their memoirs: *Cheegha—The Call* (2014) and *A Fort of Nine Towers* (2013) respectively. Most importantly, it will highlight the way these writers have written back to resist the notion of tribal terrorism (which got popular after 9/11) by bearing witness to the peaceful indigenous laws governing Pashtun tribal life.

Keywords: Af-Pak, Pashtun, 'war on terror', memoir, tribal terrorism

Correspondent Author: Aiman Khattak, Doctoral Scholar at the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies, The University of Warwick, UK. E-mail: a.khattak@warwick.ac.uk

Af-Pak and the "war on terror": An overview

After the collapse of the Twin Towers on 9/11, the Bush administration turned its attention towards possible hordes of Islamic fundamentalists residing at different locations in the Muslim world. Afghanistan was first targeted for retribution since it had given safe haven to Taliban and Al Qaeda members for long. The U.S. troops were sent to topple the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In the presidential address on October 7' 2001, Bush administration announced the formal initiation of the military operation, code-named as *Operation Enduring Freedom*, as part of a wider war against terror to eradicate enemies of freedom. "We defend not only our precious freedoms", said President Bush, "but also the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear…" (Bush). The "war on terror" thus formally began with the bombing of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan was bombed, but Pakistan has also had to face dire consequences over the years (Ranjan 457). From the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to the ongoing "war on terror" against Islamic extremism since 9/11, the geo-strategic position of Pakistan in South Asia along with the resultant American government's interest in the region compels it to retain strong allying ties with America (Tickell 22). Backed by the U.S.[i], Pakistan sent the *mujahideen* to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan that resulted in mass migration of Afghan refugees across the border into Pakistan. It also joined the U.S. in their war against terror after 9/11, provided land routes to NATO forces and supplies being sent to Afghanistan, submitted to America's unmanned drone strikes since June 2004 over its tribal areas, and also launched a massive internal military operation (in 2014) against terrorist groups hiding in the tribal areas.

Post-9/11 studies often refer to Afghanistan and Pakistan together because of cross-border movement and connectivity of extremist groups, like Al-Qaeda, between these countries, across the porous Durand Line. This was, and remains, precisely one of the main reasons that the U.S. has had its eye on this region for long. Vast expanses of land on both sides of the Durand Line accommodate great Pashtun tribal belts whose particular way of life has put them in a rattletrap over the years (Ahmed 199). It is an understanding of these tribal belts that seems to be crucial for all or any counter-terrorism strategies designed either by the U.S. or the United Nations (Khan 6). This seems to have caught notice of subsequent American governments from Bush administration to recent ones.

Bush administration first initiated the formal campaign against terrorism in the region which involved a clear offensive against Afghanistan, while for Pakistan it set a different course as mentioned earlier. Both the countries, however, displayed similar crises during this period including terror attacks on civilian populations, suicide bombings, drugs and arms smuggling, Islamic fundamentalism, refugee crisis, internal displacement of people, etc. Bush's successor, Barack Obama, therefore first identified the need to see the region as a whole, an idea later translated into his counter-terrorism strategy for Af-Pak in March 2009.

Obama put forward his nascent Af-Pak strategy on 27th March 2009, announcing a US/NATO troops surge in Afghanistan, a collective (regional) approach towards combating terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and collaborative efforts from all major powers of this region—China, India, and Russia (Mahapatra 1003; Fischer 3). This strategy appears to hinge on the realisation that it is potentially difficult for any one country to go solo in the fight against terrorism within this tense region. The complexity arises primarily due to the porous nature of the Durand Line from where members of terrorist or extremist groups have been reported to spill out from Afghanistan into the Federally Administered Tribal regions of Pakistan and also encroach further to eastern areas of the country (Mahapatra 1004; Khan 25; Ahmed 200).

The campaign in Afghanistan was transformed from 'counter-terrorism' to 'counter-insurgency', which held the "clear, hold, build and engage" (Khan 2)

strategy for this region, specifically the Pashtun tribal belt on both sides of the border, rather than open war like that of the Bush regime. Even though Obama's Af-Pak policy appeared to be somewhat advantageous for the region as a whole, still the intervention of major powers in the region was considered as a threat to these countries' borders and sovereignty. Also, it was found that the troops surge led to a boost in militarisation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderland by converting it into a garrison zone (Khan 7) and consequently an expansion in the "theatre of war" (Fischer 12). The number of drone strikes in tribal areas of Pakistan increased fourfold during the Obama regime and aid was provided based on Pakistan's performance in fighting terrorism (Khan 3; Ahmed 193). The strategy also stated that a "civilian surge" will replace the "troops surge" once the region is clear, with humanitarian reconstruction and rehabilitation projects to be primarily headed by USAID (Khan 13-14). Obama's counter-insurgency strategy for Af-Pak started off with good aspirations, including an effort to win the 'hearts and minds' of the civilian people of this region, yet it remains uncertain whether the region has been transformed in a good way.

After Obama's two consecutive terms of governance, Trump got elected as president in December 2016, and came up with his own policy in August 2017. A few significant deviations from Obama's Af-Pak approach were seen in the 'South Asia' policy of Trump. First, unlike Obama's approach, Pakistan was seen as a perpetrator of terrorism in the region rather than a stakeholder in fighting it (Jash 4). Second, this new strategy aimed to "avoid losing rather than winning in Afghanistan" (Tourangbam 5) after about sixteen years of inconclusive war over there and American frustration running high (Pathak 13; Mahapatra 1004). Since more fundamental groups, (Daesh, for instance) were seen to have risen in the country so any reconciliation talks with the Taliban were not prioritised in this policy. Third, the troops surge was to continue in Afghanistan with no mention of America pulling out of there.

I find all three administrations to have lacked coherent knowledge of the internal politics and regional ties that form the layout of the Af-Pak region. It is due to this widening epistemological gap which has caused failure to secure peace and stability here. One of the primary reasons for this gap is the failure to understand the border tribes which are considered to house and give safe passages to terrorists. The region has variously been called rogue area, savage frontier, rugged terrain, and brutal borderland. Terrorists have lived and passed through these lands, but the reasons and/or causes behind this hard fact are not known. I consider this knowledge to be crucial to eradicating terror in the region and thus ending war.

A closed textual analysis of Daur and Omar's narratives of resistance

With the premise set in the previous section, I set out to discover and present a deeper understanding of the Af-Pak region, most particularly of its Pashtun border tribes, as recorded by the region's indigenous literary writers. For this purpose, I have selected two compelling auto-biographical and fictional memoirs from the Af-Pak region: Qais Akbar Omar's (Afghan) *A Fort of Nine Towers* (2013) and Ghulan

Qadir Khan Daur's (Pakistani) *Cheegha—The Call* (2014). Both writers have lived in their native regions through the entire course of the "war on terror" years and have personally witnessed, as well as have been the victims of, the horrific accounts of war they retell. Through an in-depth critical and closed textual analysis of these two literary texts, I try to find answers to my primary research questions: How does indigenous literature from the Af-Pak region reflect the socio-political situation that led to tribal Pashtun identity being equated with terrorism on an international level? How does this literature respond to this unilateral negative profiling of tribal Pashtuns across the world?

I take Priyamwada Gopal's chapter entitled "Of Capitalism and Critique: Af-Pak Fiction in the Wake of 9/11"[ii] as my initial frame of reference. Gopal talks of Af-Pak fiction and its writers as having gained public attention and popularity in the aftermath of 9/11. An important reason behind this popularity is that "the address of anglophone literature from predominantly non-anglophone contexts is often necessarily transnational, and at least partially directed at an English-speaking readership located elsewhere" (22). I find this idea crucial to my research because I find the anglophone Af-Pak literature to be directed at a wider global readership, intending to convey some deeper socio-political realities of this region, along with a desire to gain a state of peaceful co-existence with the rest of the world, which otherwise go either ignored or misrepresented. This is exactly what Ghulam Qadir Khan Daur pinpoints in his memoir: "People responsible for taking decisions effecting millions are so misinformed about the ground realities" (13), says Daur. The memoir thus intends to challenge and rectify the misrepresentation.

Daur sets out to show us the real face of Waziristan[iii] in his *Cheegha: The Call*. It is a memoir about the Waziristan agency of Pakistan which shares a border with Afghanistan and is home to a large number of Pushtun tribes. He takes us to the very heart of this society. We meet his family and those living in his village Darpa Khel in North Waziristan Agency. We become familiar with individuals within the tribe and with the members of his extended family. We are also introduced to the essential features of tribal society. In addition, we are informed of the way the peaceful lives of these tribal people were deteriorated because of foreign intervention since the Cold War era. In the writers' case particularly, he and his family were driven out of their ancestral home during the military operation and drone strikes in their area (as part of the "war on terror") to seek refuge in another city, just as Omar's (the other writer I refer twin this study) family was driven out of their ancestral home in Kabul. They could never return to their house afterwards and this left Daur's parents (elders) devastated. Most importantly, Daur introduces the Pushtun code of life to his readers, *Pakhtunwali*. This way of life, according to him, is under threat of eradication due to military operations conducted by the home state as well as discriminatory attitude against them at the international level since 9/11 due to the connection of this region with terrorism, militancy and extremism.

A Fort of Nine Towers (2013), the memoir by an Afghan writer, is a tale of hope and longing piercing through endless regimes of tyranny, violence, sacrifice, and chaos. It is a first person narrative told by Qais Akbar Omar, a Pashtun who grew

up in Kabul[iv] during most of the warring period[v] of Afghanistan. Qais narrates the very sad transformation of Afghanistan, especially his hometown Kabul. He remembers Kabul as a place where kids flew kites on rooftops, women worked to earn money, people grew beautiful gardens, and extended families ate their meals, told stories, arranged marriages and lived together. In his memory, it has now become a country ramshackle with flying "rockets", "dead bodies" (40), "stumps and splinters" (53) and civil war. Both women and men have been confined to their homes due to invasion of the country by Soviets, different warring factions, Taliban and then Americans, irreparable familial divides have been induced by death, loss, deprivation, starvation and, simply the endless struggle for survival. In this story, readers come to know how the young Qais loses some very important and dear relations to war over the years in Afghanistan; for instance, his grandfather who was laid to rest with a broken heart and his cousin Wakeel who lost his life to a stray rocket. It is the story of Qais's family, including his many aunts, uncles and cousins, fleeing from their ancestral home to an old fort on the outskirts of Kabul to save themselves from open war, and of his father's continuing struggle to leave the country along with his family. Yet, Qais also shows an Afghanistan which is replete with hospitable people who hunger to be kind to others. Amidst the fighting, Qais finds a deaf and mute carpet-weaver who teaches him something that later becomes his profession and bread and butter to his family—carpet-weaving. Qais sums up the trials of the Afghans as:

> "In the time before the fighting, before the rockets, before the warlords and their false promises, before the sudden disappearance of so many people we knew to graves or foreign lands, before the Taliban and their madness, before the smell of death hung daily in the air and the ground was soaked in blood, we lived well." (Omar 9)

The pushtun way of life—indigenous perspectives

There have been some attempts to record the history, culture and pattern of life of the Pashtuns. Most of these, however, were written by foreigners rather than by native people. Sir Olaf Caroe, in 1958 for example, penned down a detailed history of the Pashtun nation in which he talked of the earliest Pashtuns who walked the earth. He traces out the Pashtun's ancestral origins as far back as 550 B.C. This shows the deep historical roots that this brave nation shares with the land through time and space. However, Caroe, just like others from the West, shows the pushtuns to be mythical and mystic. He says that "in a word the truth is that the history of the Pathans has never been unrolled. There are tribal annals, there is legend, there is myth" (Caroe xiv). He also believes it his good fortune to have compiled a detailed history of the pashtuns from some of the earliest traces available. According to him, this is difficult work to have been accomplished, since he believes that "it is a part of the magic of the Frontier" (xxii). There are other similar examples of writers from the West trying to discover ethnic and historic dimensions of the Pashtun tribes, an aptitude to which the significant incident of 9/11 rendered an even greater momentum.

It is disappointing to see that the honorable, innocent and strong Pashtun came to be defined as a terrorist, extremist, fundamentalist and radical activist after 9/11. This paper, on the other hand, finds Daur and Omar's memoirs as good attempts by indigenous writers to record their own history and way of life in a positive light, and present it to the world. It is important to note here that the Pashtun's way of life is '*pakhtunwali*' of which religion Islam is only a part. This means that coming from the average Pashtun, religion will not signify as a precursor to radical activism (as considered by outsiders) rather as a day-to-day component of his/her lifestyle. Daur's memoir grieves over the fact that tribal Pashtuns have been "robbed of the two things " they "have lived for", their "culture and religion", amidst a battle that they have been fighting for others and yet they are not given their due respect and recognition in the world (17).

The Pashtun nation has a deep-rooted culture and historicity. It has a rich socio-cultural heritage, being among the oldest cultures of all. It has communal ties as strong as a rope woven out of metal. Its family system is enviable for its well-built relationships which is best manifested during times of distress. "When it comes to owning and protecting, especially the weak, (and) the whole Khel becomes one big family", says Daur about his tribe (Daur 41). A similar aptitude among the Afghan Pashtuns is seen in Omar's *A Fort of Nine Towers* when his family flees from Kabul to seek refuge at Tashkurghan, Bamyan, Kunduz, Mazar, Samangan, Mazar again, and finally, Kabul. They were "treated very well in Bamyan by everyone there" (Omar 167). When any villagers passed them during their travels, and found that they were strangers, they "made salaams*",* *"*shook…hands*"* and *"*invited…to their houses" in a very "hospitable and sincere" manner (199). In addition, the relationship of these people to their motherland is too secure and complicated to be either broken or easily understood. "Our land is our mother. We don't let strangers invade our land. It's our duty to protect her", says Omar's father (368). Daur also emphasises the significance of land in the Pakhtun culture by saying that "khawra, land, to the tribesmen is sacred; it is termed as the lap of mother" (43).

Pashtun people are hospitable, strong, protective, loving, caring, pure, welcoming, generous, open, and friendly. Daur says that he has tried to "take the reader into tribal life, to live and talk to a poor and proud people and to know the softer side of the tribal's life" (14). Omar, on the other hand, doesn't talk of Afghan Pashtun culture as explicitly as we can see in Daur's *Cheegha*, but still there are a number of instances where the reader is introduced to a deeper understanding of the Pashtun tradition and code of life. The Pashtuns usually have extended families that live together with an elderly person as the centre of the family who, in the writer's case, is his grandfather. Omar says, "the heart of our world is my grandfather's house" (10). In their culture, "pashtun sons must obey their fathers" (11), food is always at plenty for everybody including guests even in hard times (27, 63) as it is believed that "no need should go unattended" (Daur 103), and they also "never forget" (Omar 3) when somebody is kind to them.

The Pashtun nation is known, by those who know them, for the strong hospitality coursing through their veins. They provide shelter and saftey even to

their own enemies if the enemy knocks at their door to seek it. This hospitality was what led the pashtun tribes of Pakistan to harbour lots and lots of Afghan migrants (Daur 332) during the U.S.-Soviet war. The Afghan pashtuns are also equally hospitable. Despite being raved by war for decades, they are still generous enough to forgive their offenders and even befriend them. For instance, Omar, in *A Fort of Nine Towers* (2014) steals five pomegranates from a walled garden in a village to feed his hungry family. He is caught red-handed, bitten by a guard dog, and barely escapes. In the morning his family is sent a lavish breakfast by the same people he had stolen from and invited over to stay in their house as guests. "You should have knocked on my door. I would have given you more than five pomegranates", says their generous host to Omar (139).

Besides all the good attributes, however, the Pashtun nation also has its deficiencies. A major one of these, is the customary practice of 'revenge'. Due to centuries-old ancestral and communal ties, the Pashtuns' enmities and feuds, called "badal" (Daur 103; Omar 86) (revenge) in the native language, also go deep into their communal fabric. These feuds are carried on from generation to generation and often end in distress. Some suspect present-day suicide bombings to be a manifestation of the tribes' aptitude for 'badal', in their attempt to retaliate against the national as well as international level use of force against them in recent years. A nation which had for centuries resisted foreign intervention has recently been faced with challenges alien to their indigenous social ethic, and thus have had to respond with a '*badal*' of equal measure. "…this war has destroyed everything good in my life…I want revenge", says a young man turned into a brutal killer in Omar's *A Fort of Nine Towers.* In fact they are shown to be justified in the memoirs as the number of their civilian casualties (including children, women and the aged), the amount of damage caused to their property, and the open violation of their sacred '*Pakhtunwali*' by outsiders since 9/11 have left them devastated. To support this idea, evidences like "a ditch filled with the heads of men and women. Dozens of them" (Omar 77), the killing of a man "by putting red-hot iron bars through his body" just because he is suspected to be American spy (Daur 315), collateral damage during American as well as local military operations (Daur 322; Omar 241), civilian people losing "a limb or two" (Daur 336) or being hit "fatally by stray bullets" (Daur 337), abound the texts in plenty. But then, there is evidence to suggest the roots of modern-day suicide terrorism to lie in the American "war on terror" more than anything else.

It is the very open, welcoming and generous nature of the Pashtuns that renders them vulnerable to being misled. The Pashtun would go to whatever end if he loves, and he would go to war if he hates. In Omar's novel, this is best explained by the character of Commander Zardad who turns into a monster when it comes to getting revenge from those he has come to hate. He submits them to severe torture by unleashing the man called 'Dog' upon them who continues biting them until death. However, he is generous to other Pashtuns (his own people whom he has a soft corner for) as he says, "I don't torture my Pashtuns" (262). On the other hand, Daur points out this side of the Pashtun tribesman by recounting the time when the

Pashtun tribesmen were known for their chivalry, "strength" (193), and "marksmanship" (194). They helped save the region from foreign invaders like India in 1965 and Soviet armies in the 1980s for no material gain of their own. The straight forward and sincere commitment towards feelings, things and people is what becomes liminal for 'others' to exploit them. This is the very dilemma the Pashtun nation has always had at its door step. Daur articulates his agony regarding the injustice against the Pashtuns by saying that:

> "We were betrayed and our Paradise along with our dreams and aspirations was burnt to ashes. Now the Russians have left, the US and NATO troops are in Afghanistan since 9/11. Without going into the politics of who did what and why, I have detailed how the war on terror affected our lives, lives of common people. My peaceful village, my Paradise, Darpa Khel and our peaceful lives have been devastated by the War on terror while Taliban, Al-Qaida, Pakistan army and NATO forces have all contributed to our miseries. Faceless enemies are supporting the terrorist. They are getting funds, equipment and trainings and no one has been able to stop their access" (16).

Civilian people of the Af-Pak region are quite aware of the internal politics that characterized the U.S.-Soviet war, and the effects it had on this region in the years that have followed. Many consider that bloody war to be a major cause of present day terrorism prevalent in this region with its effects converging specifically into the Pashtun tribal belt—a gradual development of which both Omar and Daur show an awareness in *A Fort of Nine Towers* (2014) and *Cheegha—The Call* (2014), respectively. Omar says that the "Russians brought bombs" (24) and dropped them on people indiscriminately, turning Kabul into "a grave…as big as a whole city" (21), until the Americans interfered to drive them out. However for Omar, time has told that all the "foreigners were more interested in their own politics" (375). Daur also says that "…Russia pulled out from Afghanistan" leaving behind the Jihadi Raj which, surprisingly enough, did not stay united for long. It got divided into factions and the militants or mujahideen who had been trained in the same madrassas with the same ideologies started "fighting amongst themselves" (308). The previous three decades (or more) have resulted in the fact that day-to-day suicide bombings, military operations in the tribal areas with mounting civilian casualties and increasing drone attacks have become a matter of great sorrow for the people of this region (Ranjan 457; Tickell 22). An area which was "poise and peaceful" (231) has been imbued with fear, lawlessness and destruction, and its people robbed of their dignity, "honor and pride" (88). On a similar note, Barrister Shazadi Beg says:

> *"...*the trail of modern-day terrorism begins in the anti-Soviet covert war in Afghanistan against the Red Army, when Osama bin Laden was just another businessman. Once the last Russian tank pulled out, the well-trained mujahideen turned their attention to their trainers and funders…After 9/11 the same

> seminaries were seen as using their funds to spread terrorism and sectarian strife'" (Beg, 2006).

Daur goes a step further to say that the tribes have been in war for the last thirty years and that "human life is not sacred anymore" (343) in this region. He is quite right because war started for the tribes since the Soviet war in Afghanistan, rather than since 9/11. He finds a solution to this menace in the form of annexure of tribal areas with mainstream society so as to enable them to have more facilities just like an average citizen, as well as education and employment for their youth. This way their energies could be put to productive use instead of being misled.

One, nevertheless, senses a clear segregation of civilian and non-violent tribespeople from various warring groups within the region, including the *mujahideen*, Taliban, local armed forces and American troops, consciously developed by both writers in their memoirs. What they seem to be conveying is that civilian people of this region are wholly divorced from the political ideologies of these groups. It has never remained a concern for these people to hold power in world politics. They just have a way of life which they want to live with dignity. They want to enjoy freedom within the confines of their own country, their own land. They want to live happily with their families within their own resources, with freedom to practice their own beliefs and with their doors always open and welcoming to outsiders who may come knocking at their doors in peace. They respect this way of life even above religion. "They have no ambitions to rule the world, no ambitions to become the richest on earth, small desires of being able to give, to share what little they have. All they want is to be respected and recognized" (300), says Daur. However, history has proven that many local and global forces have kept interfering with and disrupting this simple pattern of life and have thus lost any remnants of trust in the hearts of the tribal people.

Pashtun tribes of Pakistan have often been related to that of the Afghan Pashtuns. The fate of both has been traced, written, constructed, manipulated, and tempered with almost at par with each other. Being joined together through land and culture, they present a picture of twin regions. Pashtuns live on both sides of the Durand line, causing the border to be controversial on both sides. The Durand Line is thought of as an unnatural divide—a spike driven through the tribal landscape by the British Empire when they gave independence to this region after World War II (Fischer 1). It is considered either as a mis-informed experiment or a deliberate attempt to de-stabilize the tribal region (Daur 45) which has fought to retain its autonomous status for centuries. The rise of such sentiments among these Pashtun tribes, who are caught in between the crossfire of Taliban and their home or American military, may give new meanings and impetus to their pre-existing claim to merge, secure and liberate the tribal landscapes on both sides of the Durand Line into a separate country i.e. Pakhtunistan (Khan 3). This, in turn, threatens to cause more instability in the region. Unfortunately, the strong cultural ties of both these regions cause them to be equally vulnerable to manipulation by external forces that even history has proven. The years following 9/11 are a true and hard testimony to

this declaration. It is precisely because of this reason that it is pivotal to maintain peace in this region, if it is desired to secure peace in the rest of both the countries.

The Orient, according to Edward Said, was always a place of desirable interference for the West in terms of it being "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (Said 1). The Af-Pak region is a part of the Orient and I find that it has also been receiving similar treatment by the West, or generally by outsiders. After independence from the British and separation from the Subcontinent, the tribal frontier of both these countries has been facing many troubles. According to Said's *Orientalism*, the west views itself as very much logical and rational, and whatever it cannot understand through reason or logic is named as mythical, exotic or irrational (39-40). People of Pashtun ethnicity on both sides of the Durand Line comprises a nation tied up with strong communal and cultural ties as well as a a firm bond with their motherland despite of its land comprising of a very harsh terrain. Such a strong commitment towards their inherited values is not understandable for many outsiders. That is why, throughout history, the West has kept on fantasizing this region. Akbar S. Ahmed talks about such fantasization of the Pashtun tribal belt by outsiders in the foreword to Daur's C*heegha—The Call* as:

> "Waziristan remains a mystery and a puzzle for most of the world. Reports of violence and terrorism are frequently associated with its name. Rumours and stories associate Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other al-Qaeda leaders with this area. For people living here, life has become a hell of uncertainty. A drone strike could kill them or their family members one day, a suicide bomber the next, or action by the Pakistan army the day after. Is this all there is to Waziristan?" (Daur 9)

The United States of America, as many local people have now come to believe, exploited the Pashtuns' hospitality and strength in the name of religion as well as honor to wage war against Soviet Russia. Col. (Retd.) Muhammad Yahya Effendi traces down a very comprehensive account of what happened during those years of chaos where the pashtun was raised by the fake cry of threat to their pride, honour and religion. Many were trained as Taliban through religious madrassas. After 9/11, however, the same Taliban and madrassas were exterminated by the U.S. when they no more required them. It was all like a game of cards, one card here and one there; "…first the politicals would reason and try to indulge in an exercise of gentle persuasion, which included imposition of fines when that failed; then there was the military waiting in the wings to wield the baton", says Col. Yahya. (Effendi, 2009). This is what remained the strategy of the West, and this is what it has transferred as a legacy to the governments of the Af-Pak region as well.

The Pashtun tribal areas form an integral part of the Af-Pak frontier as cultural, geographical and historical ties hold them together. Although these tribal areas are a part of their countries, but they have had certain pacts with their respective

governments that legitimized certain amount of autonomy for them. The British had to grant special constitutional status to the Pashtun tribes[vi] in order to be able "to protect and promote its imperial holdings in the area and beyond…" (Khan, 2009). In his foreword to Daur's memoir *Cheegha—The Call* (2014), Akbar Ahmed writes that the tribal area has been "famous in history for having challenged every empire that attempted to control it—whether the Mughals or the British" (9). After independence, the tribes gave their consent to be a part of Pakistan if they will be allowed an autonomous status within the state. The Pakistani state thus had to reinforce the same strategy to retain its rule over this region. Since 9/11, however, the government started tempering (to fulfil the demands of the U.S.) with the autonomy that was granted to these regions at the inception, so tribal feuds with the federation erupted and even the loya jirga[vii] (which is the local justice system) failed to stop them. The recent decision of the Pakistani state to annex tribal regions (FATA) with the mainstream Pakistani society, on the other hand, is expected to transform their lives in many desirable ways. By bringing the tribal population under state governance, Pakistan recognises the tribespeople as Pakistani citizens. The future of Afghan Pashtuns, on the other hand, is still unpredictable due to ongoing American presence in Afghanistan.

The tribal struggle for peace

The Pashtun region is not only filled with bloodshed, violence and chaos at all times. It also has life without all these atrocities—a life of joy, love, hope and peace. A number of people, both natives as well as some foreigners, have written or spoken about this 'other side' of the region and its people as well. Abdul Ghaffar Khan, in a part of his book compiled by S. Fida Yunus, *Pakhtunistan and Afghanistan*, has documented a history of the Pashtuns from Pakistan and Afghanistan. He has talked at length of the peace-loving and peacemaking Khudai Khidmatgaar Movement organized by Bacha Khan[viii] and others at a time of great violence emanating from tribal customs of ignorance. S. Fida Yunus, also, notes that "Bacha Khan saw the Pakhtun violence for what it was—a consequence not of bloodlust but of ignorance, superstition and the crushing weight of customs" (Yunus, 2003). As a result, in order to build peace and exterminate violence, Bacha Khan had organized the Khudai Khidmatgar movement before Partition in the Pashtun region. The Khudai Khidmatgars had a complete code of conduct in the form of some verses which held promises like refraining from violence, being nice to humanity, refraining from taking part in feuds, etc. Besides Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Ghani Khan also wrote a complete account, entitled *The Pathan*, which portrays the day-to-day life of a Pashtun. He presents the Pashtun neither as a bandit, as a dacoit, as a robber, as a violent man, as a man who hates peace, as a mad man, nor as a terrorist; rather, he presents to us the Pashtun in his torn clothes as a tired (in the sense of exhaustion after hard work), soft and peace-loving man. He talks of the innocence, happiness, feelings, nobility, sincerity, pride, simplicity and hard life of the Pashtun. "I want to talk about the Pathans, the people I love, which makes my task harder than ever. I want you to love them as I do. But the Pathan is not easy to love. He takes a lot of knowing. His is a most complicated simplicity…', says

Ghani Khan (Khan G., 1947). Thus, he places the Pashtun at a much higher plane than anybody else. The Pashtun is worthy to be known, and should be known, for there lies much in his complicated simplicity which is desirable.

Daur's memoir, *Cheegha—The Call* (2014), too intends to be part of that corpus which throws light on this 'other side' of the Pashtuns. He points to the fact that knowledge of the "real tribesman" is lost (40) in all that talk of militancy, terrorism, collateral damage and extraordinary renditions. He even proclaims that "tribal Pakhtun is the most misunderstood nation on the face of the earth" (59). Daur wants to show the Pashtun in the light which is his/her due right. He wants his book to be "a powerful plea to the world" to treat the Pashtun tribes as "ordinary human beings who feel pain and joy and fear" (11) just like anybody else. By reiterating such a concern throughout the memoir, Daur attempts to assert the 'human' side of the Pashtun as opposed to that of fantasized savage or over-generalised terrorist. He also wants this to be a realisation to the "free world" of the sorry plight it puts Pashtun tribespeople into. After the Cold War, the U.S. left this region with victory leaving behind only grief, death, loss, deprivation, and ashes for the native tribes who only fought that war for America. It, once again, left the already-troubled region vulnerable and weak since the inception of the "war on terror".

Omar's *A Fort of Nine Towers* (2014), on the other hand, is a thematically similar yet strategically different anthropological resource. Unlike the bold attempt by Daur in *Cheegha* (2014), Omar expresses similar concerns in his work in a comparatively milder and implicit tone. By narrating how he grew up in an Afghanistan which passed from one tyrannical regime to another tyrannical regime, Omar lets his reader catch glimpses (through flashbacks) of the peaceful life he had had being part of a Pashtun family before all the atrocities of the "war on terror" began. He, just like Daur, mourns the losses his people have had to endure, and says that "though it sounds mad, I love Afghanistan? That I love being an Afghan? That I want to help rebuild what so many others destroyed?" (4). Furthermore, he wishes to call the world's attention toward the fact that the Afghanistan "they had dreamed about during all those years of bombs, whips and stoning still has not returned to us" (378). Thus in both the novels, I find hope, expectation and anticipation for the shackled Pashtun tribes.

To conclude, I find both Daur and Omar's memoirs to be indispensable indigenous literary resources since they are torch bearers to the indigenous canon which writes back to western misjudgments about the Pashtun tribes, culture and land. Their impact increases fourfold with the autobiographical strategy employed by these writers in their memoirs as it renders greater authenticity to the accounts they tell. They are also rare sources that take us right into the heart of the Pashtun society to give voice to their ordeal in contrast to purely fictional and western works written about this region. Furthermore, they also carry a socio-political dimension which attempts to activate the search for recognition, freedom, and respect for Pashtuns at international level. Therefore, these indigenous memoirs provide ample evidence to support and answer the primary investigations of this study: socio-

political situation of the Af-Pak region and literary response by indigenous writers to rectify the negative profiling of tribal Pashtuns, since 9/11, at an international level.

End Notes:

[i] In order to save itself from open war, Pakistan was forced to "officially align itself with the United States and its allies" after 9/11, says Karl Fischer (8). This is in no doubt true, taking into account all the internal counter-terrorism policies and strategies that the state of Pakistan came up with in the wake of 9/11 despite explicit civilian distrust and negative sentiments against those policies. Pakistan does, in fact, hold the distinction of capturing the largest number of Al-Qaeda members since 2001 (Ahmed 199). Yet, after all its efforts to secure peace in the region, Trump administration's rebuke directed towards Pakistan threatened to render all the country's past efforts null and void, and to leave it in a precarious situation once again.

[ii] Gopal's chapter is published in the book *South Asian Fiction in English*, compiled and edited by Alex Tickell (2016).

[iii] Waziristan forms a greater bulk of the North West Frontier province of Pakistan (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), which shares a border with Afghanistan and houses a great number of Pashtun tribes. Across centuries, this region has been known for its closely-knit governing system that has successfully resisted foreign intervention or rule and has enjoyed autonomous status while remaining a part of Pakistan, and before that, of the subcontinent. Thus for a long time it has co-existed with the state under a mutual bond of understanding, support and respect. It has been able to survive through the regimes of great Empires, but the American Empire is the first one to have truly crumbled its tribal structure during the on-going global war on terror. Amidst all the chaos, a region which was once identified for its hospitality, justice, protection, fierceness and noble warrior spirit has been reduced merely to "the most dangerous place in the world" (Ahmed 48).

[iv] Kabul is the capital city of Afghanistan which lies quite close to the Af-Pak border—the Durand Line. Throughout the history of war in Afghanistan, Kabul has faced devastation amidst the battle between different factions claiming to be perfect custodians either of the Afghan people or of Islam, yet they spared none when it actually came down to the brutal display of power. The insecurity prevalent in Kabul is seen to trickle down to the rest of the country, as even the consciousness of the young and innocent Qais can tell. The boy says he has never been to Kabul and neither does he want to, because "It is a horrible place. Every trouble starts from there, and it spreads all over Afghanistan. I wish Kabul did not exist…" (Omar 143).

[v] Most people believe, as well as some accounts record, that Afghanistan is one of the most unfortunate countries on whose doorstep war, or in Omar's words "madness of this war" (Omar 236), has remained knocking for several decades. War is often traced back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and is considered to have held to this day in one form or another. Both the memoirs show an awareness of this hard fact and appear thoroughly disturbed by it. Omar talks of it as the "past three decades" (Omar 4) during which many Afghans fled the country, while Daur clearly says that "this area has been in war for the last thirty years" (Daur 26).

[vi] The Pakhtun tribes were not divided into Afghanistan and Pakistan back at the time of British Raj in the Subcontinent of India. They enjoyed a unified autonomous status while remaining within the Subcontinent.

[vii] Mohib Wazir describes the Loya Jirga in an article entitled *Different Stages of Jirga* published in the magazine 'Pakhtun Rabita: Pakhtun Culture, Traditions and Society'. He describes the Loya Jirga as the grand jirga which is formed when the need arises for resolving an issue or conflict of greater national interest. In Afghanistan, it enjoys the status of a law-maker institution, the number of members is not specified and it has no written constitution. Representation is given to all small and major tribes, even minorities and women are given the right to send out their representatives. In FATA, there is a tradition of the Loya Jirga in the backdrop of a conflict between the major tribes or the tribal agencies (Wazir, 2012).

References

Ahmed, Akbar. *The Thistle and the Drone; How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam*. Washington: Brookings P, 2013. Pdf.

Ahmed, Ishtiaq. "The U.S. Af-Pak Strategy: Challenges and Opportunities for Pakistan" *Asian Affairs* 37.4 (2010): 191-209. Pdf.

Bangash, Salman. "Politicization of Madrassahs in Pakistan: A Critical View." *Central Asia; Research Journal of Area Study Centre*, 6th June 2013, www.asc-centralasia.edu.pk: http://www.asc-centralasia.edu.pk/Issue_62/11-POLITICIZATION_OF_MADRASSAHS.html, 12th August 2019. Web.

Beg, B. Shazadi. "The War on Terror--A Betrayal of the Rule of Law?" *Global Terrorism: Genesis, Implications, Remedial and Countermeasures* (2006): 101-117. Print. (Published by Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies)

Bush, George W. "Bush Address on Military Action in Afghanistan" *Youtube,* Uploaded by AP Archive, 21 July 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osXkym5GHXI.

Caroe, Olaf. *The Pathans; 550 B.C.—A.D. 1957*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1958. Pdf.

Daur, Ghulam Qadir Khan. *Cheegha—The Call from Waziristan, The Last Outpost.* Sweden: *l'Aleph*, 2014. Print.

Effendi, C. Yahya. "Military Operations in Waziristan: From A Historical Perspective." *Central Asia; Research Journal of Area Study Centre,* September 2009, http://www.asc-centralasia.edu.pk/Issue_62/01-Military_Operations_in_Waziristan.html, Accessed 12 August 2019. Web.

Fischer, Karl. "The AfPak Strategy: Reactions in Pakistan" *Afghanistan Analysts Network* 2 (2010):1-13. Pdf.

Jash, Amrita. "Preface". *Perspectives on Trump's South Asia Policy; The Dossier by IndraStra* 1.1 (2017): p.4. Pdf.

Khan, Ayesha R. *Conceptualizing AfPak: The Prospects and Perils*. Chatham House: Asia Programme, 2010. Pdf.

Khan, Ghani. *The Pathans*. Peshawar: University Book Agency, 1947. Print.

Mahapatra, Debidatta Aurobinda. "The AfPak Strategy and Its Implementation." *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 1.3 (2009): 1003-1009. Pdf.

Omar, Qais Akbar. *A Fort of Nine Towers*. London: Picador, 2014. Print.

Pathak, Sriparna. "Trump's South Asia Policy: Implications for China." *Perspectives on Trump's South Asia Policy; The Dossier by IndraStra* 1.1 (2017): 13-17. Pdf.

Ranjan, Amit. "Drone Attacks in Afghanistan and the Af-Pak Region: Is There Any Other Option?" *Asian Affairs* 45.3 (2014): 456-466. Pdf.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism; Western Conceptions of the Orient*. 3rd ed. London: Penguin Books, 2003. Pdf.

Tickell, Alex, ed. *South-Asian Fiction in English; Contemporary Transformations.* Buckinghamshire: Palgrave, 2016.

Tourangbam, Dr. Monish. "U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan: Old Wine in Trump's Bottle". *Perspectives on Trump's South Asia Policy; The Dossier by IndraStra* 1.1 (2017): 5-8. Pdf.

Wazir, M. "Different Stages of Jirga." *Pakhtun Rabita: Pakhtun Culture, Traditions and Society.* July 2012. Pg 21-23.

Yunus, S. Fida. *Abdul Ghaffar Khan: "Pakhtunistan" & Afghanistan.* Peshawar: Np. 2003. Print.