

A Critique of Resistance Shown by Pashtun Leaders to British Raj in Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone*

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Abstract

*The research paper analyzes resistance of the colonized (Pashtuns) to the British rulers in India. Two Pashtun leaders, Haji Sahib Taurangzai and Ghaffar Khan, are prominent names in the movement of freedom. Both the men resisted the British rulers together but then parted their ways. Haji Taurangzai aimed at reforming society through education. He reformed madressahs in order to educate people. Fighting battles was not his first option. Increasing popularity of his movement earned him hostility of the British rulers who made a plan to push him to tribal area (the present day FATA) so that he could not continue his struggle successfully. Kamila Shamsie (2015) portrays him in *A God in Every Stone* as a man fighting battles against the British rulers in tribal areas (the present day FATA). He is disqualified through Ghaffar Khan who did not believe in battles. He resisted the Raj through anti-British movement based on non-violence. But the author devalues his political movement as well because she is of the view that social change is more important than the political movements. Freedom for such people meant freedom of men only. The author belittles importance of the movements of resistance and indirectly justifies the British colonizers' claim of being civilized who wanted to civilize the Indians. Resistance of the natives also indicates that the natives being colonized are not mute.*

Keywords: Resistance, Madrasah, Colonial discourses, Ambivalence, Mimicry.

The act of colonization leads colonized people to show resistance. The colonizers wish to make the colonized their loyal subject through colonial discourses but their desire is troubled by the

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colonized people who show resistance actively. Freedom is the most driving passion which paves ground for resistance. It is because of active resistance to the Raj that the British rulers left India.

Edward W. Said believes that colonizers remain unchallenged in their colonial mission. He focuses on the role of the British colonizers who survive inferior status of the Orient academically, "Orientalism lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental".¹ But colonial discourses (used as an instrument of power) were challenged in India where the British colonizers ruled for a long time. Resistance of the colonized to the Raj proves that Said's views about Orientalism cannot be accepted absolutely. The colonizers are not successful in their colonial operations through colonial discourses, "...the discourse of colonialism ... does not function according to plan ..."²

Homi K. Bhabha does not follow the argument of Edward Said because he "ascribes a more active agency to the colonized."³ The natives threaten the colonizers without taking inspiration from colonial discourses in order to protect their culture or they challenge them through mimicry. Mimicry according to Bhabha is "one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge."⁴ Position of mimic men is ambivalent because their representation moves between "polarities of similarity and difference."⁵ The mimic men finally challenge representations of the rulers. Resistance of the colonized thus cannot be overlooked.

Two well-known Pashtun leaders named Haji Sahib Turangzai and Ghaffar Khan fought against the yoke of colonization. Their struggle of resistance was based on different approaches portrayed in Kamila Shamsie's novel *A God in Every Stone*. Haji Sahib Taurangzai made use of *madrassahs* (schools of religious education) while Ghaffar Khan set up schools in order to educate Pashtuns.

Haji Sahib Taurangzai's real name was Fazl-e-Wahid. He was born in Charsadda and was anti-imperialist. Shahid Siddiqui traces history of Haji Sahib Taurangzai:

"After completing his religious education, he came back to his village and started living there. A turning point in his life was his visit to Deoband where he was hailed by Pakhtun students. It was here that he met Shaikhul Hind, Mahmud al-Hasan, who was a young and dynamic teacher at Deoband. This meeting turned into a long-standing friendship with Deoband leaders and he decided to go for hajj along with a caravan led by

Maulana Qasim Nanotvi. It was perhaps during his interaction with the Deoband that the decision to set up madrassahs in the frontier was taken. This was a strategy that was initiated by the Deoband leaders when they established Darul Uloom Deoband to put up discursive resistance to the Raj”⁶

Haji Taurangzai’s background indicates that he received religious inspiration from his teachers. His visit to Deoband motivated him for running schools of religious education called *madrassahs*. The *madrassahs* played significant role in the struggle of resistance to the Raj. These schools stressed need of religious education and used it as a motivating factor in their anti-imperial mission. Shamsie also mentions fight of the religious leader:

“Two men waited outside a closed door, talking about the massacre of English troops by Haji Sahib’s forces at Rustam. They swept down the Ambela Pass and attacked the camp ... Allah keep Haji Sahib safe ...”⁷

Haji Sahib fought a holy war (Jihad) against the Raj. For this purpose, he had raised his own army willing to sacrifice their lives. The quoted passage also shows that Haji Sahib and his men were supported by the local people. This is the reason that one of the two men prays for protection of Haji Sahib.

The author has linked Haji Sahib’s movement with the Ottoman Empire since Muslims share their brotherhood irrespective of their boundaries. Haji Sahib had sympathy with the Turks. But the author portrays them savages having no support of their own people:

“The Ottoman Empire, by contrast, is crippled by its own savagery ... There is no love there, no admiration, for the Ottoman Sultan. No loyalty ... they do not have their people’s loyalty.”⁸

The Ottoman Empire did not deserve to rule since it had no support of its own people. The Ottoman Empire was one of the central powers and developed an alliance with Germany in World War I (1914-1918). The British army was on the side of opposition. Muslims of India being colonized had to be loyal to the British Empire. But all the Muslims did not take side with the British, rather they showed their attachment with the Ottoman Empire e.g. Haji Sahib.

Hajis Sahib fought against the British army and had sympathy with Ottoman Empire. He had a number of supporters

who fought along with him. His anti-Imperialist movement was also supported by *Khilafat* Movement which:

*"...is the name of a Muslim institution handed over to the followers and friends (Sahaba-i-Karam) of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and the rulers and administrators of Islamic state who are called and known as Khalifas (Caliphs)."*⁹

The First World War in 1914 compelled Turkey, the seat of *Khilafat*, to take side with Germany against the Allies. The Indian Muslims due to their religious attachment with the Turks and *Khilafat* had sympathies with the Turks. The British rulers were not happy with the Indian Muslims supporting the Turks. In the novel, Remmick who is a political agent criticizes the Turks for arousing Indian Muslims against the British rulers:

*"The Haji has given us trouble before but this time round it is because the damned Turks have riled up the tribes in the name of the Caliphate. Told them to launch a Holy War against us."*¹⁰

The novel portrays the Turks trying to win support of the Indian Muslims. An old man conveys message of Kalam, Pashtun, to Qayyum who is a Pashtun soldier in British army:

*"...our brothers, the Turks, promise when the time comes for Ottoman troops to sweep through Persia into India the Volunteer Corps, led by Indian Generals, will be part of the army. You could be one of those men, Lance-Naik. A general in the army of Indian liberation."*¹¹

The element of *Khilafat Movement* is shown as a motivating factor in the war. As Pashtuns are Muslims, their support can be easily won. Haji Sahib and his army supported the Turks and fought against the British army.

Moreover, Haji Sahib was in favor of social reform. He wanted to reform *madrassahs* and use them for eradicating social evils, especially to compete with Christian preachers who wanted to inculcate their Christian values in the minds of Indians, "Christian preachers were active in spreading Christianity by exploiting the poverty of the locals."¹² He was more in favor of educating the people instead of an armed resistance to the Raj. He wanted to set up *madrassahs* which were independent of supervision of the British colonizers:

"The period between 1911 and 1915 saw these madrassahs gaining popularity among the locals. The madrassahs were run on a scientific basis. There was an advisory council of scholars to run policy affairs. The manager of the madrassahs was Taj

Muhammad from Mardan, who was a graduate and was well-versed in contemporary trends in education.”¹³

Haji Taurangzai was not against Western education and it is evident from the manager of his *madrassahs*, Taj Muhammad who was a graduate. He focused on reforms in *madrassah* system which he was doing successfully. His struggle gained popularity and was supported by a large number of people. Increasing popularity of his struggle earned him hostility of the British rulers because they considered him a threat to their rule. In order to stifle his voice, they forced him to move to tribal area, “... and now one was a fugitive in the tribal areas.”¹⁴ Haji Sahib in the novel has been portrayed as a man for whom *jihad* was the first and the last option. Nothing has been said about his educational fervor. He is in fact remembered for his educational and *madrassah* reform, “Haji Sahib’s fearless struggle against the British Raj encouraged the freedom fighters to set up educational institutions in the area.”¹⁵ The British rulers pushed him to tribal areas (the present day FATA) in order to stop his revolutionary struggle.

Ghaffar Khan is another Pashtun who challenged rule of the British colonizers. Ghaffar Khan was a Pashtun born “in 1890 at Utmanzai (Charsadda) district Peshawar.”¹⁶ After doing matriculation, he was about to join the British army but he realized that serving the British rulers would not help his cause of freedom. So he changed his mind and turned out to be anti-British activist. He and Haji Sahib worked together in their resistance to the Raj, “... they set up a programme for education and reform; when Haji Sahib declared *jihad* their paths diverged”¹⁷ Haji Sahib was more in favor of reforming *madrassahs*. His way of resistance was different from Ghaffar Khan. Ghaffar Khan in the novel explains reason of his moving apart from Haji Sahib:

“Taking up arms after your lands have been conquered is like building a well after your house has caught fire. The sword in tribesmen’s hands will not cut this yoke from our necks. No sword will cut this yoke from our necks. If we want any chance of advancement ... He said we must get rid of our wrong ideas. We must wake up from this rabbit’s dream.”¹⁸

Ghaffar Khan is of the view that raising weapons against the British army was not a sensible decision of Haji Sahib and that was the reason that he parted his ways with him because he did not believe in violence. He thought that raising an armed army against the Raj was just like trapping oneself in a house surrounded by a

well. The use of violence was not included in his book of anti-British movement. Thus he could not continue his mission of resistance with Haji Sahib.

Qayyum, protagonist in the novel, served the British army as loyal Lance-Naik. His close friend, Kalam, tried to convince Qayyum in order to join the force of Haji Sahib who fought battles against the English. Kalam was successful in shattering Qayyum's loyalty with the English, "the Qayyum of before distinct from the Qayyum of now."¹⁹ He did not find any satisfaction in his loyal attachment with the English. Kalam's father told him about inspiring leadership of Ghaffar Khan, "Of your generation, only Ghaffar Khan is a true Pashtun."²⁰ He further told Qayyum that Ghaffar Khan could guide him, "How to remove your blindfold, and see your place in this world."²¹ Qayyum later on met Ghaffar Khan and became member of his mission. He did not like "the bloody battles between the English and the tribesmen under Haji Sahib in the mountain passes and foothills."²²

Ghaffar Khan set up schools to educate his people. His struggle of resistance was based on non-violence and his followers were popularly known as *Khudai Khidmatgar* (Servants of God). He tells his follower, Qayyum:

*"A few weeks earlier when Qayyum had told Ghaffar Khan he wanted to teach at one of the schools his new hero had opened in the Peshawar Valley ... Ghaffar Khan had said don't forget, the most important thing you'll teach them is service."*²³

Ghaffar Khan used Western education as a weapon against the British. He believed that educating people for resistance was more effective than jihad (Holy War). Qayyum was also one of his followers. He was inspired with the personality and political vision of Ghaffar Khan. He tried to convey his brother, Najeeb, in one of his letters, "But Ghaffar Khan tells us we must be patient and show through example that they are wrong."²⁴

As Ghaffar Khan stressed the need of education for showing effective resistance, he was not supported by maulvis, the traditional clergy, "we ... will challenge any of the maulvis who claim Ghaffar Khan's actions in allying with Gandhi are not those of a true Muslim."²⁵

Ghaffar Khan's movement of non-violence or passive resistance did not lead successfully since the tragic incident of Qissa Khwani (the Street of Storytellers) made "the site of massacre"²⁶ and turned "in flood."²⁷ It is made evident through words of an armed woman named Zarinain the novel when

Qayyum being weaponless entered a house where he was caught by the woman. She asked him about her husband's sister, Diwa. He had no idea about Diwa; he wanted to know why she had moved out of her house in that bloody war, the woman told him:

“When men become women and approach an enemy armed with nothing but chants then it falls to a woman to take the role of Malala of Maiwand and walk into the battlefield to show you what a warrior looks like. She was down with the men, and there was more of a man's fire in her than in all of you [men].”²⁸

The woman's response shows her hatred for the non-violent protest and passive resistance of Pashtuns to the Raj. She considered the men of *Khudai Khidmatgar* responsible for the carnage in Qissa Khwani (the Street of Storytellers). For her, it was quite foolish to encounter the armed British soldiers in a state of being unarmed. They had nothing to defend themselves. Consequently, the streets were filled with blood of men and women participating in the protests. Zarina was furious because she had lost her close relative, Diwa.

Qayyum also felt anguish of women. He was now sure about falsity of his leader, “... and now he saw with complete clarity the extent to which the man he revered above all others was wrong in this matter.”²⁹ He realized the plight of women in the strike of his people, who just raised their slogans of *Inqilaab Zindabad* (long live the revolution!) while men were lying dead in the streets:

“Women may be shot, their wounded bodies may need to be lifted away by strange hands, you may hear them call out in pain, you may watch them die- and to all this you can respond with nothing but a cry of Inqilaab Zindabad.”³⁰

The woman transformed Qayyum who lost his passion for the political movement. He was now worried about protection of women in the streets of massacre. The woman named Zarina approved such protests and moved out of her house to show to the men how to fight and protect people:

“Zarina, who never wanted her husband to take part in this protest ... Zarina, who took a dagger in her hand and walked out bare-faced, the dye of the Khudai Khidmatgar staining her skin not as tribute but as taunt, so that she could shame her husband, so that all the neighborhood would say, His woman has to be the man in the family now that he has turned weak.”³¹

Zarina took arms not due to her political inclination but just to prove and show weakness of the men who participated in the protests which resulted only in massacre. She raised a question for the havoc caused by protests of the army of *Khudai Khidmatgar* for which Qayyum had no answer. Zarina lost sister (Diwa) of her husband. So many other innocent people got killed in the “childish protest.”³² The novel ends with the tragedy of Diwa:

“...the world would hear the story of Diwa—not an angel sent by Allah to give water to thirsty men but a girl, unafraid, shot down by the English and disposed of by the men who shouted ‘Freedom.’”³³

People chanting slogans of freedom are satirized in the passage by saying that the unarmed men confronted the British armed army. The confrontation resulted in the massacre of men and women. Diwa was not afraid of any one. Zarina told Qayyum about her bravery and mocked helplessness of the unarmed army of *Khudai Khidmatgar*.

The author has criticized both the political movements i.e. that of Haji Taurangzai and Ghaffar Khan. For her, political change is not so much important as social change:

“The rage she felt on behalf of the women of the Peshawar Valley as she sweltered beneath the voluminous burqa dispelled any ambivalence she might have started to feel about Indian demands for self-rule. All these Indians talking about political change when really this country desperately needed was social change. Why should they be allowed independence when they only wanted it for half the population?”³⁴

Shamsie makes it clear in the passage that the political movements for independence were male oriented and thus there was no ray of hope for the Indian women to have freedom in the real sense though they suffered in the bloody war. She is of the view that the struggle for freedom was only for male people; women had to be ruled over by their males even after independence.

Vivian Rose Spencer, an English woman and nurse, wore *burqa* (a veil which Pashtun women wear to cover their whole body) in order to hide her identity. She felt suffocated in the *burqa* and felt sorry for the women in Peshawar since they had to bear burden of *burqa* “vile cloth”³⁵ on their heads. The author thus reveals her view in favor of social change. She is against male chauvinism in Pashtun society. The people suffered grave issues which had weakened the society. Thus the society was more in need of social change than the political change.

Conclusion

Resistance erupts in every colonized country. Colonizers' act of suppression is responded with intellectual and physical resistance. Haji Taurangzai fought against the British rulers with religious zeal. The novel does not say anything about circumstances which the British rulers created in order to compel him to move into tribal area so that he could be restricted to mountains and his voice be kept unheard because his efforts of reforming *madrassahs* on scientific bases posed threat to the British rulers. He was a great admirer of education but the novel portrays him as a man who just fought battles and nothing else, "the bloody battles between the English and the tribesmen under Haji Sahib in the mountain passes and foothills."³⁶

His anti-British movement has been disqualified in the words of Ghaffar Khan who says, "The sword in tribesmen's hands will not cut this yoke from our necks. No sword will cut this yoke from our necks."³⁷ Ghaffar Khan, on the other hand, started his political movement with the name *Khudai Khidmatgar* (Servants of God). His struggle based on non-violence has also been ridiculed for being unarmed while confronting the armed British army. According to the author his movement was confined to "childish protests."³⁸ He set up schools which taught his supporters non-violence. But according to the author, his struggle for freedom led to a brutal climax.

It has been made clear in the paper that plans of colonizers are endangered by colonized in different ways. Shamsie has satirized both the movements i.e. one for the reason of jihad (Holy War) while the other due to unarmed resistance which resulted in the brutal incident in Peshawar. Another reason of the author's disapproving the movements of resistance was miserable Indian society because here freedom did not mean for all but only for the male people. She is of the view that social change is more important than the political movements. She indirectly justifies presence of the British rulers in India by undermining political movements of Pashtun leaders. She gives preference to social change. She ridicules *Pashtunwali* for being male-chauvinistic. She does not offer an alternative for showing resistance to the Raj and reform the society without taking inspiration from colonial discourses.

Notes & References

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