



REVIEW ARTICLE

A Study of the Social Continuity and Transformation of Pashtunwali Code in the Novel De-Takht-Ghami

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the representation, transformation, and continuity of Pashtunwali, the indigenous ethical code of Pashtun society, as depicted in the Afghan novel De-Takht-Ghami. Pashtunwali functions as a traditional moral and social framework grounded in values such as bravery, honor, loyalty, pride, and collective responsibility, which shape the cultural identity and social cohesion of Pashtuns. The research aims to understand how these values are portrayed through the novel's characters and social contexts, and how they interact with the challenges of modern life. Employing a qualitative content analysis approach, the study examines value-based conflicts, character behavior, and the dynamics of social relations within the narrative. The findings reveal that Pashtunwali is not a static or rigid code but a flexible and evolving moral system that both resists and adapts to changing social realities. At times, it safeguards cultural integrity by preserving traditional norms, yet it also reinterprets itself to remain relevant within contemporary contexts. Overall, the study provides a sociological understanding of the endurance and adaptability of Pashtunwali, demonstrating how traditional Afghan values continue to navigate the boundary between cultural heritage and modernity.

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Introduction

Pashtunwali, the unwritten code of social conduct among the Pashtun people, governs various aspects of communal life, providing a framework for social order, justice, and cultural identity. Rooted in values such as honor, bravery, loyalty, pride, and hospitality, it guides individual behavior as well as collective social expectations. The preservation of Pashtunwali relies primarily on oral transmission across generations, with folktales, proverbs, and communal gatherings conveying moral teachings, social norms, and ethical obligations (Ali, 2024, p.143). Pashtun culture, expressed through Pashto and Pashtunwali, has been profoundly shaped by geography and climate across regions on both sides of the Durand Line. Home to nearly 39 million people, this area—historically referred to as Roh, Yaghistan, and Pakhtunkhwa—stretches from the Hindu Kush and Karakoram mountains to the Indus and Helmand rivers. Pashto serves as both the language and

symbol of identity, while Pashtunwali embodies a code of honor encompassing hospitality, courage, loyalty, and moral integrity. The diversity of the landscape, from deserts to snow-clad peaks, has fostered a resilient and nature-bound spirit among the Pashtun people (Khattak, 2010, pp. 12-13). Literary works, particularly novels, provide a unique lens to examine the social and cultural realities of a society. The novel De-Takht-Ghami engages deeply with core Pashtun values, depicting the tensions between tradition and modern challenges. This study analyzes the characters and events in the novel to explore the sustainability, adaptation, and transformation of Pashtunwali, offering insights into the preservation and evolution of Pashtun cultural identity in contemporary contexts.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative, descriptive-analytical research design grounded in textual and library-based

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analysis. The primary data source was the Afghan novel *De-Takht-Ghami*, which was examined through close and repeated reading to identify representations of Pashtunwali and its social continuity and transformation. Data collection focused on narrative events, character behavior, dialogues, and value-based conflicts related to Pashtunwali. To support and contextualize the textual analysis, secondary sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and sociological studies on Pashtunwali, were reviewed. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis within a sociocultural framework to interpret how traditional Pashtun values are maintained, adapted, and reinterpreted in response to changing social realities.

The Novel De Takht-Ghami

The novel *De-Takht-Ghami* is considered one of the most valuable narrative works in contemporary Afghan literature, offering a profound portrayal of the cultural values and traditional customs of Pashtun society. The author, editor, and compiler of the novel is Mr. Mustafa Jihad, who wrote the work in 1369 Hijri Shamsi (1990 Gregorian) in Kabul, Afghanistan. The novel was first published by the Afghan Writers' Union through the State Printing House, released in eleven serialized parts using Monotype (typeset) format, with an initial print run of 2,000 copies.

Summary of the Novel

The novel *De-Takht-Ghami* narrates the life story of Sher Alam, a young man from Kabul, highlighting his experiences of love, patriotism, and social status. Sher Alam is the son of a goldsmith and is regarded as the heir to his father and uncle in terms of gallantry, generosity, and moral integrity. The novel begins in a traditional, yet richly cultural and political setting. The story opens with a nomadic girl named Lashteh, who visits Sher Alam's jewelry shop with her mother. While browsing the ornaments, she is drawn to a beautiful necklace, but its price is too high. Jokingly, she remarks, it's not like the gemstones of the King's throne (*De-Takht-Ghami*) is embedded in this! This playful comment kindles a flame of love in Sher Alam's heart, and he falls deeply in love with her. The narrative unfolds from this moment, as Kakah Sher devises a bold plan to bring a necklace (symbolically referred to as *De-Takht-Ghami*) from the royal palace to win her heart. His act of daring emerges alongside themes of patriotism, personal dignity, and the Pashtun code of honor. Throughout the novel, Sher Alam's character evolves from an ordinary young man into a legendary national hero. The storyline traces his emotional journey from love to patriotism, from adherence to tradition to

defiance of social norms, and from punishment to sacrifice-rendering the narrative unforgettable for the reader. In the end, as a response to Lashteh's deep affection, Sher Alam defies traditional constraints and flees with her to another region to build a life together. This escape symbolizes not only romantic love but also social resistance, the redefinition of values, and the quest for human freedom.

The Concept and Etymology of Culture

The word culture is etymologically rooted in the Latin term *cultura*, which originally denoted agriculture, land cultivation, and the act of nurturing or caring for the land. In ancient Roman usage, however, the semantic range of the term gradually expanded beyond the physical domain to encompass intellectual and spiritual cultivation. As it traversed through different civilizations, the word evolved and took on varied forms in different languages: culture in English and French, *thaqāfa* in Arabic, *farhang* in Persian, and *dood* (meaning tradition or custom) in Pashto.

In academic discourse, culture refers to the totality of both tangible and intangible phenomena that emerge through the development of a society. These elements not only foster internal cohesion but also differentiate one community from another. The intangible (non-material) aspects of culture include ethics, art, lifestyle, knowledge, philosophy, politics, thought, language, logic, emotions, and belief systems. The tangible (material) aspects, on the other hand, encompass handicrafts, architecture, clothing, tools, settlements, and other physical artifacts (Azmon, 2018, p. 18). Moreover, culture can be defined as the collective expression of a community's desires, actions, traditional practices, agriculture, religion, economy, oral traditions, languages, and myths, rooted in both historical memory and present realities. This comprehensive view of culture allows for a nuanced understanding of how human societies construct meaning, identity, and continuity across generations.

The Law and Values of Pashtunwali

Pashtuns are a sizeable ethnic group scattered across Afghanistan and Pakistan (Israr, 2024, p. 137). Pashtunwali is the traditional code of the Pashtuns that determines their behavior and way of life. It is not a legal system but rather a customary one that has developed through centuries of communal living. Speaking Pashto is not merely about using the language; it also means living according to the principles of Pashtunwali. Its roots trace back to pre-Islamic times, but after the advent of Islam, a synthesis emerged between Islamic teachings and Pashtun

culture. The key principles of Pashtunwali include hospitality (melmastia), revenge (badal), asylum (nanawatai), kinship, competition (Syali), honor (nang), protection of women's honor (namus), and the council (jirga). Understanding the complexities of Pashtunwali is essential for comprehending the challenges faced by the Pashtuns ([Khan, 2019, p. 264](#)).

In other words 'Pashtunwali is a traditional and value-rich sociocultural system that underpins the moral code, social interactions, and communal life of Pashtun society. Without being codified in written law, Pashtunwali is transmitted across generations through collective memory, oral traditions, and customary practices. It is not merely a behavioral code, but also a profound expression of Pashtun identity, honor, and autonomous thought. In practice, Pashtunwali serves as a natural mechanism for maintaining social order, cooperation, conflict resolution, and dignity among tribes and rural communities. It operates as a social contract—deeply internalized and upheld by the conscience, authority, and social standing of each individual Pashtun.

From a sociological perspective, social values refer to the principles, practices, or behaviors considered desirable and acceptable by the majority within a society ([Qaraei-Moghaddam, 2013, p. 200](#)).

Nang (Honor) and Ghayrat (Dignity)

Nang (Honor) and Ghayrat (Dignity) in Pashtunwali refers to personal honor, self-respect, and the preservation of tribal and social dignity. It places a moral obligation on every individual to protect their reputation, uphold the honor of women (namus), and never remain silent in the face of humiliation or dishonor. To safeguard this honor, Pashtun society enforces gender segregation through the parda system. The dignity of the household, clan, and tribal leaders is considered the collective honor of the group, and every member is responsible for upholding and defending it ([Rehman, 2015, p. 300](#)).

In the novel De-Takht-Ghami, this principle is vividly illustrated in the character of Kakah Sher. Upon discovering a thief in his home, he instinctively reacts with intense anger and physically attacks the intruder. However, when he learns that the thief had stolen only to afford his wedding, Kakah Sher is struck with remorse. Instead of pursuing revenge, he tends to thief's wounds, brings him inside as a guest, and offers him half of his savings to help him complete the marriage. The narration reads: Kakah Sher suddenly hears a noise like clashing dishes. He half-rises and looks out the window: the thief

has bundled up valuables in a sheet. Enraged, Kakah Sher grabs his weapon and strikes. The wounded thief cries out, 'You ruined my wedding! You made my bride a widow!'

Kakah Sher is shaken. He steps back, grabs thief, and asks in disbelief, 'What? I made your bride a widow?' Filled with regret, he gently carries thief inside, applies ashes to his wounds, and then returns with a jingling pouch of money. He places it in front of the man and says, 'Brother, may God heal you. This is all I have—one thousand Kabuli rupees. Take half and make your wedding happen!' Seeing this unexpected generosity, thief's eyes widen. Bleeding, he embraces Kakah Sher, kisses his hands and beard, and says breathlessly, 'Brother, if I am a Pashtun man, I will never forget your courage and kindness for as long as I live. Just promise me—you will come to my wedding!' ([Jihad, 1990, pp. 120-124](#)).

This episode reflects the moral complexity within Pashtunwali—a code that not only demands the defense of honor but also embraces forgiveness, empathy, and communal support. It shows how even in a moment of justified anger, the Pashtun sense of ghayrat can evolve into a higher form of human dignity. Pashtuns' sense of pride and identity in their cultural heritage, language, customs, and traditions reflects key values of honor (Nang) and dignity (Ghayrat), as embodied in Pashtunwali, poetry, language, and traditional dress. These cultural elements illustrate how Pashtuns uphold personal and social ([Pamir, 2023, p. 747](#)).

Benevolence and Generosity (Murawat)

Benevolence and generosity are core virtues in Pashtunwali, guiding behavior toward relatives, neighbors, friends, and strangers. Acts of kindness, support during hardship, and compassionate behavior toward the vulnerable are considered moral duties and markers of good character and manliness. This reflects the concept of murawat, described by Khushal Khan Khattak as kindness, generosity, and consideration for others ([Rishtin, 2010, p. 2](#)).

In De-Takht-Ghami, this trait is embodied by the character Kakah Sher, who is described as follows: Despite everything, Kakah Sher had a remarkable nature and a big heart. If a needy person stood before him, he would, without hesitation, share half of his money or household supplies—flour, rice, or oil—with them ([Jihad, 1990, p. 114](#)).

Generosity, valued across all ages, is closely linked to spirituality and psychological well-being. Among youth, it is expressed through attention, assistance, and social

suport, strengthening both social and mental development. Research indicates that spiritual values and generosity enhance resilience, mental health, and psychological adjustment. Females often demonstrate higher generosity than males, and family structure influences generosity, spirituality, and resilience. Islamic teachings also emphasize helping those in need, which fosters spiritual, mental, and psychological health ([Malik, 2021, p. 132](#)).

Hospitality

In Pashtunwali, a guest is highly respected and regarded as a “friend of God.” Every Pashtun maintains a *hujra*-a communal space for hosting guests and preserving the core values of Pashtun culture. Traditionally, it also served as a gathering place where travelers shared stories and experiences, fostering social interaction and cultural exchange ([Aziz, Ali & Khan, 2021, p. 211](#)). Pashtuns provide good food, accommodation, and complete safety for the guest’s comfort. Hospitality serves as a means to end enmity, build friendship, and resolve tribal disputes. The guest’s tribe, language, or religion are of no significance. only quality service is offered to them. This custom is one of the cherished and valued traditions of the Pashtuns ([Federal-Of..., 2024, p. 11](#)).

In other words, under Pashtunwali, hospitality is considered one of the highest moral duties. Guests—whether known or unknown—are treated with the utmost respect, generosity, and dignity. Hospitality in Pashtun culture is not merely a custom but a sacred obligation that symbolizes honor, kindness, and communal solidarity. Traditionally, the *hujra* serves as a communal guesthouse in every village, where guests are welcomed, and both joyful and sorrowful occasions are shared. Moreover, protecting the guest’s life, dignity, and belongings is considered a binding responsibility ([Rishtin, 2010, p. 29](#)).

Kakah Sher, much like his father and uncles, is portrayed as an exemplary figure of hospitality. He cared deeply for his friends and often shared his inheritance generously with others. The novel describes: Smandar Khan, though poor himself, was deeply attached to his only nephew, Sher Alam. As a child, Sher was never allowed to sit alone; later, Smandar took him everywhere. Gradually, Sher bonded with the young men of Kabul-the Kakahs-and adopted their way of life: generosity, courage, youthful camaraderie, and noble gatherings.

When Smandar passed away after a long illness, Sher Alam had already transformed into the legendary Kakah Sher-renowned for his fearlessness and leadership

among the Kakahs. For many years, he walked shoulder to shoulder with the spirited youth of Kabul, attended every gathering, and learned the values of brotherhood, humility, poetry, and patriotism. So generous was he, that after the deaths of his father and uncle, all that remained from a substantial inheritance were a single shop and one fortified house-everything else had been spent on his friends and companions ([Jihad, 1990, pp. 11-14](#)). This narrative illustrates how Pashtunwali not only prescribes formal hospitality but celebrates selfless giving and the preservation of social bonds as the highest virtues of a Pashtun man.

As communication improved between Pashtuns and participants, locals emphasized hospitality. Tea played a central role in social interactions and discussions. One military representative observed, “The Pashtuns were always friendly and welcoming... rushing out to greet us with great warmth.” Accepting their hospitality—such as seating or drinks—was vital for relationship building and social respect ([Coulson, 2014, p.14](#)).

Patriotism (Watan-Palana)

Patriotism (watan-palini) reflects a profound emotional attachment to one’s homeland, people, and cultural identity. It signifies resistance to every kind of colonial domination and dedication to protecting the nation’s political, economic, and cultural sovereignty ([Fazal, 2015, p. 174](#)). Among Pashtuns, this feeling is not limited to speech; it is demonstrated through commitment, selflessness, and an unwavering sense of honor toward their country.

Patriotism constitutes a fundamental tenet of Pashtunwali, deeply embedded in traditional codes of honor and loyalty. No matter how far a Pashtun may live from his homeland, or how prosperous his life in exile, he never forgets his native soil. No foreign garden or green valley compares to the dry plains, thorny deserts, and majestic mountains of his own land ([Rishtin, 2010, p. 28](#)).

In De-Takht-Ghami, Kakah Sher exemplifies this ideal. From childhood, accompanying his father and elders, particularly Haji Sahib Khairuddin Khan, he developed an early exposure to political discourse and national history: His father would often tell him stories of the first Afghan war against the British, where the colonial forces suffered a devastating defeat and only a few survivors returned. These tales ignited a burning sense of patriotism in his heart. He often dreamed of having fought alongside his ancestors against the invaders, testing his courage in the battlefield.

Since then, Kakah Sher remained deeply connected to the destiny of his country, making efforts to stay informed about political developments. Like his father, he kept close ties with Haji Sahib Khairuddin. In other words ([Jihad, 1990, pp. 21-22](#))

Love and Loyalty

In Pashtun society, love is not viewed merely as a private emotion, but as an essential expression of honor, loyalty, and personal integrity. Whether love is directed toward a mother, homeland, craft, or beloved, it is always measured by the scale of dignity and fidelity. Pashtunwali transforms love from a feeling into a profound moral force.

In De-Takht-Ghami, the protagonist Kakah Sher embodies this deeper dimension of love. He does not merely love his country; he also holds deep respect for his craft and sincere devotion toward his beloved, a nomadic girl named Lashtah. His affection is not limited to emotional admiration—it evolves into courageous action. Captivated by a single glance from Lashtah, Kakah Sher undertakes a daring mission to retrieve the De-Takht-Ghami (gemstones of king's throne) from the royal treasury—a gesture that reflects not only his passion but also Pashtun bravery, sacrifice, and social defiance. In pursuit of this love, he is willing to break traditional constraints, fleeing with Lashtah to build a life together. Their escape represents not just a personal love story, but a broader struggle for human dignity and freedom ([Jihad, 1990, pp. 25-32](#)).

Through this lens, Kakah Sher's love becomes a transformative force-spanning emotion to action, individual to society-offering a symbolic critique of rigid traditions and a passionate affirmation of human agency.

Night Raids (Dāra)

In terminology, a night raid, or dāra (Persian: shabkhun), refers to a sudden and unanticipated attack or robbery, often executed by a group of thieves or combatants acting collectively. In Pashtun martial traditions, it is a tactical method of warfare, typically employed when the enemy is superior in numbers or strength. Such raids are irregular, strategically timed, and aim to shock, destabilize, or inflict harm on the opponent. While primarily conducted at night, they may also occur during the day. Additionally, the term can refer to an act of wrongdoing or evil ([Zahid-Mashwani, 2006, p. 441](#); [Pashto Dictionary, 2010, p. 462](#); [Benawa, 1941/1320, p. 293](#)).

In the novel De-Takht-Ghami, this concept materializes vividly through the protagonist's daring raid:

When night had fully fallen, Kakah Sher mounted his horse and left the fortress in pursuit of the De-Takht-Ghami. He stealthily infiltrated the royal palace during midnight, fought valiantly against the palace guards, and succeeded in penetrating the inner sanctum of the king's ([Jihad, 1990, p.49](#)).

This literary depiction aligns closely with the traditional understanding of dāra as both a martial strategy and a cultural motif of bravery, stealth, and resistance in Pashtun resistance history.

Escort and Tribal Protection (Badarga)

In Pashtun culture, badarga has two principal meanings. First, it refers to an armed escort or a group of protectors assigned to accompany and guard an individual, caravan, or convoy during travel—especially across volatile or enemy-held territories. Second, the term is also used to denote the charity or offering made in memory of the deceased ([Benawa, 1941, p. 293](#)).

At its core, badarga is a guarantee of safety for life and property. Individuals under threat—whether from enemies or due to outstanding debts—may request protection through badarga. This escort can be offered based on personal connections or in exchange for payment. In tribal borderlands, where formal state protection is absent, badarga functions similarly to modern insurance, ensuring peaceful passage through otherwise hostile zones. It is considered sacred; violating its terms is seen as an egregious dishonor and can trigger serious conflict ([Rishtin, 2010, p. 21](#)).

This value is illustrated in De-Takht-Ghami through a powerful scene of solidarity and protection following Kakah Sher's daring act: Wounded and bleeding, Kakah Sher reaches the mosque, ties his injuries with his turban, performs ablution, and joins the congregation in prayer like a true warrior. After prayer, the imam leads a supplication for the victory of Muslims and the defeat of the colonial forces. The community surrounds him in admiration—some embrace him, others kiss his face or drape their shawls around him in respect.

The mosque's imam appoints two men to discreetly bring Sher's horse to his home. When Sher exits the mosque accompanied by religious elders, British troops—positioned for search operations—refrain from inspection upon seeing his religious escort ([Jihad, 1990, pp. 67-68](#)). This depiction demonstrates how badarga, in its traditional Pashtun context, is not merely physical protection—it is a communal affirmation of honor,

legitimacy, and belonging. The act of accompanying someone in this way, especially under threat, exemplifies the deeply rooted values of collective responsibility and tribal solidarity.

Loyalty and Ethnic Pride

Loyalty (*wafādāri*) is a profound and noble human trait that binds a person to truth, steadfastness, and commitment—whether to principles, affection, homeland, nation, or comrades. It is not circumstantial, but an expression of sincere conscience. Loyalty is the crown of personal ethics and the pillar of enduring social relationships.

In *De-Takht-Ghami*, loyalty is portrayed through the character of Kakah Sher as a living embodiment of devotion and ethnic pride. His unwavering allegiance to his people, homeland, and companions is likened to the unbreakable bond between a tree and its roots. Throughout the novel, he not only takes pride in his nation's honor but actively defends it—often not with violence, but through dignity, resilience, and moral courage. It is narrated: I feel my friend's sorrow as the pounding of my own chest; if someone attacks his honor, I consider it an attack on my nation's pride (*Jihad*, 1990, pp. 7-8). This statement reflects the depth of Kakah Sher's fidelity and the elevation of ethnic pride above personal interests. His actions symbolize a national consciousness infused with loyalty, courage, and sacrifice.

The novel further contextualizes loyalty through resistance to colonialism: Rumors circulated in Kabul that a British officer named Kiyonari had arrived to revive colonial designs through negotiations with Amir Yaqub. Yet, the Afghan people—especially the elders and tribal leaders—maintained composure and prepared for meaningful action, guided by a collective national will to protect their homeland (*Jihad*, 1990, pp. 7-8).

Ghazā and Jihād (Sacred Combat)

The term *Jihad* means striving, struggle, and active effort. In terminology, it has two meanings:

1. Fighting against disbelievers,
2. The utmost degree of effort and endeavor (*Muqeem*, 2018, p. 74; *Afghaninawis*, 2011, p. 291).

In Pashtun tradition, *ghazā* refers to a sacred battle waged in defense of religion and homeland. It is a spiritually charged term that evokes fervor and self-sacrifice. For Pashtuns, the word itself inspires immediate

readiness—even among the youth and elders alike. Victory in *ghazā* earns one the title of *ghāzī* (warrior), while martyrdom is celebrated as the ultimate honor. Both outcomes are viewed as triumphs (*Benawa*, 1941/1320, p. 289).

In *De-Takht-Ghami*, the term *ghazā* appears within the context of anti-colonial resistance: Gunfire from British soldiers was returned with equal force by Afghan fighters, who managed to kill several of them. As a result, the mujahid leaders resolved to begin a national uprising and launch a jihad against the British the next day. I've already taken the necessary steps and informed the neighborhood youth. God willing, we shall defeat the colonial forces and remind them of past lessons through this righteous *ghazā* (*Jihad*, 1990, p. 96).

This passage demonstrates how the concepts of *ghazā* and *jihad* intertwine not just as religious duties, but as expressions of collective resistance, identity, and spiritual unity in the Pashtun worldview.

Funerary Rites and Condolence Rituals

As God has created humans and sent them to this world as a trial, life and death are both part of this divine test. Death is an undeniable truth. In the Holy Quran, it is stated that every soul shall taste death. In the novel *De-Takht-Ghami*, the rituals of condolence and mourning are depicted vividly. A representative excerpt describes the scene as follows: It was near noon. Since morning, Kakah Sher had been sitting on the condolence mat (*gilim*) at the main hall entrance of the central mosque near Takhta Pul, mourning the death of his only son, Babrak. Around forty to fifty of his relatives and acquaintances were seated along the mosque wall, listening attentively to the recitation of the Quran by Qari Sahib. When the prayer ended, all raised their hands in supplication, then silently offered condolences to Kakah Sher through solemn glances and hand gestures over their chests. Some individuals stood up, approached him, and expressed their sympathies, for which Kakah Sher thanked them (*Jihad*, 1990, p. 91).

This scene portrays how traditional Pashtun mourning rituals emphasize communal solidarity, respect, and shared grief through culturally specific gestures and practices.

Jewelry and Its Cultural Value

Adornment and jewelry are integral to the material culture of every nation. Among Pashtuns, such items carry both aesthetic and symbolic significance, especially for women, and have been cherished and preserved with pride across

generations. As noted by [Zagham \(2015, p. 182\)](#), the historical continuity and cultural richness of these items reflect deeply rooted traditions.

In *De-Takht-Ghami*, the importance of jewelry is immediately apparent. One notable passage illustrates this cultural element: An elderly nomadic woman, speaking in her tribal dialect and loud voice, said to Kakah Sher: Brother! We want a beautiful necklace... We are your loyal customers. In the past, I've bought jewelry from you many times... Now I want something elegant for my daughter—something truly beautiful! A beautiful necklace? Both the mother and daughter nodded eagerly. Kakah Sher turned to Gul, asking her to bring them some of the finest pieces from the shop's collection. He added: Look around the shop walls yourself—you might find one you truly like! ([Jihad, 1990, pp. 30-31](#)).

This episode reflects the cultural attachment to jewelry in Pashtun society—not merely as decorative items, but as markers of tradition, identity, and social exchange.

Handicrafts and Traditional Artistry

Alongside modern industrial production, traditional handicrafts play a crucial role in a nation's cultural and economic life. Originating from human needs and local artistic expression, these crafts include pottery, stoneware, metalwork by blacksmiths, and jewelry by goldsmiths ([Dodyal, 2003, p.61](#)). Created using natural materials and traditional techniques, handicrafts preserve cultural traditions, transmit skills and knowledge across generations, and provide important economic value, particularly in poorer countries ([Shahab, 2024, p. 1](#)).

In the novel *De-Takht-Ghami*, such artisanal heritage is reflected through the depiction of a traditional jewelry shop: This shop had originally belonged to a pious and well-respected goldsmith known for his honesty and wealth. People used to refer to him with pride and reverence as Haji Zabardast Khan. After his passing a few years ago, full responsibility of the shop was taken over by his only son. Though his real name was Sher Alam, he became widely known over the years by various names such as Kakah Sher the Goldsmith's Son, Kakah Sher, Kakah Zargar, and later, Kakah Ghazi ([Jihad, 1990, p. 10](#)).

This passage demonstrates how traditional artisanal practices, particularly jewelry-making, are embedded in social memory and identity, passed down generationally and serving as a symbol of pride and continuity.

Violation and Transformation of Pashtunwali

Violation refers to any individual or collective act that transgresses moral principles or societal norms—formal or informal—and is either legally prohibited or socially condemned ([Sidiqi, 2017, p. 4](#)). In *De-Takht-Ghami*, the transformation and violation of *Pashtunwali* are presented through a nuanced and realistic artistic lens. The novel invites the reader to witness the stages of conflict, weakening, and evolution of traditional values.

While the novel narrates themes such as honor (*nang*), revenge (*bada*), and asylum (*panah*), it also reveals how these principles are distorted under the pressures of time, political power, economic hardship, and shifting social structures. Some characters abandon or manipulate the values of *Pashtunwali* for personal gain or in response to broader societal changes. These transgressions disrupt the foundations of trust, unity, and justice within the community.

Author Mustafa Jihad artistically portrays these violations not merely as moral failings, but as symptoms of deeper structural transformations. Through his storytelling, he presents a society at a cultural crossroads—where tradition collides with modernity, and ethical flexibility begins to replace rigid customary law. The resulting narrative environment captures a collective identity grappling with change, where the resilience of *Pashtunwali* is tested by the currents of a transforming world.

1. Elopement as a Violation of Pashtunwali

In *Pashtunwali*, elopement is regarded as a serious breach of family and tribal honor. While some may see it as a path to personal salvation or love, traditional Pashtun norms interpret it as a grave moral offense. Such actions often result in blood feuds, lasting animosities, or even fatal consequences. Particularly in cases where a girl elopes with someone to whom she is not formally engaged—or worse, is already promised to another—both her own family and the groom's family perceive the act as deeply dishonorable.

In some instances, if the couple is caught, they may be killed to restore the family's *nang* (honor). If not apprehended, the boy's family may visit the girl's household with *nanawati* (a ritual plea for forgiveness), seeking resolution through a *jirga* (tribal council). Literature, especially novels, often explore this conflict as a poignant collision between individual desire and traditional obligation, portraying characters who are caught in a

moral and emotional struggle between love and social expectation ([Sharifi, 2019, p. 79](#)).

In De-Takht-Ghami, the final scene involving Kakah Sher's elopement with Lashtah encapsulates this very clash. Lashtah, defying the authority of her family and society for the sake of love, courageously seeks refuge in Kakah Sher's tent. Kakah Sher is faced with a profound test of loyalty-torn between his cultural code and emotional devotion. Lashtah, bearing her symbolic pao and tikray, stands as an emblem of love, honor, and sacrifice. After her impassioned plea, Kakah Sher chooses to flee with her, abandoning everything.

This scene represents a deep emotional tension-between individual love and social restraints, between tradition and personal agency, and ultimately, between life and death ([Jihad, 1990, pp. 131–135](#)).

2. Forced Seizure of the Necklace from the King's Harem

In the context of Pashtunwali, seizing something by force is not merely a material transgression-it constitutes a direct assault on personal, familial, and tribal honor. Such acts, especially when involving violence or coercion, can escalate beyond mediation and often lead to cycles of vengeance.

In De-Takht-Ghami, the author presents this violation through the symbolic incident involving the forceful taking of a necklace necklace from the king's harem. The narrative clearly distinguishes between legitimate exchange (based on honor, trust, and mutual consent) and forced appropriation (perceived as dishonor and provocation).

Through a dispute over Lashtah's jewelry, the novel illustrates how even the smallest item-if taken without consent-can ignite a deep emotional response rooted in cultural pride. The reader is shown how precious dignity is in Pashtun society, and how violently one might react when that dignity is trampled.

The protagonist, De-Takht-Ghami, declares his stance with both conviction and action: Kakah Sher readied his rifle, revolver, and sword-waiting silently into the night. Once the hour ripened, he mounted his horse, left the fort, and headed toward the palace to retrieve Lashtah's necklaces. At midnight, he stormed the royal harem. With tremendous bravery and resistance, he fought off the palace guards, waking the king with the uproar. Breaking through by sheer strength, he used his revolver to dislodge four necklaces from the queen's necklace and rode away with them... ([Jihad, 1990, p. 49](#)).

This passage reflects the ultimate expression of resistance-when cultural values are perceived as violated, restoring honor becomes a sacred duty, even at the cost of breaking into the highest authority's sanctuary.

Conclusion

A sociological reading of De-Takht-Ghami reveals that Pashtunwali is not merely a static tradition, but a living cultural and social legacy of the Pashtun nation. Despite the historical ebb and flow of time, Pashtunwali remains deeply rooted in collective identity, while simultaneously displaying flexibility in the face of socio-cultural and economic transformations.

Though grounded in the core values of honor, loyalty, bravery, and communal dignity, the novel's characters demonstrate how these principles are increasingly challenged by contemporary pressures. Their actions reflect the tension between enduring cultural codes and the evolving realities of society.

The analysis also affirms that Pashtunwali is not a rigid or obsolete system; rather, it is a dynamic ethical framework that either resists change or adjusts itself to new social demands. Through characters' choices and the depiction of moral dilemmas, the novel illustrates the tension between tradition and transformation. These shifts are neither uniform nor uncontested-they are often met with resistance, uncertainty, and emotional conflict.

Thus, De-Takht-Ghami provides a nuanced artistic representation of the continuity and transformation of Pashtunwali, capturing the inner social contradictions and value shifts within Pashtun society. This study not only contributes to the field of literary analysis but also offers a meaningful foundation for sociological inquiry into cultural resilience, identity negotiation, and normative change.

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