

## A Review of Pashtuns Hujra in Urdu and Pashto Short stories

Dr. Anwar Ali<sup>1</sup> Dr. Tahir Abbas Tayib<sup>2</sup> Zaiba Gulzar<sup>3</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*The Hujra is usually called the place where the guests are accommodated and their food and drink is arranged. In the Pashtun society, the Hujra is a prominent institution. Weddings and such like other ceremonies are often held in the Hujra. People also come to these Hujras for condolence and Fateha, the Jirgas (panchayats) also sit there. In these Hujras people smoke hookahs and pipes, play cards and other similar games. Traditional stories and folktales are narrated here and people gathering here spend their time in laughing and gossiping with each other. Similarly, this is a news agency too, as important news reach early to these centers. Wherever an incident—good or bad things happen, somehow the news reaches these Hujras. Discussions and debates on various topics are also held here. Apart from other cultural activities, the youngsters warm up traditional dance and music festivals by singing, playing sitar, rabab, tambourine and matka. It is said that these Hujras are cultural centers in Pashtun society. In Urdu fiction, the Pukhtoon's Hujras and the activities enacted therein, is researched and critiqued in this article.*

**Keywords:** Pashtun Society, Hujra, Fateha, Jirgas, Panchayats, Hooqas, Pipes, Play Cards, Folktales, Rabab, Tambourine, Matka, Pashtun Society

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Urdu, Islamia College University Peshawar

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Urdu, GC Women University, Sialkot.

<sup>3</sup> Visiting Faculty, Department of Urdu, GC Women University, Sialkot

The Hujra is the epitome of Pashtun society. It is not only a place to eat and drink and accommodate guests but also a center for other activities of the villagers. Wedding ceremonies are also held in the Hujra. In case of death, people come to these “Hujras” to offer condolences and prayers. The Jirga also (panchayat) sits there. Cards and other similar games are played. Traditional stories and tales are also told here and people gossip and spend time laughing and gossiping with each other. Similarly, this institution is also an important news center. Wherever an incident takes place, good and bad things happen, some or other news of it reaches the “Hujras”.

There are discussions and debates on various topics. Apart from other cultural activities, young people here sing songs, play sitar, rabab, tambourine and matka to warm up traditional dance and music festivals. These Hujras’ are said to be cultural centers in Pashtun society. In the same way, in every village where there is a common room, all the people of the village sit in the same room. Each person brings food and drink according to his capacity and the food is eaten sitting at the same table. When the population of the village increases, different people make separate rooms for themselves. Similarly, the women of the village also prefer to make separate rooms for themselves. Apart from Hujra, the rooms and guest rooms are also called dera. Hertbert H. Verland writes in this regard:

"This is the part where men rest during the day, so it is also considered a place of general assembly and the number of people who go to a person is determined by the status of that person in that nation." In the code of honor of the Pathans, it is called Melamastya / Melama meaning guest.” (1)

In the Short Stories of Urdu fiction, where other aspects of Pashtun customs and culture have been presented, the night and day of the Hujra have also been shown. In the short story “Aan”, there is a village with one Hujra, but when the village is divided into two parts, one Khel takes the old Hujra and the other Khel makes a separate “Hujra” for themselves. These “Hujras” are built on the common land of the village which is called "Shamilat". According to this writer:

“The residents of Dheri village did not have their own “Hujra”.  
An emergency “Hujra” was set up on a piece of common land

near the garbage dump. It was also used for weddings and other ceremonies. ....The elders had great qualities. They were as strong as mountains, that's why they did great things. ” (2)

In the present era, the concept of joint “Hujras” in the tribal areas is disappearing. Now the trend of making separate “Hujras” or sitting rooms for oneself is common in the tribal areas as well. Since when has this trend arisen in the region? The writer said in this regard:

"At that time there was no practice of separate sitting at home. It came to this side of Attock along with the English." (3)

This quote suggests that after the arrival of the British in the tribal areas, a series of hypocrisy and civil war broke out. That is why Khan Khawaneen's class was trying to make separate rooms for themselves so that they could talk to their people there. The story of Khan's “Hujra” is also presented in the short "Najab Khan". When the confrontation between Najab Khan and the British starts, negotiations between Malik and Najab Khan's men take place in the country's “Hujra”. Although there is a tradition in Pashtun society that others are respected in their home ‘Hujras’ and they are given full freedom of speech, the “Hujras” of some Khawaneens are different from those of Pashtunwali. Even sitting in the “Hujras”, one should not speak harshly in front of the Khawaneens and whoever wants to speak the truth openly, the attitude of the Khawaneens becomes very bad. In the story of “Najab Khan”, when the men hint at not stopping their attacks against the British, then on this occasion the action of Khan becomes something like this:

"If I had not clothed the jackals in lions’ skins myself, why would they have come to my mouth in a crowded room today?" (4)

It is also customary for the Pashtuns to eat and drink in the ‘Hujras’ of the tribal area.

"When we reached Malik's Hujra, he was lying on the bed with a big pillow and a half-naked boy was sitting, holding a pipe in his hand. He was sitting on the ground. The poor boy's feet were constantly trembling. He was staring at the face of Malik. As if saying in his heart. "Have mercy on my weak hands, oppressor." (5)

The scene of the Hujra of the Pashtuns in Tahir Afridi's short story "Dedan" is no different from this.

“When he reached Malik Feroze's Hujra, the sun was setting behind the mountains. Many people were sitting in the Hujra. There were beds lying all around. They looked bowed in respect. A boy was sitting in front of him holding a pipe and his eyes down to earth.” (6)

The story of the village's common ‘Hujra’ is also presented in the short story “BeKafan”. There are men sitting in the ‘Hujra’ while there is silence on all sides. The audience can enjoy the elders’ aggressive speech. In the same legend, the view of Malik Aziz Khan's room in the village is also presented in which he appears with noble dignity and is surrounded by a bunch of flatterers:

"The room was full of flatterers and Aziz Khan was lying on the bed." (7)

Khan Khawaneens of Pashtun society do not sit with the common people in the “Hujras” of the village but in their separate large “Hujras” because their world is slightly different from that of the common people. In Khawaneens Hujras there are several servants to serve them and flatterers or poor people keep visiting them to praise. Now the situation has changed but in the old days the beds were kept upside down for the common people in the rooms of the Khawaneens, to make commoners feel their inferiority. They did not want to make them sit equal to them so that they could not think of their equality and their self-confidence could not flourish.

In the same way, in order to escape their wrath or to get their work out of them, the court other flatterers used to come to their “Hujras” every day. In these “Hujras”, those who cursed Khan and those who mentioned the exposure of his machinations were trying to keep Khan happy. Khan was happy and they were safe.

Tahir Afridi's short story "Zaban Be Zaban" (8) depicts a “Hujra” of a khan of Pashtun society where plans are made against truth and justice. The story depicts the character of an old man. There is a danger of unveiling Khan's sinister character and creating difficulties for him by speaking the truth. For the same fear, Khan makes this person go round his room from time to time and tries to annoy him. On this occasion, the hypocritical atmosphere of Khan's “Hujra”

is exposed. Every selfish person here is painted in the color of fat mouth, lies, macro-fraud and hypocrisy, putting many faces on his face. And such difficulties are created for an honest person like Misal Khan that when he finds himself deprived of the courage to speak the truth, he is forced to cut his tongue.

In the same way, the ‘Hujras’ of these Khawaneens used to be a refuge for the fugitives. Most of the thieves, robbers and assassins who were caught by the law also used to live here as guests. They used to stay here but usually the Khawaneens used to keep them for their own purposes and when necessary they used to kill them, rob them or commit other similar incidents. Similarly, the farmers of these Khawaneens were always ready to defend them.

Ashraf Hussain Ahmed's story "Aiteraf" (9) this story represents the scene of Khan's Hujras in a village. Khan's Hujra is a heaven for fugitives who are afraid to face the law or are often filled with assassins. Kalashnikovs and rifles are openly displayed in these ‘Hujras’ and they show off various weapons in the ‘Hujra’ to intimidate the people of the village. They are also proud of themselves.

In the short story of “2035” (10) Weapons are displayed while the tradition of hospitality is also presented.

Tahir Afridi has also presented the view of a Hujra of Pashtuns in the story of “Duae Maghfarat” (11). However, in this room, Dilbar Khan forcibly lifts a boy from the bed. Regarding the behavior of the legendary writer Dilbar Khan, it is said that this bed was probably owned by Dilbar Khan because if it was the bed of the room, Dilbar Khan would not have lifted the boy in this way. This class does not miss any opportunity to humiliate the poor.

In the same way, the dim light of the lantern is mentioned in the fiction instead of the bright light of the bulb. This suggests that this fiction was written at a time when there was no electric light in the area. It also has a mud floor bathroom where people usually bathe in the morning. There are also piles of unnecessary hair on the bathroom floor. There is also a small mosque with a room built into the wall. In the closet are the Quran and the supplications. There are also nests in the roof of the hall of this Hujra in which the babies of Ababels keep whispering. Similarly in fiction there is also a pipe in the Hujra which Dilbar Khan tries unsuccessfully to drink.

Scenes of Khan Baba's Hujra are also shown in the legend "Pagal" (12). Birds, mulberries and oranges are seen on the trees and shrubs. Khan Baba's “Hujra” is the cradle of

love, compassion and sympathy. Khan Baba's Hujra is the representative Hujra of the Pashtun society. This is the concept of the Hujra which has the status of a cultural institution with moral values in the Pashtun society. It is in this Hujra that the moral values of the Pashtuns flourish and the tradition of Hujra is fully alive in the tribal areas. In other parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it has been replaced by "Beithak".

Tahir Afridi wrote the story "Barf Paharon Ka Aadmi" (13) considering the environment of a tribal village, I have presented the view of a Hujra in such a way that there is a big Hujra with a mosque inside it. There are also water jugs there. The guest is not asked about his stay. Special care is taken for his food and comfort. There is no difference between strangers and acquaintances. All this is a reflection of the specific culture of the Pashtuns.

In Pashtun culture, the tradition of dancing and singing at weddings or other happy occasions has been going on since time immemorial. Because of this, people can sit in the drawing room of their home and watch and listen to dance, song, music of any country of the world through TV and internet. But in the past, when these facilities did not exist or were not common, Prostitutes were often invited to happy occasions and were made to dance and sing on the open fields or on the roofs of houses, and often in the open courtyard of the Hujra. The men formed a circle around the prostitutes, sat on the beds and enjoyed themselves, while the women often watched the spectacle while standing on the terrace of the house, sitting on the roof of the room or peeking through the walls.

Zaitoon Bano short story "Pankha" depicts a Pashtun wedding party that reflects this aspect of Pashtun culture. In this story, the narrator has presented the situation of holding and enjoying such parties in the room with the details:

"Dancing and singing prostitutes would sometimes take a look at the women sitting on the roof. The women would get out of control and reach for the money tied to the sides of the dupattas. But immediately their hands became loose for fear of the men in the room." The desire to give money to prostitutes with their own hands would remain in their heart. " (14)

Similarly, when the prostitutes get tired, a break is made. During the break, the traditional drink of Qahwah is usually served in the "Hujras" to relieve the fatigue. This tradition of Pathans is also mentioned in the said Math.

Tahir Afridi's story "Beri Ka darkhat" (15) also mentions the dancing of prostitutes in Pashtun weddings. Prostitution was considered a part of Pashtun culture on the occasions of joy, so there was no reaction from the religious circles. People used to come from far and wide to see the prostitutes. Traditional hospitality was also shown on such occasions, so when Naseer thinks about his marriage in the said fiction, he is reassured that this year because of tobacco the harvest is good and now he has money so he will be able to take good care of the guests coming to the wedding.

In Pashtun 'Hujras', pillows are usually placed on the beds. The old men of the village are leaning on the beds adorned with these cushions. These elders discuss and comment on various issues, problems and current situation of the village. When a person in the village takes any action against Pashtunwali, these "Hujras" are often visited. It is as if these "Hujras" are the training grounds of Pashtun Wali They listen to their elders and are trained in a way to know and recognize their values. These Hujras have their own etiquette by which the younger generation learns the culture of their ancestors. If a person does something ugly in the 'Hujra', then the elders rebuke him.

Most of the mosques are built near the Hujras of the Pashtuns in which besides the prayers, jirgas are also held. Those who do not agree to hold a jirga in one's Hujra, hold a jirga in the mosque. Taraweeh prayers are a religious duty. The children of the village are also given religious and moral training. They are also taught the basic rules and the Holy Qur'an.

In Tahir Afridi's story where these aspects of Pashtun culture are presented, there is a tradition of drinking pipe inside the 'Hujras' because in the tribal areas it is still customary to drink huqqa and pipe in the "Hujras". A guest named Gul Sher stays in the novelist's room. Gul tells Shira to go home to fetch food and starts to fill the tobacco by pushing the pipe towards him. When food is brought for him, according to the legend:

"He was smoking a pipe as if there was no one else in the whole room," he said after the meal. "Now if you have a cup or two of Qahwa, it will be a lot of fun." Then he started stroking his mustache. When I started walking towards the house without saying anything, he called out." (16)

From this quote, along with the custom of drinking pipe in the 'Hujras' of Pashtuns, it also comes to light that it is also the custom of Pashtuns to drink Qahwah after eating food.



Masoom Shah Saqib short story “Nakaam kamyabi” (17) Malik Hayat's vast “Hujra” is shown, in which his father, Rab Nawaz, is shown inhaling and exhaling deeply. Hujra and hospitality are very important in Pashtun culture. If even a poor person enters the room of a rich person, he is treated as a guest. At this stage, the difference between rich and poor disappears and he is only a guest.

Tahir Afridi's story “Beri Ka darkhat” Naseer Khan enters Malik Feroz Khan Hujras. Then Malik Feroz Khan asked him about his condition and gave space on his bed. At the same time, a man puts a pillow behind him and puts his rifle on the peg. Then a boy runs and fills the bowl with water from the pot. And gives it to Naseer. On this occasion Malik Feroz Khan says to the boy:

"Go and make some tea. The guest is very tired." (18)

It is also the custom of the Pashtun tribal areas that no matter who the guest is in the Hujra, the food comes from everyone and they do not sit down to eat until the last person brings their bread. There is no difference between rich and poor in these Hujras. From someone comes chicken or meat, someone brings lentils or greens and bread from wheat or corn. They all sit together and eat and it is not considered from whom it comes.

In the legend, when Naseer Khan sits in Malik Feroze's room, after the congregational prayers, everyone brings food from their homes. They sit by the window and eat together. The legend also states that the Pashtuns believe that feeding on the earth increases their livelihood. A similar scene of Pashtun Hujra is also presented in the short story “Watan Achha ke Mohabbat” (19). The people of the village get acquainted with Abbas Qamro due to his high capacity and he starts coming and going in the room of the village. These village ‘Hujras’ are also a source of social interaction where the guests are accommodated and entertained, while the villagers listen to each other's pains and anxieties and try to cure them.

This is the reason that in story of "Sahare" (20), when the sarwarae is not able to bring medicine for his son's Jani death due to scarcity, in this hour of trouble, he goes to the “Hujra”. In Pashtun society, the Hujra is also a center of gossip, humor and good humor. Here, unmarried young men often sleep at night and their equipment often lies in the Hujra. They also make light-hearted jokes and try to annoy their friends by grabbing any of their weaknesses.

The same aspect of the Hujra is presented in Tahir Afridi's story "Gul Show" (21). In the fiction, on the one hand, there is talk of Hujra meetings and jokes, and on the other hand,



there is a mention of the custom of pipe in the Hujra, which is considered an essential part of the Hujra of the Pashtuns. There is nothing wrong with smoking a pipe. In the Story of khula Sandoog", too, the character of the fiction writer, Nadir Khan, is portrayed in his pipe-drinking style:

“Amirgul would call him and fill the pipe and put it in front of him. Nader would take his quail in one hand and drink a bowl full of water from the jug and draw a long pipe. It would come out of the nostrils like a train engine.” (22)

Similarly, the legendary "Gul Show also depicts instrumental gatherings in Pashtun 'Hujras', referring to the cultural identity of the tribal society:

"Everybody was happy with the good harvest. The sound of the harp, the sound of the pitcher, and the mesmerizing sound of the singer - it seemed that children, old and young, were lost in the magic of instruments. They were full of fun and intoxication. As the sound of the assembly grew louder and louder inside the houses, Kaka Khushal was not left on the bed happily. (23)

This quote also suggests that not only young people but also old people come and enjoy these gatherings in the Hujra. Music concerts do not take place in the Hujra every day. Channels of the world can be watched through the dish, but when the world was unaware of these things, at one time this hobby was fulfilled through radio. The fictional radio occupation is also mentioned:

"Sometimes he would go to the room and listen to the radio brought by Malik Nawaz's son and listen to his oral stories of the cities." (24)

When the Pashtun youth gather in the collective room at night, one young man picks up the rabab, the other handles the matka. The fingers of the lute player become entangled with the strings of the lute, and the flute player joins his rhythm and shrugs his shoulders with a sigh. The singer wakes up to the sound of his God-given voice, and the melody of Rabab, Sitar and matka and the melodious voice again enchants the whole atmosphere of the room.

These gatherings of Pashtun "Hujras" have been mentioned in the legend "khula Sandoog" (25). While depicting Pashtun 'Hujras' in fiction, the novelist also mentions gossip and drinking

in Pashtun 'Hujras'. But this does not mean that luxuries are enjoyed in these 'Hujras' but these things are part of Pashtun culture. Children, old and young alike are involved in these gatherings.

In the story "Woo Jo Gawoon Tha"(26),Tahir Afridi has presented the same aspect of the Pashtun Hujra and has described the usefulness of these gatherings which creates unity, solidarity and love among the Pashtuns and also helps to relieve their time and fatigue. This is a kind of effective prescription. Which gives peace of mind. The map of the "Hujra" is also drawn in the legend "Andhere Ka ghao" as follows:

"All the men of the village had come and sat in the room. And between them Chilam was dancing like a beautiful lakhty (dancing boy). The roar of the pipe was creating the heat of life in the party and the smoke was coming out of it and dissolving in the air. Rabab was lying in the lap of Redi Gul and Juma Khan's resounding voice was resounding in the ears of the people participating in the gathering. (27)

In this myth, it is also said with reference to the Hujra of the Pashtuns that most of the unmarried, young and old bachelors also sleep in the Hujra because if there is any important place for them to spend their time, it is this Hujra. Similarly, the young men of the village who are unmarried not only sleep in the "Hujra" but also their equipment is often kept in the private "Hujra".

Zaitoon Banu's story "Nasha" (28) also mentions laughter parties and rabab and chellam in the 'Hujras' of the Pashtuns. Ceremonies are performed here. Prostitutes are invited here. Night gatherings are held here. The company of Rabab Sittar and Matka, ghara and colourful gatherings are held here. Even the bitter realities of the stormy world have to be faced here. Crowds for funerals also gather here and from here sighs of prayers for forgiveness are raised.

"People were gathered in the common room of the village and Shamroz's brothers were comforting him by raising their hands in prayer with Namdar." (29)

In the Pashtun tribal areas, young people often gather not only in their village Hujras to watch the dance of the "lakhte" (dancing boy) dancing to the ting tukur (instrumental sound) in village Hujras. In Tarang, the youths of other nearby villages go to each other's 'Hujras'

even after receiving invitations. They also shoot bullets in the 'Hujras' to express their happiness and often take turns shooting. The Pashtun Hujra is also mentioned in the legend "Kanch kay Tukray" (30). It is also said in the legend that these Hujras of the village are often attributed to a person or a tribe, khel or some other name. In this story one of the Hujra was named as Ahmed Kaka. Since this 'Hujra' is situated on a high hill, it is known as "High Room". Similarly, in some Pashtun 'Hujras', old and young sit together, while in some 'Hujras' only the young are there. The rooms reserved for the youth are called "Da kashrano Hujra" i.e. the 'Hujra' of the youth. In these 'Hujras' the young people gather at night.

The myth also speaks of the sanctity of the Pashtun Hujra, that the Pashtuns consider any of their Hujras to be free of immoral talk when the women pass close by, the chamber becomes silent and all the young men of the chamber become silent. Similarly, women also become silent while passing through these chambers and no other sound is heard except their breaths.

Zaitoon Bano's story "Shisham Ka Patta" (31) also depicts the scene of a Pashtun 'Hujra'. The story depicts Feroz kaka's 'Hujra' where guests come and go from place to place and Feroz kaka treats them with hospitality. After the death of Feroz Kaka, his son Noroz lala follows in his father's footsteps and makes similar friends. Dozens of guests come and go every day. A guest enters the 'Hujra' and is listened to as per tradition and necessity. But it is so important that the myth gives an idea of the hospitality of the Pashtuns, the hunting activities and the tradition of having a Hujra.

Zaitoon Bano's story "Faseelain" (32) represent the scene of Khan Kaka Hujra. This Hujra belongs to the elder khan of the village in which the servants of khan are shown walking around. This Hujra was also use on the death of Khan Kaka daughter for Fateha and Duae e Maghfrat. In the same Hujra Khan Kaka son Sajjad and his friends come and stay from the city and their food and lodging is arranged.

Shamim Fazal Khaliq's legend "Gonga dard" (33) also mentions the sanctity of the chador and the four walls with the toils of the village fields and the hospitality of the Hujras and the Pashtuns and also tries to show that the Pashtun society I have a pleasant attitude towards a stranger in different positions. It is the nature of the Pashtun people to take care of their living room and their 'Hujra' more than their home. In this age of materialism, everyone suffers from narcissism. In the same way, the old system of Hujras has come to an end. The

elders of the village explain that the time is no more for those who used to make sacrifices for each other. Now the time has changed. These women also refer to the current concept of the “Hujra”:

“That is why the men have demolished their “Hujras” and decorated their houses, and like the fields, orchards and houses, the people have divided the gardens into two parts. They are broken and scattered.” (34)

The Pashtuns used to have a common Hujra in every village in ancient times but with the passage of time different khels and tribes built their own separate Hujras and now the concept of common Hujras is slowly disappearing, each person has started building a separate Hujra or sitting room for himself. Hypocrisy and apathy have taken the place of unity. In some areas khan's Hujra was the Hujra of the whole village. From here people used to learn all the ways of life. However, the tradition of Hujra in Pashtun society is now slowly disappearing. Because now the situation has changed a lot, everyone prefers to have separate rooms and seating for themselves but in the tribal areas there is still a common guest house of the village, which promotes tribal unity, solidarity, brotherhood and tolerance.

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