

# Social-psychological analysis of three cups of tea

Literature



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The major characters in the book faced various conflicting societal values mostly within themselves because of external forces and their resolution of the conflict led to their roles as the story unfolded. The conflict unfolds as the major characters feel the pressure of different perspectives and attitudes by the other members of society and battle with themselves over which path to pursue. Ultimately, the major characters make a decision and take on roles that determined the outcome of the story.

One major character is Greg Mortenson who started out as a mountain climber for personal goals to become an education advocate for children in the remote villages in Northern Pakistan and Afghanistan. As his wife described him, he “ is not one of us” (Mortenson and Relin 4). This was because of his upbringing by missionary parents who worked in Tanzania. Two conflicts in social values emerged in his character. One is his role as father and husband to his family. Pursuing his cause in Pakistan means he would be unable to provide for his family and be there for support as expected by society.

Building schools involves money and he experienced great difficulties in obtaining the money for the schools. He is also foremost donor to his cause. After rallying people, he was able to find funding but this still meant separation from his family for long periods. The other is his attempt to get through to the communities and the people who he described as similar to an ibex (117), very cautious about foreign influences. There are also stark differences in the values of the Shiite Islam and American beliefs, especially in educating girls.

Differences in social values meant he had to deal with resistance and counter-influences (Barrett 15, 73) while at the same time learning about the beliefs and values of the villages. Educating women represents a radical change in the social order of the community (Burch 48) it was not surprising for resistance to emerge from the conservative elements of the religious authority. After 9/11 he continued to receive death threats not only from the conservative religious authority but also from the home front (Mortenson and Relin 302). Immersion in the villages solidified Mortenson's perspective of the peace loving Shiite communities.

The outcome is the building of schools that accommodate both boys and girls. This decision reflected social optimality as the positive outcome of social welfare functions (Burt 27) because of the acceptability of the schools to the communities especially among girls, despite conflicts, and the positive contribution of educating girls to the long-term development of the community. There was positive acceptance of the schools expressed through the "fierceness in their desire to learn, despite how mightily is stacked against them" (Mortenson and Relin 32) and the admiration from different sects and economic classes (3).

Educated girls also tend to remain in the community to impart their learning to the next generation while educated boys move to the cities to work and do not return to the rural communities (217, 234). Another major character is Haji Ali, the nurmandhar or village leader of Korphe, the village where Mortenson ended up after losing his way in descending from K2 (Mortenson and Relin 24-25). As the village leader of a Shiite community, there was expectation for him to uphold the values of society.

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Allowing an American to establish a school in the community and other communities that cater event to girls meant allowing change in existing social values and the Muslim way of life. The social conflict in his character was the divergence in his positive view of education for all to improve the lives of the villagers (209) and the different view of extremist groups. Since he accepted Mortenson into the community, this potentially placed the community in danger from internal divisions and external interference.

By selecting to support the building of schools in the community, he received renewed respect from members of his village and in other villages. He proved that terrorism is not an innate aspect of the Muslim way of life and education is a peaceful and positive development in the community (Mortenson and Relin 151). Still another major character is Twaha, the son of Haji Ali. He is a single parent who speaks some English and became Mortenson's guide in immersing into the culture of the village. He also taught Mortenson Urdu.

While being a guide to Mortenson, he also learned more English and about foreign cultures (Mortenson and Relin 24). The conflict in social values was apparent even before Mortenson arrived. He is a widower and had to take care of his children. This meant that even then he had to deviate from strict gender roles in the traditional practice. His exposure to foreign culture and knowledge of some English as well as recognition of the value of education to the betterment of his village (114) also made him more open to education for both boys and girls.

His guiding role and support was a big help in establishing schools in his own village and in other villages. Other major characters are Faisal Baig and Mouzafer Ali, two villagers who represented the impoverished families in the community (Mortenson and Relin 200). The biggest conflict in social values for these characters is reconciling the seemingly conflicting complexities of identity change (Davis 2) implied from supporting the modern education system relative to traditional learning.

These characters wanted to improve their lives and that of their families and the village (244) but this would also mean they have to let go of some traditional practices and beliefs. The choice of these two characters to become Mortenson's defenders (255) was important in upholding education in the village and in other remote villages. The Taliban and other extremist factions comprise the antagonists in the story. Extremists are strongly resistant to foreign influences on Islamic social values (Tarrow 2, 4). This found expression in terrorism.

These characters faced the conflict in social values with the establishment of schools for boys and girls in villages by an American infidel (Mortenson and Relin 152). They felt threatened by the foreign incursion and regarded this as the bastardization of their way of life (152, 185, 285). They resorted to acts such as death threats (280, 302) and kidnapping (176). Although, this posed a challenge to Mortenson and the protagonist characters in the villages, this further heightened the advocacy and commitment to the cause to battle ignorance and deprivation that breeds extremist acts such as terrorism.

The book expressed change in society then and now. Before, social fragmentation was common because of limited cross-cultural awareness. The ignorance and misconceptions of other cultures created resistance. The story showed that by opening to other cultures, learning happens in a manner that improves societies by changing individual misconceptions and reinforcing the culture of peace that serves as the foundation of different cultures. Now, women have a place in bettering society. This change makes society better. The first step is education.