

Introduction to Pashtun Women's Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Much of human emotions are expressed via poetry and other literary genres but when it comes to women in Pashtun society we lose their voices. Afzal Raza believes it is impossible for Pashtun women to speak about their pain and misery or any other feelings (Raza). As women could be persecuted for writing poetry in Pashtun society thus much of the folklore poetry came to existence by female speakers anonymously. Recently, New York Times reported about several young girls set themselves on fire after they were caught reciting poetry to an FM radio from home (Griswold).

Reading about women casualties for their poetry, Raza shall be true saying that Tapa or Landay (a two-verse poetry) is the ancient form of poems mostly created by women that still exist as its writer is unknown but has its female speaker for us to understand it. To study Pashtun women and their poetry Tapa or Landay is the primary source to begin (Raza).

Keywords: *Pashtun Women, Poetry, concerns, call for rights and status.*

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Poetry Magazine published numerous Landay in their collection. The publishers believe landay is the most basic source to hear Pashtun women. On the other hand, it is famous poetry in Afghanistan. In their collection of Landays we read about women current concerns. Some of these concerns are peace, social injustice, force marriages, education, political instability, moral man, poverty, and national unity. For instance, the Poetry Magazine has collected the following Landay:

You sold me to an old man, father!

May God destroy your home, I was your daughter.

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(Poetry Magazine)

I will explore women's sociocultural concerns through my research in detail. Shortly, in this two verses poem, we read that the speaker is a young girl who not only complained but also cursed her father for his decision about her marriage to an older adult. It will be discussed how arrange marriages take place in Pashtun society in detail in the following pages. Anyhow, Professor Afzal Raza believes that women's part in Pashto literature could be found in folklore, women could help the folkloric poems to survive for thousands of years. (Raza)

In order to prove women's wit and wisdom, both Raza and Poetry Magazine compiled on Pashtun Women Landays as follows based on the poems' themes and subjects.

Themes: Patriotism

Even if, I live a miserable life ahead

I would not stop my beloved to join war for the country

(Raza)

The following Landay is believed to be attributed to an Afghan folk hero, Malalai, a Pashtun poet. Poetry Magazine stated that Malalai was an Afghan warrior who fought alongside the commander Ayub Khan to defeat the British at the Battle of Maiwand on July 27, 1880.

I'll make a tattoo from my lover's blood

and shame every rose in the green garden.

We can read several concerns in the above poem as Poetry Magazine compiled. "Its themes: war — jang; a woman's pride in her lover's courage and willingness to sacrifice himself for homeland — watan; love — meena; separation — biltoon; grief — gham, are the five most common currents that run through these poems". Poetry Magazine shed more lights on the poem writing tattoo is mentioned in this poem which was common for Pashtun women to receive it in order to avoid evil look.

The magazine claimed that baby girls are much less likely to be tattooed these days, as the practice is considered superstitious and un-Islamic. The faces of older Pashtun women, however, are dotted with these rough-hewn circles, moons, and flowers: living reminders of another time. (Poetry Magazine)

As earlier claimed by Raza that Landay is poetry sang by women with mostly female speakers, I would like to present some of the examples based on the following categories.

Patriotism

If my life is in vain

I will not stop my beloved to go to war for the country.

که تور اوربل مي ميرالتيري

په وطن جنگ دی جانان نه منع کوم

Excuse to meet the beloved

May you are the flower at the bank of river

So I can smell you when pretending take water from the river

خدای دی د رود غاری گل کره

چی د اوبو په بهانه درشم بوي دی کرم

Condolences

If you are bothered by my beauty

I will sleep on the ground till I became pale

چی په بنایست مي خفه کیری

نور به د زمکي خوب کوم چی زیره شمه

Rain

Rain, slow down

There is no shelter on my lover

بارانه رو رو پری وریره

به مسافر اشنا مي نشنه دالانونه

Trust

I trust my lover

If road is to tough, he will reach me out

زما په خپل لالي باور دی

که د چروپه خوکلار وي رابه شینه

(Raza)

Apart from folkloric poems called Landai or Teppa we are now on the journey to explore those poetry written by Pashtun women and have been documented. Despite of constant typing errors, Professor Afzal Raza wrote a very important book in the name of Pinza Shami (Five Candles). Mr. Raza concluded in his book that Ulfat Begum Dard was a ‘‘famous’’ poetess of Pakhtu language of her era. She was born in Nawi Kalay of Sawabi District in Peshawar in 1952.

The source adds that after her parents’ earlier death, Ulfat Begum had no choice but to hold the family together and sooner took the responsibility of bringing up her brothers and sisters. It

appears Ulfat Begum wrote several poems about her feelings of losing her parents a lot earlier than she could expect. In one of her poems, it says:

I always kept the glory of this garden
Candles died; I turn my heart into torch
Ay, my life what will be your ending
The one I was thinking of gardener turn out to be hunter (Raza 80)

In the contrary to Ulfat Begum's exposing her feelings about her life Selma Shaheen says that it is not simple to unveil Pashtun woman. It requires a lot of time, energy and study to know what these women have been going through and what they have thinking of. Selma Shaheen states in one of her poems as following:

No one can read me
I am complicated like a book
to some I appear shore
to some ocean
ما هيڅوک لوستی نه شي
زه مشکل غوندي کتاب يم
چا ته ساحل ښکاره شم
چا دپاره زه درياب يم
(Raza 517)

In the following poem we read that a girl comes to this world naturally which is then it is the girl to suffer but she is happy because one day she would be called 'mother'. Moreover, the speaker of them poem has mentioned the 'Daughter of Hava'. It is used by writers in sub-continent to refer to a woman.

It equals to Bani Adam which means the son of Adam. Women in Sub Continent want to highlight that if men are the sons of Adam, women are the daughters of Hava and it means women and men are not superior regarding their origin and status but equal, siblings in a family.

Ay! Tender – flower like – the daughter of Hava
How unfair of the creator
But you are happy to be mom (Raza)
ای نازکی گل اندامی د حوا لور
څومره گران د کاینات
د تخلیق کار دی

خو په دې بي ته خوشحاله چې به مور شم

A part of the Pashtun woman's tragedy is to lose male caretaker earlier as Ulfat Begum puts it because of her parents' earlier death she doesn't see any solutions to the social problems she faces in her life in the absence of her parents. As Pashtun society is male-dominated and a major role is played by the male body of the society, it is overwhelmingly back-breaking for Ulfat. In her following poem, we read her story of pain for no male protection.

I don't need light – I got used to darkness
 The fortune – that my both parents passed away
 I can't see any shore
 My boat has been pushed by the storm
 My entire story is my father's death
 Its sorrow falls me down with the pain in my heart (Raza 81)

رنا څه کرم په تيارو کې اموخته شوم
 مقدرزما وفت د مورويلاړ دې
 د ساحل چيرته کې پته نشان نشته
 په کشتی مېد طوفان د دیکو زور دې
 ټول بيان مې مرتب د پلار په نوم دې
 غم بي کرم د زړه د درده راگذاره

Ulfat Begum realized her role as poet. It is not only her tragic life but it is the sorrow that she feels seeing other people. In her beliefs she is poet and her job is to worry not only about her but also many other people in her neighborhood.

Ulfat claims that a poet life is all about documenting sorrows and it is that simple, and she is one of them. In following poem, we read about Ulfat acknowledging herself as poet.

The story of poet's heart is short
 Getting tired – scanning people's sorrows
 Don't discuss bad and good with me
 I only know I am a poet (Raza 87)

د شاعر د ژوند قصه ده مختصره
 ځان کړي ستړی چانوي پردي غمونه
 ما سره د خيروشو(شر) خبري مه کړه
 صرف دومره يم خبر چې شاعره يم

Because of the unending tragedy in Ulfat's life, the poet says she lost her eyes' sight. Ulfat also mentions the pain she has been going through is unprecedented and can't be explained in words and poetry. One can imagine how much life depended on male family members back in the 1960s, and losing a male member of the family is not only psychological damage but also financial.

Numerous accidents happened to me
It can't be explained by pen
Crying – I have lost my eyes sight
Enough – I can't write the poems of sorrows (Raza 88)

واقعات په ما بي شماره دي تير شوي
دا د درد په قلم نه تر سره كيږي
په ژړا زما د سترگونظر كم شو
بس دی نور د درد اشعار ليكلي نه شم

Two words are used to explain women's situation in Pashtun society: 'powerless' and 'hopeless. The basic rights that ensure woman's power and hope are not given to women and that we read about Pashtun women who are introduced as powerless and hopeless. Hopeless and powerless exist included but not limited in the lack of enough freedom of speech as Hasina Gul puts is 'whole life, we have to seal our lips? If we call for awakening'.

Let's read the following powerful poem which almost leaves no doubt and misunderstanding in readers' minds. It says as you see Pashtun girl in real – she herself an image of powerlessness and hopelessness because she is 'Pukhtana'.

This girl is an image of powerless – she is Pukhtana
In the sea of tears, she is swum by laugh
(Gul, Las ki Mi Sta Las Way 17)

دا پيغله يو تصوير د بي وسي دی پينتنه ده
د اوبشو سمندر کي بي د خندانه اوبو پوره

Single parenting or being alone sound common around the globe where women are a bit financially self-sufficient and for the government support of single parents and motivative packages for newly born infants. But Pashtun society is different where a woman depends on a man financially, and financial dependency leads to all dependencies.

And, when a woman is left alone it is painful, as we read in this piece of poem.

You have left me alone in my life

I don't know where you have drowned or went away (Raza 95)

تا د ژوند لارو کښې پرېښودم يواځې

خبر نه يم چرته ډوب شوي چرته لاري

‘Where to go, I lost my way – there is no Khider*, nor any stranger’ to lend me a hand of help or guide me in my difficult life while all those people who could be helpful passed away. Life has been very difficult because there is no assistance available. Ulfat Begum wrote this poem in the 1960s where there was no smartphones or internet to make video calls with people as we do in the twenty-first century.

As the poem develops, it informs us that her loved ones are no longer in contact with her.

With their presence looked the association beautiful

They have packed their stuff and went away (Raza 138)

One shall be self-sufficient and independent to live a happy life but there are many financial and psychological dependency in Pashtun society and that Nabila Wafa doesn't like it. The following lines are resumed by saying it is tiring life because life is dependent. In the meantime, the poem's speaker is not sure whom she loves and who is there in her heart. Let's read the poem.

It is tiring, tiring dependent life

Nothing good, but it is all heart breaking

Who is the one who lives in my heart

I don't know what strange relationship this (Wafa 15) is

Nabila Wafa's claim of dependant life leads to all misery which means if one is not financially independent, he/she can decide for herself is supported by Ulfat's following piece of poem though Ulfat writes she has everything in her life as it says ‘flower garden is full of flowers’ but it is incomplete her other half.

Symbolizing fresh clouds appearing in the sky as a sign of Spring which is a season of joy, prosperity and reunion in Pashtun region Ulfat Begum reports on separation of two lovers. Simply it says it is Spring but literally it is autumn for the lover who is longing for her lover reunion. The poem can be read as followed.

Flower garden is full of flowers and the one who cures me

I will not see him in this garden

There are dark clouds – it is spring and new spring
I am missing you dear lover this time (Raza 189)

Eight March is Women’s International Day – celebrated around the globe but Pashtun poet Hasina recalls her day as saying ‘No one listens to me - all day restless working’ and she does not have resting night either. The speaker of the poem asks what day she has to lay off at least for one single day. The poem can be read as following.

No one listens to me
All day restless working
And I don’t have a calming night
Finally! What is my day
For what day I was born
(Gul, Tah Le Ma Sanga Yi Juda 130)

We read again and again that two adult people can’t be together even if it is legitimate and if two people can’t be together the speaker of the following poem says prior to experience a disaster let’s separate peacefully and understandably. At the meantime, not being able to be together is called ‘brutality’ but we are not given details about solution, though cultural change or integration is also a powerful call by Pashtun women poets. We can read the poem as follows:

Do you see this brutality?
That two people can’t be together
Where there are two lovers
There is separation
Prior to, time separate us – dear
Let’s separate
(Gul, Shpoon Shpool Shpilai 101)

د وخت وحشت خو مني
چي دوه يو خای نه پریردي
چرته چي دوه مبین وي
هلته بیلتون پیدا کړي
وراندې د دي نه کله
چي مونږه وخت جدا کړي
راخه خپله بیل شوو

Mirman Zaitoon Bano, A Pahstun woman poet has documented women life in her poetry. Bano reports included but not limited women's social and cultural concerns, gender discrimination and social injustice toward women in Pashtun society. In the following two lines we read that men are honoured with turban but women have the same Lopata (scarf).

Both turban and scarf symbolize honour and are viewed equally, but Bano objects it as unequal treatment based on sex.

The turban of honour got worn to men

For Banu only the scarf (Raza 234)

د عزت پټکي ځوانانو ته په سر شو

د بانو په برخه تشه لويپه ده

Lyma Derman published her book 'De Wahko Samunder' translated as the Sea of Tears – in this book, a part of the poem is 'My hand is asked - we owed Malak some money - We are in his debt, he has advantages over us, Red Rose!'. These two lines reveal the dark side of Pashtun society. People in Afghanistan borrow money from each other and are supposed to return it, but recently we have witnessed that the norm of lending money to other people in need who promise to return it resulted in huge conflicts.

In Islam lending money or any other item of use to the person who is desperate for assistance is moral and rewarded but in Pashtun society lending money to the needy jeopardized by the poor – when the lender should receive his money as the deadline approaches and if the lender can't get it he/she asks for its equivalent.

In many cases, people who borrowed money and can't return it at the right time, give away their daughters to the lender's family. Let's read the following lines; perhaps it explains it better.

My hand is asked - we owed to Malak some money

We are in his debt, he has advantages over us, Red Rose (Derman 57)

Her hand was asked not because she was loved as a life partner but for compensation of the amount of money or any other goods that value a free human to be sold. It clearly explains 'we owed to Malak some money'.

Malak is community elder and not necessarily a bad man – it is chosen for the poem to highlight someone of higher status in the community. Malak will be equal to English landlord, broker or district governor. (Derman)

ما غواري د ملک يو څو روپۍ په مورېه قرض دي
!قرضداري يو، په مورېه يې اوس پور دی سور گلابه

Pashtun women poets report another tragedy. The tragedy is that Pashtuns wage war on each other. In the following lines, we read that the result of today's crises is because of no peace and stability. Political, economic stability and natural peace are the major concerns of Pashtun women poets. The following piece of poem is so rich in meaning and imagery and reveals a dark image of Pashtun society. Lets' read the poem.

People love, live with honor, Sahib!
Paktuns wage wars on each other, Sahib
If it will be my destiny, I would marry next summer
My lover's land will grow hashish, Sahiba (Derman 61)

The female speaker of the poem believes she will marry next summer though she doesn't know whom she is marrying to. The only thing she knows for sure is that her husband got (her) prosperous and money promising harvest.

She is her husband harvest for growing one dozen sons as first priority while there are one dozen roles waiting for her to fit herself at.

!خلک مينه کوي ننگ کوي صاحبه
!پينتانه خپلو کې جنگ کوي صاحبه
که نصيب و دغه اورى مي کوژده ده
!د جانان بټي به بنگ کوي صاحبه

Lyma Darman continues writing on the same story and in the following lines we read as her female speaker employed to be sorry for herself. Additionally, seeing disparate poor kids adds to her sorrow – though she is not complaining if it is her Taqdeer.

However, she has been sure in her previous lines that man has caused poverty and misery in Pashtun society. She can't complain to her creator or never blame him. The poem can be read as follows:

I come to sorry for myself, I come to cry for myself
I come to cry for my torn, torn shirt
I am not denying Taqdeer's decision
Seeing bared feet kids, I come to cry (Derman 51)

Reading poems written by Pashtun women one can conclude that Afghan women adore good men and cry after them for a very long time in their absence and life is joyful as long a good man is accompanying Afghan woman in her life. We also read that Pashtun women like hardworking men whose deeds are meaningful.

One of these moral and hardworking men is Abdul Shukoor Rashad, an Afghan academician. Rashad wrote dozens of books in Pashtu language, upon Rashad's death Parveen Malal wrote the following piece of poem:

Hundred suns shall be covered in black Hijab
As our Reshak like a sun passes away
What great Afghan shall be proud of
As the head of our caravan like a sun die (Malal 20)

One of the major concerns that we read in Pashto women poetry is war and calls for peace. War is treated as sickness, problem and a bad culture that needs to be cured, solved, and changed for better. Bahar, Pashtun woman poet calls on man to drop his gun and give up on violence and if he wants to have me that will be based on her consent and agreement, and there is no relationship governed by force. 'He should drop his gun – and take slingshot – we can't live by force – he should receive my consent'.

Additionally, the man shall not exercise his power blocking women way to receive attention and force the woman to agree as these lines directly inform us:

He should not block my way
He should have some shame
For the darkness of our time, the Pashtun
Must have some light of education (Bahar 59)

Hasina Gul, famous Pashtun women poet has published many of her poetry books and known for her style of (free verse poetry). Many of the themes of her poems are exactly Pashtun women's concerns. Hasina Gul wrote many poems about the dark side of her society.

One of the negative sides of Pashtun society that closed relatives do not get along well with each other and that resulted in sorrow. The poem can be read as follows:

I consider my brother as my enemy
We are this much bad Pukhtana
ورور ته په سترګه د ترېور ګورمه

داسې بي خونده پښتانه خو يو نو

(Gul, Las ki Mi Sta Las Way 13)

Pashtun people have their unwritten law called 'Pashtunwali or Pakhtunwali'. Pakhtu or Pashtu is the language but at the meantime it refers to the principles introduced by Pashtunwali. The following piece of poem explains the rules that no one shall break. If broken, it will have consequences as the poem explains it: 'The restriction you have introduced to me, Pakhtu! – I am Pukhtana – I live within those restrictions/boundaries.'

'Every time they are sad and no longer ask me about city life' (Gul, Las ki Mi Sta Las Way). The poet claims that girls in her village are sad and no longer curious about life in big cities. What make them sad is not reported her but looking at other poems with the same themes, it appears that women in rural areas are tired of dreaming life in big cities.

Anyhow, in addition to being quite about city life, there is another gesture of sadness is that girls in poet's village no longer put make up which is a sign of sigh and disappointment. Lets' read this piece of poem as following.

Every time they are sad and no longer ask me about city life

The girls of my village don't wear makeup these days

Women were not wearing makeup and gave up on their investigation about life in big cities because now the poet is talking about 'dark storm'.

In Pashto poetry, 'darkness' refers to ignorance and 'dark storm' perhaps means uncertain future and unending ignorance of women as many women have either no access to light (education) or not given priority to be educated.

But it says, 'my entire nation' got stuck. Perhaps, 'dark storm' now refers to unhealthy lifestyle practices or negative stereotypes still exist in the society.

Making way out of this situation is difficult – Lord, be with us

It is a dark storm – my entire nation got stuck in it

(Gul, Las ki Mi Sta Las Way 29 - 31)

One of the biggest challenges is poverty. Poverty causes frustration in Pashtun society and much of the misery rooted in difficult life, with fewer resources for bundle of desires. Much of the Pashtuns' area is rural and undeveloped. It is tough terrain.

The territories that Pashtun chose for their residing are far valleys from actual cities. Hasina Gul believes if poverty is addressed it will solve many problems.

(I wish) Life was doable – and I could rest

Only if I had a small adobe house

Pakhtuns' trouble will go away

If poverty is eliminated

ژوند پکښې راټول وی ښه دمه مې وی

بس یوه وره کچه کوټه مې وی

د پښتنو به هر زحمت لری شي

که د ژوندون نه یې غربت لري شي

(Gul, Las ki Mi Sta Las Way 76)

‘People are upset with me’ is a poem by Sayeda Hasina Gul. Its poetry language is direct and bold. In this poem the speaker explains that she is honest and that people are upset with her. Perhaps, the community needs some hypocrisy as it says, ‘ those having two tongues – two colures’. Two tongues and two colors or many tongues and many colors/faces refers to hypocrisy.

Well, I am honest and direct

people are upset with me

people are happy with those

who are showcasing care

those having two tongues

two colours (Gul, Zwand Parasta 40)

زه چې سپینې سپینې وایم

خلک ټول له ما خفه وي

خلک د هاغو نه خوشحال وي

په ولازه ترې خاریږي

چې دوه ژبې وي

دوه رنگه

‘ For Fakhira Yunus’ is another poem written by Hasina, who was sprayed acid on for going to school. The poem begins with the statement about how important it was to keep the face out of public stares – as it says: ‘I was always keeping it behind one hundred lyres of curtains.

And then follows that it is ‘My face,’ but the brute has caused enormous damage by spraying acid on it. We further read ‘You – insane, burn it with acid’ (Gul, Tah Le Ma Sanga Yi Juda).

‘Be careful! You should not hurt yourself – stones and rocks are hard’. The poem begins with a call to watch for danger as the worker breaks stones on the road construction scene. It further advises the male worker to be careful ‘when breaking rocks.

The male worker on the road construction scene that poet saw has no protective gear like glasses because the poem says ‘Close your eyes – as they shall not hurt you’. Further, the poem can be read as follows:

Sun must be burning you
Your whole body must be burning
Your feet must have burnt too
What to do
You are labour???
See! Keep your head
covered
(Gul, Tah Le Ma Sanga Yi Juda 112)

We find affection for moral men in women’s poetry, which means Pashtun women believe in love and never forget their love for the other party. Several poems show care for a good man; the following verse is one of them as the speaker merely dreamt, and when she wakes up, she thinks to check on her friend.

The poem ends here, though it does not say whether a phone call was made but to look deep into it the female speakers wish to make sure the lost friend is safe and secure.

Last night, I had a dream
You had a worse fever
I couldn’t hold on longer
I took my telephone – thinking to call
and ask about your wellbeing (Gul, Shpoon Shpool Shpilai 102)

Whenever we read ‘love’ in Pashto women poetry we shall not misunderstand it with Bollywood love or love affairs in western world. Love in Pashto women context refers to marriage by consent or in other words it is choosing a partner by their own and by their consent.

Defiantly, extra marriage affairs are not acceptable. Hasina Gul claims if one wants to love the other party in Pashtun society is actually setting for a suicide mission.

We are not given enough details in these two lines to justify but analysis can suggest that many young men and women are not given enough freedom to choose their life partners and almost all marriages are decided by parents. The poem perhaps warning and whining about loving in a patriarchal society is completely a suicide mission.

He/she must be destroying their life to love here

To live here - to fell in love here

One of the reasons behind the poet claims in her earlier poem if someone loves in Pashtun society, they must be destroying their life is the following. In the following piece of poem, we read that couple don't tolerate each other differences. As the poem can be read 'Here, there is nothing like your lover will bear your oddness – you have to bear yourself to love here'. So, loving someone who will not appreciate you is translated as if you fall in love with man in Pashtun society it means you are ruining your life and your efforts have no harvest (Gul, Las ki Mi Sta Las Way 31).

Earlier we read that some of the poems suggest that female speaker of the poem take all the responsibility for the misery they are experiencing though in reality it is the actual subject but the society that caused females' misery. Here, in this piece of poem by Hanifa Zahid reports that what happens to her is fair and if anything goes wrong it is because of the individual herself.

'It is a fair decision and there is no unjust – I have complaints about me, nor from my friend' (Zahid). In addition, it says human makes errors and if anything goes wrong it is the body and not the soul. As it says 'I do wrong but I don't like it – my soul is not allied with my body' (Zahid). In this piece of poem biological body is separated from the soul and the soul has been declared tender and innocent.

I do wrong but I don't like it

My soul is not allied with my body (Zahid 53)

We read women poets in Afghanistan wrote their poetry within the charter of the Islamic Sharia – there are many complaints but there is no single concern about Islamic dress codes and norms unlike other women poetry we read in English.

The following piece of poem is written by Hanifa Zahid claims scarf/Hijab is her pride. The poem can be read as follows: ‘I grew up in honor and honor is my job – I am Afghan Muslim, scarf is my pride’. It appears that Hijab is adored because it is inherited from earlier generation or the mothers of the nation as the poem suggests, ‘Scarf remained the culture of Malalai and Zarghona – honor shines on its boundary in rows’ (Zahid 81). The poem further expose:

My youth compete with the world in nobility
I defend my faith and country, and offer all my sacrifices
I don't match with the world in cloths
I am keen competing in development and civilization

One of Pashtun women poets' biggest concerns is national unity in the country. Women are more sensitive and because of wars people got scattered and that Pashtun guest houses are empty. Guest house is Pashtuns' culture where men mostly get together if there is important issue and on normal days, they do parties.

Guest house is also a place where guests and wayfarers can stay. We read some disappointment in the following piece of poem.

Where brotherhood has gone
Why the guest house is empty
There is neither Rabab nor Mangai
Nor sweet, sweet Tapi (Ikhlās 61)

Missing the moral man in Pashtun society is one of the biggest misery and concerns for women poets. It must be a concern because Pashtun women marry Pashtun men and very rarely Pashtun women may marry outsiders in Europe, US or somewhere in Islamabad. And as women are limited to Pashtun men – women poets understood if there is no moral man that is a biggest issue for several reasons.

On one hand, the woman in Pashtun society is not self-sufficient and on the other hand, if she got a corrupted man, life in hell has just begun. In the following poem, we read that the speaker has given up on men and no longer believes she can find one moral man when it comes to Pashtun men.

I have walked on love paths and have learned
Now, I cannot trust any Pashtun
I thought hard, I have reached the conclusion, after thinking

No, never, my head is no longer spinning (Ikhlas 98)

مینی لارو باندي لارمه او پوهه شومه
دلته می اوس په یو پښتون باندي باورنه راځي
ماپري ډیر سوچ وکر او سوچ نه پس کامیابه شومه
نا نا په ذهن می اوس هغسي چکر نه راځي

Adding to this statement, the poem goes on asking another world for her as it says: ‘You are kind to me, find me – O! God find me another world’. It appears the current situation is so catastrophic and that female speaker of the poem came to understanding the only solution to it is a different earth to be asked (Ikhlas 100).

‘Love is not difficult if people are honest’ suggests the worrying point is that man learnt to exploit his fellow men and in the absence of honesty there is no love. It must be lust then. The female speaker of the following poem is worried about future of Pashtun society if people are not sincere or true about what they think of others and what they want for other people. The poem can be read as following.

What will happen, I am so sad
Human became cruel
Love is not difficult
If people are honest

Similarly, another female speaker of the poem calls for understanding women in details. Perhaps, Pashtun women don’t pay attention to details and that they are generalizing their fellow female human.

In the following lines, we read the frustration of a female speaker who tried several times to take her life, but the killing pills did not kill her. In the meantime, we read smart woman can be fooled by man despite a woman's potential. Let’s read the following lines.

It doesn’t kill me – my life remains
I swallowed poison pill many times
Knowledgeable KaYenath, became ignorant
Someone must understand her with Zwar and Zeer (Tanha 93)

‘Selfish’ is a poem written by Farishta Bahar, a Pashtun woman poet. This poem is rich of similes. In this poem, we read a woman is compared to a weak tree and no one wants to take

care of it and if someone wants to take care of it, it is for his selfishness. The most important line is ‘And when I can’t produce fruit and it makes him disappointed’.

This line refers to when a woman can produce a child, Pashtun man tries to marry another woman to have children. This behavior of Pashtun man is compared with cutting the weaker branches with his ox. Let’s read the poem as following:

I am the weakest tree on earth
where no one wants to shelter herself under its shade
no one wants to water me
if anyone waters me voluntarily
That is also because of his greed
And when I can’t produce fruit and it makes his disappointed
Then he cuts my weaker branches
With the ox of his cruelty and hardship (Bahar 116)

Pashto women poets wrote dozens of poems calling for life improvement, cultural reforms, correction of behavior in men, education, peace and much more. Here we read a call for waking up and do something to make the life more prosperous: ‘wake up! Pakhtoon – you are sleeping’ while the rest of world addressed their challenges and have been busy doing something meaningful but it is Pashtun man who could not change his lifestyle for centuries (Bahar 59).

Saba Rasooli is another Pashtun poet who recalls hundred of years old history when Pashtun men invaded India and some established their brand-new governments as these lines claim: ‘I had strong and hero children – I was as vast as from Delhi to Mashad’.

The speaker of this poem is country (Afghanistan) personified and calling its children who are not killing each other as the poem develops, we read: ‘Akh! My ignorant sons went astray – now, my children are killing each other’. They have turned their guns on each other and treat each other as enemies. Women poets allocated a big part of their poetry to peace, stability, and national unity, which are their major concerns (Rasooli 9).

Despite being determined to be victorious, the poem's female speaker appears to be defeated as her dreams never come true. The poem can be read as following.

In the face of storms, my hopes were standing young and fragile
They were parallel lines but got bent now
Muzdah! Neither the dream will become true not fulfilled

You like a crazy (person) still have wishes in your heart (Baraan 20)

تاندي ولاري وي د ژوند د توپانونو مخکي
موازي کرښي وي خو اوس شولي راکاتي هيلي
پوره به نه شي گوره خوب نه رښتيا کيږي مژدي
ته ليوڼي غوندي تر اوسه زړه کي ساتي هيلي

It is believed that man is made of soil, meaning man/human has biological instincts and characteristics. In the following lines we read, the poem's female speaker explains that she was living a life lively, full of energy and joy. Perhaps, it is the childhood she has been talking about. Let's read these lines:

Like a handful soil I was naughty, careless
There was a time, I was colorfully sinner
Rebellion was running in blood vessels
I was careless, rebellious, and full of joy and energy
موتنه خاوره داسي شوخه دل ازاره ومه زه
يو وخت بل شانتي رنگينه گناهکاره ومه زه
بغاوت مي په رگو کي چيلیده لکه د ويني
بي پروا ومه ياغي ومه سرشاره ومه زه

Despite of careless child who hold no responsibility still report about her feelings of being taking life seriously. The speaker of the poem acknowledges her responsibilities as a member of the family and community.

The poem can be read as following:

I know the language of loyalty
Not like, a dragon in the house I was
I was carrying mountains on my young shoulders
I was mentioned in these people's accusations

In Pashtun women poets the 'love' means the right and freedom of choosing marriage partner. But Nabila Wafa admitted that she has given up on that right but she has been still blamed. The female speaker of her poem informs us about her story. Let's read the poem:

I am burnt by the fire of my own honor
What happen if little I wounded
I have never called the name of love
But still, I am accused in the village (Wafa 133)

زه د خپل غيرت په اور ستي بيمه
څه وشو که لږ غوندي زخمي بيمه
ما د محبت اخستې نوم نه دی
بيا هم د دي کلي تهمني بيمه

‘If I were not in this world - what would it be, how would it look like’ – Nabila Wafa asks a philosophical question what if she were never born perhaps the world would be different place. Wafa is curious if the pain and misery in the world is because of her as the poem develops: ‘Maybe, there were joys – maybe, there were plenty of colures..., Perhaps, the system would be all right – or it would not be like this?’. Then the poem goes further and adds that only God knows how the world would look like if she was never born to this world. Let’s read the rest of the lines.

God knows, I don’t know
If I were not in this world
What would it be, how would it look like

The speaker remembers people of the poem, but they are not next to her and she feels lost, so lost that she can’t find herself and her whereabouts. A scenery in these following lines we are observing – a loving, caring. However, desperate situation of a human being whose loved ones are too far from her that she can’t have them by her side.

There are few people live deeply in my heart
My pain disappears in my wounds
I am standing on a lost path – lost – after lost
Oh! Lost friend, please come – the sun is sitting in mountains (Wafa 14)
يو څو کسه په شمار دي چي په زرونو کي ډوبيري
د درد د څړيکولاري په زخمونو کي ډوبيري
په ورکه لار ولاړه يم په ورکو پسي ورکه
په ورکه ياره راشه لمر په غرونو کي ډوبيري

Man tried to see his creator – we read in the Holy Quran that Moses was determined to see Allah (God) and he was told that he can’t. Islamic scientists believe our biological body is incompetent to see God. but what is more interesting is divine literature in Afghan curriculum where Sufism is major topic and where we read a lot about human and their creator relationship. According to Islamic text Allah (the God) is in constant communication with human and even so close, closer than the life vain in human body (Malal). In the following lines, we read

Pashtun woman dears her Allah and asks for competency to see Allah. Let's read the following piece of poem.

I am sure you see everything
I believe you hear everything
My beloved, the beloved of entire world
I sacrifice for you my dear
Give me those eyes to see you (Malal 8)

زما يقين دى چي ته هر څه ويني
زما باور دى چي ته هر څه اورى
زما جانانه د جهان جانانه
تر تا قربان تر تا وارى سم جانه
داسي ليمه راكړه
چي تا ووينم

Parveen Malal is a Pashtun women poet who wrote many journal poems documenting her journey as a refugee and immigrant from Afghanistan to London. In one her poems we read her answer to a question if she is alone. Traveling alone as a woman draws the attention of men in in Afghanistan and possibly in Pakistan. Let's read the poem as follows:

On the flight
A fellow passenger
Asked me
You don't have anyone
As you are travelling alone?
I replied, no

The answer was 'no' but it was yes that she was alone traveling in a flight but 'no' refers to the past when she was not alone and her life partner was alive and accompanying her all the time as the poems develops, we read:

But, It wasn't like this
I was not alone like this
He went on a tour
That he has never returned (Malal 9)

One of the miseries in Pashtun society is that abuser can just walk away and get away with his crime. In the absence of law, many men get away with their abuse of their women, and Pashtun women poets wrote plenty of poetry about morals.

It means if there is no law and law enforcement at least your moral and behavior can be corrected to get rid of all these tragedies upon tragedies. In the following piece of poem, we read that Rabia Mumtaz claim the killer of her love is still alive and not punished.

My love killer is rooming freely

But, I have cover my face with my scarf

You will defame me in my community

Be careful! Don't touch my scarf with

زما د ميني قاتل گرځي سرټور

زه په پروني هر وخت مخ پټوم

د بدنلمي داغ به راپوري کړي ته

پام چې پروني له مي لاس رانه وړي

(Mumtaz 5)

Earlier we read in a poem by Nabila Wafa saying 'give me those eyes to see you'. In the following two lines we read a memory that the speaker is caught by and can't forget. It is the visit of Mecca – in Mecca, Saudi Arabia there is the holy site called Kaaba. Kaaba is believed to be a landmark, and there is Aarsh in the heavens above Kaaba. Moslems when praying face Kaaba believing they are facing Allah and his Aarsh (Kursy). Let's read these lines.

How the city of Mecca I should forget

How will I be able to live the rest of my life

As the poem develops, we read the female speaker of the poem doesn't want to leave Saudia Arabia. In the following lines it has been reported that she is visiting Maddina another holy site of Islam and Moslems.

Moslems love Maddina for home to Prophet Muhammad and his earlier followers. Also, when the prophet was expelled from Mecca, his excellency was welcomed by people of Maddina – perhaps because his mother was from Maddina. Let's read the rest of the poem as following:

It seems like my heart if out of my chest – today

I will leave Medina – today

A long time I was looking forward to this moment

Working day and night

I got worried learning about the departure date

I will leave Medina – today

(Mumtaz 17 - 20)

Pashtun nationalism exceeds from one county's boundaries as we read man in Peshawar and man in Kabul are both one Afghan. Connecting Peshawar with Kabul in poems is a historical tradition of poets and in the following lines we read so but most important part of this piece of poem is the attack on Pashtun man over and over. Spogmai Khoram called Pashtuns dead people perhaps Pashtuns made no contribution to today world. Lets' read the poem as following:

Who we are in the people of the world?

We are Pukhtana, Pukhtana – we both are dead

They have no brain in their head and have no intellect

We are good in Kabul and Peshawar – we both are dead

د دنيا په بندگانو کې مونږ څه يو

پښتانه يو پښتانه يودواړه مړه يو

نه ماغزه سر کې لري نه يې شعور شته

په کابل پېښور ښه يو دواړه مړه يو

(Khoram 12)

We read that Pashtun women believe in love – here in these following lines we read female speaker of the poem is carrying light for her lover. Bringing light is common reference to Prophet Moses's story who was traveling along with his wife and livestock in the evening, and at the meantime his wife was sick expecting a child.

Moses told his wife that he sees a fire and he will bring some light form it (Ahsan).

Bringing light for female by male is now considered an action of affection but in following lines we read that female accomplishes this heroic action. Despite this we read how much the female speaker is devoted to her love and how much attention he has been paid to.

I painted your names with my love thread

I have made several handkerchiefs with my hands

What light you want what book you are reading

Spogmai has brought torches in her hands for you

په تار د محبت مي رسم کړي ستا نومونه

په گوٽو مي جوړ ڪري تا ته ڄومره رومالونه
ته ڪومه رنا غواڙي ڪوم ڪتاب گوري لاليه
سپورمي درته راوري په لاسو ڪي مشالونه
(Khoram 12)

Generally, work between man and woman is divided. Man works outside and women work inside the house. Inside the house woman has many vacancies to fill and major duties that she has been assigned can be read in the following simple poem.

However, the worrying part of the poem is that there is curse on some men who think woman is not doing enough but in reality raising kids, making food, doing laundry, cleaning the house, and cleaning after everyone, attend the guests, be in a role of diplomate to visit other families on some important occasions to celebrate their joy and attribute to their lost ones and much more. Let's read the following piece of poem.

I do my best; I raise kids and I am running the house
How would it look like to the people of this country?
Lord! Send Noah torment, take these people away
Lord, to me the people of this place appear having no nobility (Aamil 66)
!خپل غيرت ڪومه بچي ساڻمه خپل ڪورساتمه
د دي وطن دي مخلوقاتو ته به ڇنگه بنڪاري!
خدابه ! طوفان د نوح راولييره! دا خلڪ واخله
خدابه! د دي خاي خلڪ راته ٿول بي ننگه بنڪاري

Humans seek refuge in fantasy when they fail to accomplish what they like – in the following lines we read these fantasies, which reveals what the female speaker of the poem wants to do. It is all about peace and a romantic scene we read here.

In my fantasy, I build castles – in my imaginations I build houses
In my imaginations, I arrange flowers, in my imaginations I arrange flower vases
I told Jewish goldsmith; I have a favor for you
I want to have my ear rings – curved Mohammad on them
سوچ ڪي ماني جوڙوم سوچ ڪي وادني جوڙوم
سوچ ڪي گلان جوڙوم سوچ ڪلڊاني جوڙوم
يهود زڪرتيه مي ويل يو فرمايش درڪوم
د محمد ص په نوم غورونو ته والي جوڙوم
(Aamil 78)

Zeb Yusufzai is a Pashtun women poet and she wrote much of her poems for Pashtun salvation, prosperity and wellbeing. She appreciates men who care about women and their prosperity and happiness as we can read ‘I salute those brothers – who lift scarf onto their sisters head’ (Yusufzai). Lifting scarf onto sister head is a gesture of care at the meantime, Zeb asks peace for Pashtun people.

There has been a lot of bloodshed in Pashtun territories and that much of recent poetry dedicated to peace and stability in the region.

These lines were published in Mirman Ghag (Woman’s Voice). The lines can be read as following:

I am not begging, I ask for Pakhtun’s rights

I want live my life in peace

I want to live my life in peace

څه خيرات نه غوارمه، حق زه د پښتون غوارمه

امن سره ژوند غوارمه

امن سره ژوند غوارمه

Among many themes of Pashto women poetry is affection for God, and that a big part of women poetry consists prayers. Much of these prayers include poverty to be eliminated, hardship to be removed, exploitation to be ended, war to be replaced by peace and much more. There are prayers for children, siblings, and families.

Here in the following piece of poem we read the female speaker asks for mercy upon her and strength to maintain the affection for her creator.

Lord! Give me nice self

After death, give me paradise by your mercy

To be busy worshiping and praising you

to my tongue give me that much strength (Yusufzai 6)

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