

## EMPOWERMENT THROUGH POETRY: EXPLORING THE CONCERNS AND ASPIRATIONS OF PASHTUN WOMEN POETS

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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.

This research aims to examine the works of Pashtun women poets, exploring the themes, concerns, and aspirations expressed in their poetry. The study seeks to shed light on the unique challenges faced by Pashtun women and how they utilize poetry as a means of self-expression, empowerment, and advocacy for their rights and social issues.

Furthermore, the research seeks to uncover the concerns that preoccupy Pashtun women poets in their literary endeavours. These concerns may range from personal struggles and aspirations to broader societal issues that affect their lives and those of their fellow women. By understanding their concerns, this research hopes to gain insights into the lived experiences of Pashtun women and the challenges they face within their communities.

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

### Introduction

Historically, women in Pashtun society have faced significant challenges when it comes to accessing education and participating in public spaces. This lack of access to education and limited mobility has resulted in a limited representation of women's voices in literary and artistic circles. While there have been notable female poets and writers from Pashtun backgrounds, their contributions have often been overlooked or underrepresented in the broader literary canon.

Afzal Raza believed it was impossible for Pashtun women to speak about their pain and misery or any other feelings (Raza, 2006). As women could be persecuted for writing poetry in Pashtun society thus much of the folklore poetry came into existence by female speakers anonymously. Recently, The 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, 2012). Reading about women casualties for their poetry, Raza shall be true in saying that Tapa or Landay (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, 2006).

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 a famous poem in Afghanistan. In their collection of Landays, we read about women's current concerns. Some of these concerns are peace, social injustice, forced 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.*  
(Poetry Magazine, 2018)

I will explore women's socio-cultural concerns through my research in detail. Shortly, in this two verses poem, we read that the speaker of the poem is a young girl who not only complained but also curse her father for his decision about her marriage to an old man. 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, 2006)

To prove women's wit and wisdom both Raza and Poetry Magazine complied 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 the war for the country*

(Raza, 2006)

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 in his willingness to sacrifice himself for the homeland — *watan*; love — *Meena*; separation — *biltoon*; grief — *gham*, are the five most common currents that run through these poems". Poetry Magazine shed more light on the poem writing tattoo mentioned in this poem which was common for Pashtun women to receive to avoid evil looks. The magazine claimed that these days baby girls are much less likely to be tattooed, 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, 2018)

As earlier claimed by Raza that Landay is poetry sung by women with female speakers mostly, 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 ميراتييري  
په وطن جنگ دی جانان نه منع کوم

### **An excuse to meet the beloved**

*May you be the flower at the bank of the river*

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

خدای دی درود غاري گل کره  
چي د اوبو په بهانه درشم بوي دي کرم

**Condolences***If you are bothered by my beauty**I will sleep on the ground till I became pale*

چي په بنايست مي خفه كيږي  
نور به د زمکي خوب کوم چي زيړه شمه

**Rain***Rain, slow down**There is no shelter on my lover*

بارانه رو رو پري وريزه  
به مسافراشنا مي نشته دالانونه

**Trust***I trust my lover**If the road is too tough, he will reach me out*

زما په خپل لالي باور دی  
که د چروپه څوکولار وي رابه شينه  
(Raza, 2006)

Apart from folkloric poems called Landai or Teppa, we are now on the journey to explore those poems that are written by Pashtun women and have been documented. Despite constant typing errors, Professor Afzal Raza wrote a very important book by the name of Pinza Shami (Five Candles). Mr. Raza concluded in his book that Ulfat Begum Dard was a "famous" poetess of the Pakhtu language of her era. She was born in Nawi Kalay of Sawabi District in Peshawar in 1952. The source adds that Ulfat Begum after her parents' earlier death left with 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 about 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 a torch**Ay, my life what will be your ending*

*The one I was thinking of gardener turns out to be a hunter*

(Raza, 2006, p. 80)

Contrary to Ulfat Begum's exposing her feelings about her life Selma Shaheen says that it is not simple to unveil a 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 follows:

*No one can read me  
I am complicated like a book  
to some, I appear shore  
to some ocean*

ما هيڅوك لوستی نه شي  
زه مشکل غوندي کتاب يم  
چا ته ساحل بنکاره شم  
چا دپاره زه درياب يم

We may have noticed that poetry is not ordinary language. Poetry is the voice of our deep self and soul that can reveal a lot about us. In Pashtun society where women are considered extremely private which makes it super hard for a woman to express her feelings even if a poem has a speaker and not necessarily representing the writer. Such poetic expressions can cost the life of a writer. Many young poets were either murdered or took their own lives apparently being blamed for what she merely imagines and fantasizes. In the following poem by KaYinat, it says the writer does not want to continue writing poems anymore.

*Perhaps, it will be my last Ghazal  
No more, I can enjoy writing poetry*

کیدای شي دا مي اخري غزل شي  
نور، شاعري راته خوند نه راكوي

(Tanha, Les Ghora Shayerani, 2016)

Earlier there were news reports covering stories of young women and their suicides. It is also expected women write poems with their pen names – totally different from their given

names. For instance, Dr. Mohammad Sadiq Fitrat a popular Afghan male singer is known as Nashanas. Nashanas means anonymous. If a man can't live and sing songs with his real name exposed what we can imagine about a woman who merely can be killed for expressing herself and her concerns about their legal rights? It appears that there is immersed pressure on Pashtun women resulting in inner fear of losing the privacy of thoughts that a writer does not want to continue writing more 'Ghazals'. What is clear is the pain resulted in the destruction of women. The pain that we can feel and read in the following poem by young poet Khwaga:

*Even if you laugh with the drops of rain*

*Khwagi! you cannot hide your tears*

څاڅکو د باران سره که خاندې هم

نه شي پټوی خوري د سترگونم!

(Tanha, Les Ghora Shayerani, 2016, p. 79)

In Alif Jana's belief, Pashtun woman suffers because of misinterpreting of Islamic script by Pashtun men who believe in their superiority over Pashtun women. In her angry tone, Alif Jana says because of an ill understanding of the Islamic faith, one can damage the faith reputation and its fame around the globe.

*You call it religion; I think you are doing non-Islamic*

*You have objections over God and the Prophet*

*You defame Islam and follow your tradition*

*Come to me! I will teach you the reality of our religion*

ته يې مذهب بولي زما په خيال کفر ونه کوي

خدای او رسول باندي د غير اعتراضونه کوي

دين د اسلام بدنموي ټول رواجونه کوي

راشه چي زه درته د خپل دين حقيقت وښاييم

(Saadat, 2008, p. 4)

Back to Khwaga's poem about not being able to hide tears even if she cries in the rain. - in a country like Afghanistan, rain is rare, and people are relieved to receive rain. People get pleased and relaxed and consider rain as a blessing but Khwaga says even if she is pretending to be happy because of the rainfall, tears in her eyes can be noticed because of the enormous pain carried by her. Despite saviour damage made to women not only by male dominancy but

the patriarchal structure in society, the poets want to remind us that they are not waging war on men but they are discussing their status in their society, rights, and respect in the light of Islamic script. Alif Jana Khatak says she did not mean to criticize her father or any father but wants to explain to the ignorant the right path and the truth.

*I didn't mean to make it a parenting issue  
Or I explain to you what has been happening to my sisters  
My heart wants to show a path to my blind community  
To expose the traditional Purdah and its damage one by one*

دا مي مطلب نه دی چې ظلم د خپل پلار او بنایم  
زړونه وریته د خپلو خویندو په انکار و بنایم  
زړه مي دا غواړي چې رانده سماج ته لار و بنایم  
د رواجي پردې نقصونه تار په تار و بنایم  
(Saadat, 2008, p. 2)

A very clear guidance to men and women on *Purdah* is given in *Surah E Noor*, in the Holy Quran. Alif Jana asks Pashtun men to take a look into it where men should need to observe piety and *purdah* too and men were told to do it before women do: 'Surah NOOR'. Alif Jana says after reading the holy script, compare your life and relook into your behaviour and how much you follow the Islamic teachings.

*Open Quran and read Surah E Noor  
See Aleem Hakeem's words full of wisdom*

*Read it carefully, don't scan it  
After that, review your way of life*  
خلاص کړه قران او د قران سورت نور وگوره  
ته د علیم حکیم کلام په حکمت پور وگوره  
سرسري مه گوره په عقل په شعور وگوره  
پس له هغې نه خپل رواج او خپل دستور وگوره  
(Saadat, 2008, p. 4)

Naturally, bad people ally with bad and good with good, Alif Jana Khatak in one of his poems translated the Holy Quran. The speaker of the poem calls for looking into details about

women. Even if there are bad women, there are millions of good women too. Alif Jana Khatak speaks from the same holy text that men interpret in their favour.

*God gives bad women to bad men*

*Why you accused Mominat with Momineen*

*If you say there are whores in Ummah*

*Almost hundred percent women are believers (sincere)*

خداى دى كرى وركى خبيثات د خبيثانو سره

مومنات ولى توروى د مومنانو سره

ته كه دا وايي چي امت كي فاحشاتي شته دى

يو په سل زياتي پاڪ لمني مومناني شته دى

(Saadat, 2008, p. 4)

And if someone commits a crime, she shall face the court, and Alif Jana does not refuse it but punishing a woman who didn't do anything incorrect is not right. In the following poem, Alif Jana is angry for punishing a woman. Being a woman shall not be a crime.

*In Sharia whores are cursed*

*They could be jailed, beaten or much more*

*Punishment prior to trail makes no sense*

*Keeping noble women in houses is not necessary*

په شريعت كي د فاحشو ملامتي شته دى

بندول شته دي وهل شته دي دينه زياتي شته دي

جرم نه وړاندي سزاگاني وركول څه پكار

پاكي بيبياني په كورو كي بندول څه پكار

(Saadat, 2008, p. 5)

Women are human like men and have their life to live. Women as men have their needs and no one shall ignore it. Women have feelings and shall be respected. In her poem, Alif Jana says, women have hearts and brains. In the heart they have emotions and in the brain they have thoughts and it is not a sin. Alif Jana believes women have better ideas compared to men but she does not understand why the woman is to be blamed because a woman has a different body than men.

Women too have hearts and have wishes



They have brain and have feelings  
 They are not rocks they have emotions like you do  
 They have better thought, better than you

بنخې هم زرونه لري زړوكي خواهشات لري  
 سر كي ماغزه لري ماغزوكي احساسات لري  
 كانې خو نه دي هم دا ستا په شان جذبات لري  
 بڼه خيالات لري بلكي له تانه زيات لري

(Saadat, 2008, p. 5)

Why you kept innocent birds in cages, Alif Jana asks. Keeping birds is a simile of women with no rights and freedom to the outer world prescribed by Islamic teachings and in the second line of the poem it says why women are buried alive – burying women alive was used to be common in Hijaz before Islam was revealed to them. After Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) liberated women from the violent and unacceptable tradition of his people. Alif Jana refers to that historical era where women were buried alive.

*Why you kept innocent birds in cages*

*Why do you burry them alive in graveyards*

دا بي گناه مرغي دي بند كړي په پنجره كې ولي  
 وايه كړي بنخي دي ژوندی په هديره كې ولي

(Saadat, 2008, pp. 5 - 6)

Shafiqullah Rahmani published a booklet of women's poetry. He collected a big number of women poets in his book. Spogmai Halimi is one of these young poets who clearly explains via a female speaker of the following poem asks for attention, placement, and status in society. In the following poem, we read about the demand for love, attention, and respect. 'Treat me like a human' reveals that women have been deprived of their status. In ideal women have a lot better place but, they are ignored, and the poem put it in her words expressing their social concerns.

*Take me out of this darkness*

*Make me human like a nice human*

*Treat me like human*

*Make me your love place – and glob*

*You call yourself Pakhtun*

*Make me your Pakhtuna and Afghan*

دي تورو تيارو خني مي اوباسه  
 بنكلي د انسان غوندي انسان مي كره  
 ما ته د انسان په سترگو وگوره  
 جور د محبت ماني جهان مي كره  
 ته چي خان ته دغسي پښتون وايي  
 ما هم پښتنه خپله افغان مي كره  
 (Rahmani, 2012, p. 67)

Among the many rights that are not reserved and served is banning girls from receiving education. In the following poem, the violence against women is catalogued. One of them that Alif Jana highlighted is banning girls from going to school. Later on, the poem develops to another finding saying women's freedom of travelling is never accepted and women are limited to their homes only. After that, it is family violence employed by men of beating their wives. Not the last one but one of these enlisted pieces of violence is regarding women being less and unequal to men.

*They should not receive education, like blind*

*And you lock them up in houses, like robbers*

*You are uselessly beating them, like donkeys*

*You treat them disrespectfully, like dogs*

يو دي تعليم نه كړي محرومي د رندو په مثال  
 بل دي بندي كړي په كورونو كې د غلو په مثال  
 په نه خبره يي وهي د پردو خرو په مثال  
 دير په ذلت ورته نظر كوي د سپو په مثال  
 (Saadat, 2008, p. 6)

Even if men are proud of themselves only for their biological appearances but they never showed any nobility to listen to the rules given by Allah in his holy script. In her poem, Alif Jana addresses the issue of the 'lack of moral man' in Pashtun society. A piece of her poem can be read as follows:

*It is good to speak for your right and where are those who did not speak*

*Where are those people who listen and accept the truth*

*Some are asking for their rights but where are those who fulfil others' rights*

*They only claim they are men but where are men*

حق ويل بنه دي خو د نه ويل مخي چيرته دي  
 څوک چې حق اوري هغه زلمی چيرته دي  
 ځان له حق غواړي چې د بل حق ورکوي چرته دي  
 هسي دعوه د سړي توب کوي سړي چرته دي

(Saadat, 2008, p. 6)

The speaker of this poem is wandering around for quite a long and wishing to return to Nangarhar, Afghanistan. In the meantime, the speaker of the poem is complaining about living an unstable life outside her homeland.

"Door to door" is a metaphor for baggers. Baggers always go door to door to collect charity. It can be read the speaker has compared her life with a beggar's life. The poem can be read as follows.

*I am Afghan, I have been wandering around*

*It is poverty and my life is door to door*

*Lord! Take me to Nangarhar once*

*It has been a year; I live my life in Peshawar*

يم افغانه در په در مي زندگي ده  
 غريبي ده په هرور مي زندگي ده  
 خداي ج دي ما يو ځلي بوځي ننګرهار ته  
 وشو کال په پېښور مي زندگي ده

(Rahmani, 2012, p. 80)

In the holy text, the woman is never discriminated against but praised and there are certain rights prescribed. Despite a rich women's rights charter in Islam women still live in hostility. And in the following poem by Shela Dostyara, the speaker of the poem complains about men for not treating women in a good manner.

*God! You honor women*

*You give them high position and good intentions*

*Some are losing\* them and some are selling them*

*These, unkind\* put them in hostility*

خدايه! ورکری تا عزت بنځي ته  
 تا لور مقام او بڼه دي نيت ورکری  
 څوک يي بايلي څوک پرې لوتونه اخلي  
 دغو ناترسو لوی ذلت وکری  
 (Rahmani, 2012, p. 88)

Afghanistan is a traditional society that is confronted by both male and female poets criticizing its role in society overshadowing the Islamic faith. Compared to Pashtun tradition Islam has granted more freedom and rights to women and we read complaints in the following piece of poem. In the meantime, the speaker of the poem is mentioning the youth and golden days of her life, and being restricted is not joyful. Her metaphorical language of "tall sycamores are set on fire" is an image of her and other youths washed in the dirt. If young people have no right to make decisions and have choices that must be painful. Let's read the following poem.

*I am driven crazy by the custom of four walls*

*My voices got silent in my throat sighing*

*Youth, spring and this colorful world*

*Tall sycamores are set on fire*

د رواج څلور ديوالو ليوني کرم  
 په افسوس مي خوله کي کيناستل غرونه  
 يو ځواني بل پسرلی او رنگيني ده  
 سره لمبه شول گوره دنگ دنگ چينارونه  
 (Rahmani, 2012, p. 91)

As this part of the thesis is allocated to discuss Pashtun women and their poetry, the writer themselves provide an overview of their poetry. Perhaps, this chapter covers different aspects of their life but the focus is on their poetry and what they think of it. In the following poem, Hanna Saadat tells a woman to remove her hair so she can see the face for the impression to write a poem. One of the confusing aspects of Pashtun poetry and song culture is that a woman will read or sing a poem that has a female speaker and a male will read or sing a poem that has a male speaker. For instance, one of the famous poems is *Bibi Shirini* (citation from *YouTube*). In this poem, a male speaker of the poem addresses his female partner to offer him

some blessings but you will hear a woman singing the same poem confusing whether a woman wants another woman to be in romantic affairs which is impossible and unacceptable in Pashtun society. It is a topic for discussion, however, let us read the following piece of poem by Hanna where she gets a source for writing her poems.

*Clear your face of your hair so that I can write a poem*

*Lit the light of your beauty that I can write a poem*

لري دې مخ نه دا اوربل كړه چې غزل وليكم

چراغ د حسن راته بل كړه چې غزل وليكم

(Saadat, 2008, p. 19)

In this poem, we read about the affection of the speaker for her lover, and if it is fictional, it will be still translated as Pashtun women adore their men. The only thing is that men should behave. The following poem by Pukhtana Wafa can be read as followed.

*I am so kind to my lover*

*Shinning like start in the sky*

*I don't know if I am in his thoughts*

*I will not replace him with the entire glob*

يم ډيره مهربانه په جانان باندي

خليري لكه ستور په اسمان باندي

خيال كي به يي اوسم كه به نه يم

وربه يي زه نه كړم په جهان باندي

(Rahmani, 2012, p. 16)

Kula Saadat wrote an interesting piece of poem revealing her affection for her fellow man or husband. It has been sickening to be alone. We have been discussing the male part and the contribution of female in Pashtun society and we learned that women depend on their men financially which result in all dependencies. Anyhow, there are many other factors limiting the options for a Pashtun woman to try. Anyhow, in the following piece of poem, Saadat reminds us that man is adored and missed.

*Stop your arrogance and come near me - I am restless*

*I am bored with my lonely life*

*All people are chatting with each other*

*In this world, I am the only one alone and sick* (Rahmani, 2012, p. 91)

غرور دې پریرده خواته راشه ناکراره یمه  
د تنهایی له ژونده زه نوره بیزاره یمه  
تول خلک خپلو کې یو بل سره خبرې کوي  
په دې نړۍ کې تنها زه ناسته بی یاره یمه

Tired of experiencing violence Salihi wrote in her poem that she wants to go far away as far as there is no human civilization anymore. The speaker of this piece of poem experienced long decades of violence and want distance from it. The story of this female speaker is the story of every Afghan who was born and grew up in wars that no one knows when will end. The poem is written by Javida Salihi.

*I go to the desert – I don't want to live here*

*In our village – there is violence here*

صحراته ځمه دلته ژوند نه کوم  
زمونږ په کلي کې وحشت دی  
(Rahmani, 2012, p. 27)

Women poets in the Pashto language realized that war is ugly and the only way to get rid of it by distancing themselves. A major of poetry by women is dedicated to peace in the region and peace is regarded as blessings from Allah. Haya Khatak wrote serious poetry which has direct language that addresses social and cultural concerns. Haya speaks about harassment, taboos, and the unjust that has been taking place in Pashtun society. In the meantime, Haya has respect for her father and other social values practised in her society.

*It is not only your two eyes that I should devote myself to*

*I too care about my father's Patkai and my brother mustachoes*

صرف ستا دوه سترګې خو نه دي چې ځان ډوب کړم پکې  
د پلار پټکې د رور بریتونو ته مې هم گورمه  
(Khatak, 2019, p. 90)

Much of the Pashto poetry is rich in metaphors and symbols. Here the father's Patkai is metaphorically used for honour. Lower *Shamla* or fallen *Patkai* is understood as a humiliation to the father's reputation and family honour as half-flying national flags are understood as a sign of national grief. The Brother's Mustache is metaphorically used as his status in society. In

South Asia, Mustachoes are viewed as fame for the person. Here, Haya Khatak explains that she is not free to make careless decisions for her father and brother's status and family honour in the Pashtun world. As Mohanty states women in some parts of the world (south Asia) have no power over their bodies, unlike women in the West. Specifically, back to the Pashtun community and its way of life, these symbols mean if love happens between the speaker of this poem and the party addressed will need to go through a long process to avoid humiliation as well.

The following poem is so rich in terms of meaning. In this piece of poem, we can read about respect, assumptions, and how signs of respect work in Pashtun society. Looking into eyes is considered rude and, in the meantime, not looking into someone's eyes during communication is translated as someone is lying and hiding something. The speaker of the following poem believes people should have doubt in her sincerity because she is not looking into the eyes with whom she communicates and meantime warns that even if she looks down her eyes lash are standing in terms of respect for the foe and abuser.

*Why the people of your city shall not doubt my chastity?*

*When you stare at me, I lower my look – terrified*

*It is enough respect for the foe of your street*

*My eyelashes stand up while I lower my look*

ستاسو د بنار خلق به ولی په ما شک نه کوي

چې ته راگوري زه په ويره سترگي بنکته کړمه

ستا د کوڅې د رقيب دغه احترام کافي دی

بانه مي اودريري په بره سترگي بنکته کړمه

(Khatak, 2019, p. 17)

'Today love requires wealth, need not passion', Haya reports about her society where people now consider wealth one of the major aspects to start a relationship. It is not strange, but Haia is shocked that a society where norms, feelings, and passion matter is now replaced by wealth only as we are reading this in the following poem.

*Today love requires wealth, need not passion*

*The image of TajMehal speaks for it*

نن سبا مينه هم دولت غواړي خلوص څه کوي

د هندوستان د تاج محل تصوير خبري كوي

(Khatak, 2019)

Mistrust can be read everywhere in Haya's poems and one of these examples is brought to us in the following piece of poem. it says 'mad dogs' refers to lustful men and 'merchant' to any other man who invested a lifetime harassing women. In the poem, there is the symbol 'Father's Patkai' as a symbol of respect stating she has been keeping close eyes on men – they should not do something distrustful to her so people will curse her father too while it would be because of those merchants and mad dogs.

*If the merchant spread his trap everywhere*

*I have reserved my beauty very nicely*

*Why trust mad dogs if they grab*

*My father Patkai – I have kept it up on the wall*

*Man is a mad dog – unexpectedly - unleashed*

که سوداگر راته په هره لاره جال ایښي دی

ما د حیا سره ښایست ترینه سمبال ایښی دی

په لیونو سپوڅه اعتبار که ورته خله واچوي

د پلار پټکي می ترینه بره په دیوال ایښی دی

(Khatak, 2019, p. 21)

Despite bad people, there are good people too. If some are out there only to harass women, there are many others who have respect and appreciation for women. As we read in this piece of poem by Haya: '*Some grab my hand, some grab my skirt – There are some who put a scarf on my head*' (Khatak, 2019, p. 22). Putting a scarf on a woman's head is a gesture of respect for women though many South Asian women writers may no longer agree to this as a sign of respect but perhaps interpret it as a sign defined by men for women to be as women were before or be in your role forever and that role is to be a woman wearing a scarf, be a wife, or a sister and a mother. Mohanty, in her essay, addresses this issue as a '*woman as familial victim*'.

In a society where women have fewer means to speak to their male partners or society woman can be read and understood based on the condition that she has been put in. In the



following piece of poem, we read that despite of sealed mouth a woman has told us a lot through signs and gestures.

*Times put strong hands on my mouth  
I have conveyed several messages through my eyes*

كلک لاس راته په شونډو باندي ايښي وو وختونو  
په سترگو کښي درکړي مي پيغام وو که دي ياد شي

(Khatak, 2019, p. 23)

Meanwhile, good men appreciate women's improvement, prosperity, and thriving for better life and condition and the situation of undermining is not as bad as reported in several Pashto women's poetry, as Haya Khatak puts it that men appreciate her and she has been dear to them. As the female speaker of the following piece of poem, the speaker is happy with the treatment and respect she receives in her society from her men counterparts.

*Pakhtun Poet appreciates me – I feel good  
Never shall I become smart – I am all right, innocent  
I keep my face covered in black Niqab from the people  
I am walking on a very cleared path – I am doing well  
I would not care if some rude harasses me  
Adorable Pakhtuns dear me – I feel good*

په خپل پښتون شاعر خو قدر دانه يمه ښه يم  
هوښياره دي زه نه شم چي نادانه يم ښه يم  
په تور نقاب کښي پټ ساتمه مخ د زماني نه  
د ژوند په سپينه سپينه لار روانه يمه ښه يم  
پروا نشته که سپک خلق په سپک نظر راگوري  
په گرانو پښتونو باندي خو گرانه يمه ښه يم

(Khatak, 2019, p. 25)

The only response a woman can have and can try to face unjust is to harm herself further - destroying herself to escape the torture and misery employed to her is the only option available for Pashtun women. The speaker of this piece of poem reports on her condition being caged using symbolic language in its first line.

*I bleed myself in the cage*

*The memory of my loved one shall calm down*

*The walls of our time surrounding me*

*But still, you can look forward to having me*

(Khatak, 2019)

Meanwhile, even if it is imprisoned and there is no way to escape from the cage, there are still hope and confidence assuring the other party that he can wait for her. We can read commitment, confidence and hope for a better future.

*You shall not humiliate me anymore – my dear heart*

*Let's go to my own world*

*No one understands Pakhtu or honour*

*This place is not for our dwelling*

نور مي په سپکو خلقومه سپکوه گران زرگيه

راخه چي خو خپلي دنيا ته قدردان زرگيه

پښتو غيرت دلته كي خوک نه پيژني

دا خاي زمونږ د اوسيدو نه دي قربان زرگيه

(Khatak, 2019, p. 30)

In Haya's poetry 'merchant' refers to men who cause women trouble. These men do not know women and their status granted by laws, faiths and other norms. They only think of their fellow human as objects to be used. And, in the following piece of poem Haya 'merchants' can buy any love and any woman because the woman is not free to decide. It means any woman can be sold to these merchants easily because they have power and she has a difficult time seeing all this happening in front of her.

*Merchants are trading honours*

*In this coven, I can't suit myself – my dear heart!*

*Here, there are lie, deceive, and scams*

*Here it is infidelity, infidelity – I swear my dear heart!* (Khatak, 2019, p. 30)

سوداگران پکښي سودا د عزتونوکوي

په دي محفل کښي رانه نه کيري گزران زرگيه

دلته دروغ دلته د هوکي دلته چلونه دي ټول

بي ایمانی بی ایمانی شوہ پہ ایمان زرگیہ

A society where honesty and sincerity were used to be and now it is a myth only. A society where sincere men live and exist can be only ideal. It is Haya's utopia. As Haya warns her heart for controlling its emotions that innocent and sincere heart can be broken several times. In the meantime, in the poem we read the writer is looking for seeing those sincere men she heard of or fantasized about: '*It is all dramas, performance and art – People are smart, you shall not be naïve – my dear heart!*'. As the poem develops, we read that moral man has been vanished and could not be found.

*God knows, where those precious stones got lost*

*There is no loyalty, there is no piety – my beloved heart!*

One of the dark sides of Pashtun society is men racing to achieve a woman while marriage is prescribed by Islamic teachings nicely: it is a solemn duty of adult persons to choose their marriage partner. But something horrible happens that Haya puts in her poem as the speaker is a little young girl saying she even does not know how to clean her nose but men are fighting each other to have her. Haya not only reveals man's greed and lust but also man's vision starts and ends on woman only. Man's entire mission is only having a young girl in his bed. The poem can be read as followed.

*I still clear my nose with my sleeve – Haya*

*Why these psychopath men kill each other to win me*

زه خولا پوزه په لستوني پاکوومه حیا

دا لیوني ولي زما په سر مرگونه کوي

(Khatak, 2019, p. 32)

Alif Jana addresses Pashtun society and warns them of being on one side where progress is impossible. The poem can be read and interpreted as how a bird can fly with one wing being broken. And at the meantime, the society regrets and feels ashamed of themselves being too back warded compared to other nations around the globe. Because, of avoiding and ignoring half of the society Pashtun society is only a consuming group of people where they have no innovations and have been dependent on the other world for almost everything. Let's read the poem as follows and think about it.

*Remember! Your one wing is broken and you cannot fly;*

*You have a broken leg; you cannot climb into the top of the progress;*

*Caravan has passed you and you cannot keep up with them*

*(Meanwhile) feeling ashamed and cannot enjoy being left behind*

ياد لره ستا يو وزر مات دى الوتلى نشي  
پينه دي ده گوډه د ترقى په بام ختلى نه شي  
قافلي لاري ورپسي ته رسيدلى نه شي  
شرم اخستى يي په خاي پاتي كيدلى نه شي

(Rahmani, 2012, p. 3)

Similarly, Haya as a female member of Pashtun society is not pleased with the miserable situation of her society. In her poem, she has mixed feeling whether it is to cry or laugh but simply she is hurt. She is hurt saying in her society piety and honour is no longer appreciated or viewed as noble as used to be and it is huge damage. In the meantime, Haya is asking how long it will take for society to acknowledge their errors and try to correct them. The poem can be read as followed.

*They don't appreciate piety and honour – whether should I laugh or cry*

*Today on the situation of Pakhtuns – whether should I laugh or cry*

*How do they enjoy neglecting of themselves*

*On their neglect – whether should I laugh or cry*

نه ستايي حيا او غيرت، و خاندم كه وژاړم  
نن د پښتنو په حالت او خاندم كه وژاړم  
څنگه د غفلت په خواره خوب باندي مزي كوي  
لږ د پښتنو په غفلت او خاندم كه وژاړم

(Khatak, 2019, p. 44)

Educated people are expected to think wisely in favour of society. But, Haya criticizes them for not thinking about the real issues. Instead, writers focus on women's lips. It is not the only poem criticizing the tradition of Pashto poetry where a woman figure is the center of attention. Much of the Pashto poetry has been devoted to appreciating the beauty of a woman but recently some writers produced poems criticizing that Pashto poetry is sexualizing the female body and we read in the following poem what Haya came up with.

*Writers are still not free to appreciate Hayya*

*They praise the syrup of lips – whether should I laugh or cry*

لاخو ليكو الان نه دي وزگارچي حيا اوستايي

ستايي لا د شونديو شربت، اوخاندم كه وژارم

(Khatak, 2019, p. 45)

As mentioned earlier, traditional Pashtun poets invested a big course of lifetime to write about whether fictional or real beauty of the female body. To report and get along well with the idea to be the centre of the poet's attention Haya calls her death delay because she has been a good source of inspiration for males.

*I am the queen of a Pakhtun poet's imagination*

*I am the moon of my lover's life – death do not come now* (Khatak, 2019, p. 46)

د يو پښتون شاعر د فکر شهزادگي يمه زه

د خپل جاناند ژوند سپورمي يم مرگه مه راځه لا

In several other poems, death is addressed by the Pashtun poet to wait and not show up; because there is a lot to do. We can read between the lines that death is so frequent and so unexpected in this region because of unending wars and later terrorism. The writer can't address the killer but only speak about his/her death directly to delay as Haya does in the above two lines.

Because of the gossip, I returned home as not able to accomplish what I set for Haya's other nice poem. There are many major and basic rights of women but to exercise those rights and play an active role in society is restricted again by society. Even if rights like education are preserved by the constitution but a girl will stop going to school after she turns fifteen or older. We can read this in Haya's poem as follows:

*'I returned from the half of the way – People are talking sickening'* (Khatak, 2019).

Haya wrote poetry as playing the role of spokesperson for Pashtun women. The speaker of her poem explains very clearly that as a woman she does not want wealth, property or anything else but only respect and being loved. In Islam, a woman is entitled to receive property or wealth left in her parent's and husband's property; but in this poem, the speakers dropped that case and concentrated on her placement, status and being accepted in the society which is not that much difficult.

*I am throwing roses on myself – happily*

*Today my lover has sent me roses (Khatak, 2019, p. 87)*

شیندمه د مستی نه بیا په ځان د گلاب پانی  
نن ماله رالیرلي دي جانان د گلاب پانی

As previously the female speaker of Haya's poem asked for respect and love and not anything materialistic, here we read how happy the female speaker of her poem is for receiving roses from her lover. Roses as symbols of love and affection, and if there is love there is respect and the female speaker of her poem is pleased with the situation. In the meantime, we can read that the female speaker of the poem is celebrating her lover's affection and the love she has received. In the real-life scenario, we understand that Pashtun women adore their counterpart's attention, love and respect.

Again, back to unending struggles to achieve all the rights we read about the powerless self of the speaker in the following piece of poem. Though there is the willingness for fighting against tyranny but it is limited and they need salvation. In much of the poetry written by women, women spoke about their situation and directly address the man to behave. Also, for salvation and relief and assistance, they turn to Allah. Allah has revealed the Holy Quran and assigned Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and there is an entire chapter in the name of women. Now, being a Muslim, a man has to fulfil this commitment.

*I see my powerless self and I understand my promises too*

*I have the intention to fight but I look at my hands too*

*How can I make a decision being caged?*

*I understand love but I can see the chains too*

بي وسي وينم او لوڅونو ته مي هم گورمه  
جنگ ته مي نيت دی خو لاسونو ته مي هم گورمه  
زه په پنجره کښي اخر څنگه فيصله اوکړمه  
مينه منم خو زنجیرونو ته مي هم گورمه

(Khatak, 2019, p. 89)

Cage refers to suppression and restriction, and in this poem, we read about the loyalty of one party and the betrayal of the second party. Even if there is no freedom to even think of someone that you like to be with legally is still remembered but his betrayal is also remembered

alike. Along with his remembrance, his betrayal is felt and we are given a scene of dismay and full-scale of destruction of female humans by male humans.

*In cage – I keep all your memories secret*

*Your love was like the love of city people*

پنجره کې هم ځان سره ستا یادونه پټ ساتمه

ستا محبت وو بازاری د بنارد خلقو په شان

(Khatak, 2019, p. 91)

Every individual has a battle to fight and Haya puts it in her this piece poem via the female speaker of the poem saying I am after my works to do but what others think is truly the opposite. A society where people gossip and where individual fears what people will think of is misery and we can read in Pashto women's poetry. The following poem helps us to understand how painful the assumptions are.

*On striking hot noon – I wish for shade for my head*

*And people assume me sinful for committing this sin* (Khatak, 2019, p. 104)

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