

## Pakhtun Women And The Creative Expression: A Means Of Quotidian Agency

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### Abstract

It is human nature that we tend to stereotype certain individuals and groups based on their ethnicity, race, religion, and even looks, among other attributes. That is the case with Pakhtuns as well. Non-Pakhtuns, within and outside Pakistan, do not have a very positive notion about them; more so about their treatment of women. In this paper, I demonstrate that there is no doubt that the Pakhtuns are restricted, in some cases, by their cultural boundaries but then everyone, irrespective of their ethnic, racial, and/or religious backgrounds have their limitations. In order to prove my stance I have first of all interviewed some native Pashto speakers to get a general understanding about and usage of Pashto *tappa* and contemporary poetry composed by women. Using Althusser's framework of ideology and Ideological State Apparatus, as the theoretical foundation, I argue that Pakhtun women are culturally interpellated but they have their own ways of practicing their agency. These women may not be able to totally challenge structural and cultural norms but they definitely know how to use their quotidian agency. Finally, I conclude that agency should not be understood in the narrow sense; it can have different meanings for different people in different contexts.

**Key words:** Pakhtun women, Pashto *Tappa*, Ideology, Interpellation, Agency.

### تلخیص

یہ انسانی فطرت ہے کہ ہم لوگوں کے متعلق ان کی نسل، قومیت، مذہب اور ظاہری بناء پر ایک خاص رائے قائم کر لیتے ہیں، کچھ ایسی ہی سوچ ہماری پختونوں کے بارے میں بھی ہے۔ غیر پختون چاہے اندرون ملک ہوں یا بیرون ملک ہوں، عورتوں سے روا رکھنے گئے سلوک کی بناء پر کچھ مثبت سوچ نہیں رکھتے۔ میں اس مقالے میں یہ وضاحت کر رہی ہوں کہ اس میں شک نہیں کہ پختون اپنی ثقافت اور روایات میں جکڑے ہوئے ہیں، مگر کون ہے جو روایات کی پکڑ سے آزاد ہے؟ اپنی روایات میں رہتے ہوئے پختون عورتیں خود مختار ہیں اور پشتو خود مختاری کا وسیلہ ہے۔ یہ ثابت کرنے کے لئے میں نے کچھ لوگوں کا انٹرویو کیا یہ جاننے کے لئے کہ پشتو کے بارے میں ان کی کیا رائے ہے پھر التوزر کی تھیوری آف آئیڈیالوجی اور آئیڈیالوجیکل اسٹیٹ آپریٹس کو بنیاد بناتے ہوئے میں نے یہ ثابت کیا ہے کہ خود مختاری ایک محدود اصطلاح نہیں ہے اور اس کے مطلب کو وقت، جگہ اور لوگوں کے حالات کو مد نظر رکھتے ہوئے سمجھنا چاہیے۔

کلیدی الفاظ: پختون خواتین، پشتو، نظریہ، تجربہ، ایجنسی

## Introduction

“Seeing is believing” is a rather clichéd English phrase; nonetheless this phrase carries weight. Perhaps, it holds true for the Pakhtuns as well. Before 9/11 and more so after the tragedy Pakhtuns have been stereotyped even more. As elsewhere I have stated, “A common notion among many Pakistanis even today is that the *Pakhtuns/Pashtuns* or Pathans<sup>1</sup> are woodcutters, children-abductors, and violators of women rights; in short they are barbarians of a stone-age, living in some remote and rugged lands! The West<sup>2</sup> erroneously perceives Pakhtun men as Talibans and the women as the *burqa*-clad (veiled), both of whom epitomize religious and cultural radicalism. In other words, Pakhtuns are regarded as a gender biased, gender segregated (spatially and emotionally), and a patriarchally structured people (Khan, A., 2012a; and Khan, A. 2012b). However, to judge someone or something it is better to get to know them, even slightly.

In this paper, I demonstrate that there is no doubt that the Pakhtuns are restricted, in some cases, by their cultural boundaries but then everyone, irrespective of their ethnic, racial, and/or religious backgrounds have their limitations. By using Althusser’s framework of ideology and ideological state apparatus I argue that Pakhtun women are culturally interpellated but they have their own ways of practicing their agency. These women may not be able to totally challenge structural and cultural norms but they definitely know how to use their quotidian agency. In order to explicate my stance I use Pashto folk, especially the genre of *tappa* and some contemporary poetry, composed by women, as examples. Finally, I conclude that agency should not be understood in the narrow sense; it can have different meanings for different people in different contexts.

## Literature Review: Establishing the Premise, Elaborating the Genre, and Elucidating the Theory

There is a wide variety of literature in print (Abu-Lughod 1986, 1990, 2008; Briggs 1985; Friedlander 1975; Grierson 1884, 1886; Henry 1975; Jacobson 1975; Karp 1988; Kolenda 1984; Munda 1975; Narayan 1986; Raheja and Gold 1994) that shows how women voice their concerns; comment on the cultural nuances; and hence prove literary expressions as agentic tools for tradition-bound women.

As such, *tappa* is the most commonly used genre of Pashto folk literature. Pashto folk songs are generally composed in lyrical couplets which are called *Landai* or more commonly *Tappa* (plural: *Tappay*). Mohmand (2010, n.p.) explains that Pashto folk songs are couplets of a unique cadence, authored mostly by females addressing their lovers. Their authorship has remained anonymous for all these centuries. *Tappay* have been sung over hill and vale and before the practice of printing *tappay* were learned by heart and passed down by the word of mouth. According to Mohmand (2010, n.p.) every

verse ends with a (stretched) “aa” sound as a mark of exclamation. Each verse is composed of twenty two syllables. The first line with nine syllables is shorter than the following line with thirteen syllables. The shortfall is made up for during singing with expressions of love and pathos differing from area to area. The themes vary from love to social problems, nationalism, patriotism, and even anathema and sarcasm.

According to Shah (2011, n.p.) some *tappay* begin with a fond opening phrase of “*ya qurban!*” (Oh, dear one!), meaning respect to the listener. *Tappay* are sung with loud melodious voice and could be accompanied by *mangay*, *tabla*, *baja*, and *sitar*.<sup>3</sup> He elaborates that *tappay* are generally sung at weddings, other celebrations and at times without any celebratory occasion. A *tappa* can be about human emotions, achievements, heroes, villains, and the environment.

Enevoldsen (2004) states that most of the *tappay* currently used are made by women. Romantic in nature most *tappay* deal with the lover and the beloved. A related theme is that of separation, “not only of the lover from the beloved, but of friends and of a man from his country and his family” (p. xiii).

Khan, Q. (2008) also affirms that *tappa* is “essentially a feminine form, mostly composed and sung by women. It is also essentially an anonymous form, usually extempore and unwritten” (p. 10). He also adds that the older people usually use *tappay* related to religion and morality. Whereas, the younger lot quote romantic, nationalistic, and idealistic *tappay* (p.12)

As explicated above and later expressed by my respondents *tappay* tend to express everyday issues, emotions, and happenings in the life of a person in a simple and yet powerful manner. Besides, as I read and was told that most of the Pashto *tappay* were composed by women though they come down to generations anonymously. Therefore, I use *tappa* as an example to explicate my stance because it is widely used by native Pashto speakers.

I argue that *tappa* is one of the many ways through which Pakhtun women practice their quotidian or everyday agency. In order to validate my argument I use Althusser’s (1971) theoretical framework of ideology and ideological interpellation. According to Althusser (2005) ideology is a system of representations, having nothing to do with consciousness and influencing men and women through structures unawares (p. 233). As such, Ideology is an unconscious process which acts through structures and is a process that escapes men and women. Althusser (1971) calls these structures Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) which include family, educational, religious, and legal institutions, media, and culture among others. Along with ISAs, Althusser (1971) states, that there are the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) as well. These include the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts, the prisons, etc. (p.145). However, the difference between

these two types of state apparatuses is that ISAs function through consent, whereas RSAs function through violence and coercion. As such, ISAs influence individuals unaware and are always at work without the conscious knowledge of the individuals.

According to Althusser (1971) ISAs interpellate or hail social individuals and when these social individuals respond to the interpellation they become social subjects. As a result of interpellation, the “process of recognition” begins and the individual can either accept or reject a subject-position or else he or she can agree to disidentification. According to Pêcheux (1982, pp. 156-159), the individual who responds to and accepts the interpellation or the hailed position is called a *universal subject* and the one who refuses to comply is the *subject of enunciation*. The universal subject or the “good subject” is the one who abides by the expected social and cultural norms whereas the subject of enunciation or the “bad subject” does not. Besides, accepting or rejecting a social subject-position, a social subject can adopt disidentification which constitutes “*working of the subject-form* and not just its *abolition*” (Pêcheux 1982, p. 159). As such, in this paper I demonstrate that Pakhtun women respond to the cultural interpellation and respond as the disidentifying subjects by using *tappa* as means of their quotidian agency.

In anthropological and sociological literature agency has multi-tiered meaning(s) and the notion can be expressed and practiced in various ways in different cultures, structures, and circumstances. Ahearn (2001) defines agency as, “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 112). And Mahmood (2001) believes that “[the] ability to understand and interrogate the lives of women whose desire, affect, and will have been shaped by nonliberal traditions... think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create” (p. 203). And Hilsdon (2007) believes that agency is something that arises from within the discursive discourses (p. 127). Therefore, Raval (2009) believes that women who grow in different cultures are bound to internalize desires according to their respective situations (p. 492). Correspondingly, Heron (2008) states, “When it comes to human agency, people make choices, motivate and regulate their behaviour on the basis of belief systems and cultural backgrounds” (p. 87). Keeping in view the opinions of these scholars agency is a temporally, culturally, and socially contextualized phenomenon.

As such, literary expressions, whether in the form of folk songs or published poems, should be understood and accepted as agentic tools used by women in the Pakhtun culture that may not change the cultural power dynamics but they definitely create some awareness among both men and women and to an extent challenge the cultural taken-for-granted perceptions. Finnegan (1991) explains that in order for a folk tradition continue it has to be used by its people; whether its followers exploit, change or follow it blindly (p. 112). And Geertz (2003, p. 36) believes, “But that is what listening to the voices of our own literary tradition...brings on as well: the sense that there is more to things than first

appears and that our reactions are where we start, not where we end.” Abu-Lughod (2008) also categorically discusses the importance of songs and stories as a medium of expression in traditionally gendered societies.

### **Methodology: Method, Field Site, and Respondents**

For this paper, apart from using and analyzing Pashto *tappay*, I have included few lines from some contemporary Pashto poetry by women as well. Besides, I have also interviewed three respondents, two men and a woman. I purposively selected Pakhtuns research respondents residing in Peshawar. These respondents belong to different parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and are native speakers of Pashto; Pashto being their mother tongue. The respondents are between 30-50 years old. And I intentionally interviewed respondents who were educated and by educated I mean that these respondents have a masters, M. Phil, or PhD degree. The reason I interviewed educated people was that I wanted to know how far, if at all, the educated, comparatively exposed, and what we call “modern” Pakhtuns use the traditional and colloquial language. Since my research is ethnographic in nature I include some verbatim responses of the research participants.

### ***Tappa*: The Gendered Voice**

During my discussions with my respondents it was apparent that like any culture even among Pakhtuns poetry is a dominant form of literary expression. However, I was told that folk literature and especially *tappa*, as a form of literary genre, was more popular among the masses than any other literary genre.

Nadia, a young academic whose research focuses on Pakhtun culture began by reiterating the fact that *tappa* is the most common form of expression. She explained,

It maybe because its wording and composition is very comprehensive; and one *tappa* can convey many things at a time. Secondly, it is popular because most of the Pakhtuns are familiar with its content. There are multiple themes in *tappa*, for example, bravery, *nung* (respect), *ghairat* (honor), *peghore* (taunt); everything that is there in the Pakhtun culture. *Tappa* is also a struggle to maintain the Pakhtun cultural norms, for example, the ideals of masculinity and femininity.

Another respondent, Daud, was of the opinion that *tappa* is the most popular genre in Pashto literature. It is very popular in the rural areas. The illiterate or the not trained in modern education use *tappa* a lot, “you will see them working in the field and singing *tappay*.” He also explained that Pashtun women know a lot of *tappay* and they use them on different occasions according to the context. However, Daud also said, “Our educated

lot do not know much about *tappa* because I think they are more attracted towards the modern media, Hollywood, and Bollywood music.”

Accordingly, the usual themes of *tappa* are about life: anything that is related to life. It is the most popular form because its composition is simple. As Daud pointed out, “It is folk poetry therefore it is pretty much close to the aspirations, the worries, the life of common man and woman. It speaks of the common person’s life. It is short; so you can remember it very easily. It is precise and comprehensive.”

In the following section I quote some *tappay*, their translation and explanation to demonstrate their wide thematic range expressing the female voice. For example, *Eid* is one such festive occasion which culturally sanctions meeting and mixing of relatives and friends. However, there are cultural restrictions that do not allow unrelated men and women to meet and greet. Yet, the beloved passes on a message, usually sung, that:

*Janana rasha ka me gore*

*Pa sro jamo ke laka gul walara yama* (Mohmand, 2010, p. 3)

(Darling come if you want to see me

In a red dress I stand like a rose (translation by author)

*Te da akhtar pa sahar rasha*

*Za ba dar-oozam thore starge sra laasoon* (Mohmand, 2010, p. 28)

(Come over on *Eid* morning

I’ll come out, kohl eyed and henna-stained hands) (translation by author)

Both these *tappay* are in the female voice because firstly the gendered verb endings (as in Udru) are female. Secondly, the dress code and the make-up (red dress like a rose; kohl eyed and henna stained hands), respectively, show that it is a woman who is suggesting to her lover to meet her on *Eid*. Besides, the persona is dressed up for this meeting; she will not meet her lover shabbily dressed. Amongst the cultural restraints this is how she practices her quotidian agency.

Furthermore, it is interesting to see Pakhtun women, particularly in the rural areas, are so explicit in voicing their concerns about their sexual and personal desires. Whether these emotions are sung in public domains, as in all-female gatherings, or expressed privately among female relatives and/or friends, I think it bears to the fact that these women have the space and the agency to express their emotions unlike many others.

*Zama janam nadaan halak de*

*Che khulgai warkrham beya dae waee haloona* (Mohmand, 2010, p. 36)

(My lover is a naïveté

When I kiss him he tells our secret to all) (translation by author)

*Zama chargul ke sa guna wa*  
*Ta ba da sro anango na akhista khwandoona* (Mohmand, 2010, p. 37)  
 (Don't blame my jewellery  
 You could have still relished on my cheeks) (translation by author)

*Seena palang leche balakhth de*  
*Zama napoya yar pe sar na lagaweena* (Mohmand, 2010, p. 40)  
 (My bosom the bed, my wrists the pillow  
 My naïve lover doesn't recline) (translation by author)

*Da beganae ajaba shpa va*  
*Da che da yar pa gheg ke laka panrha rapedama* (Mohmand, 2010, p.14)  
 (It was, indeed, the night of all nights, last night  
 When I quivered as a leaf pressed to his bosom tight)

The above *tappay*, that is, in Pashto, through their linguistic markers suggest the female voice. The persona talks about *janan halak* (lover-boy); *zama chargul* (my jewelry); *seena palang* (bosom—the bed); *rapedama* (shivering and the verb has a feminine ending).

Besides, the women practicing quotidian agency by singing *tappay* themselves, there are other *tappay* where the female concern about (dis)honor, (dis)respect, (in)equality, etc. are voiced in a perhaps masculine or apparently gender-neutral voice. Nonetheless, the aim is the wellbeing of the women which eventually lets them not only become aware of their traditional limitations but is in fact a way of consciousness raising of the Pakhtun men as well. As such, indirectly, such *tappay* advance the cause of Pakhtun women's quotidian agency. For instance, the following *tappay* underscore this claim:

*De Pakhtun dae Pukhto taa gora*  
*Che loor ao khor laka sarwee baya kawee na*  
 (Imagine the Pakhtun's sense of honor  
 He sells his sister and daughter like cattle) (translation, Khan, Q., 2008, p. 23)

*De khazay marg ta haajat neeshta*  
*Bala pe okra da ae marg dae; mra ba sheena*  
 (There is no need to kill your wife  
 Just marry another one, she will die herself) (translation, Khan, Q., 2008, p. 24)

*Da ser ao maal khatra pakay wee*  
*Cha che dwa banay pa yao kor saa talay wee na*  
 (It is dangerous for both your health and wealth,  
 To keep two wives at the same time) (translation, Khan, Q., 2008, p. 24)

Similarly a verse of a song, in a male voice, shows the cultural limitation of a man who wants to greet his beloved but is conscious of the societal stigma that may be attached to a single woman meeting and greeting a single, unrelated (or even related) man:

*Zra raa ta waiyae che wersha tae pukhtana oka*  
*Galay che paata shawuma da mae sta haya ta katal*  
 (My heart bids me to inquire about you  
 Keeping your honor in mind, I kept quiet) (Translation by author)

One of my respondents, Yasir, a man in his early 50s gave a plausible explanation of how Pakhtun women practice agency. He believed that the relationship a woman is in determines her level of agency. He was of the opinion that perhaps a woman of herself and in-herself does not have much agency because Pakhtun society respects relations. He explained that literature has played a role in giving some agency to women. He thought folk literature gives more agency to women since it comes first in oral form then the written form. There are certain forms which are specifically the domain of women. The voice is that of woman; the composition comes from a woman; the participation, and the performance of emotions is mostly that of a woman; like for example the *tappa* is perhaps the sole form which is specifically a form in which women specialize in. They compose these during celebratory activities and during mournful activities. And during activities that perhaps shows reflection of a woman on the political, economic, and social, issues she finds around herself. In addition to these collective spheres *tappa* is also used for the individual sphere where woman expresses her emotions as an individual. Most of the folk stories like “Adam Khan- Durkhanay”, “Yousuf Khan-Sher Bano”, or any other for that matter, the role assigned to woman seems to be more powerful than the one assigned to the man. Why? Because it is actually the woman who works a pivot or what John Donne calls the stationery leg of the compass and the man revolves around that leg. Or for man, woman is the emotional hub; the emotional nucleus. For example, Yasir quoted a *tappa* from the folktale of “Sher Alam Khan-Maimoonai”, and explained that in this *tappa* the voice is that of a woman, “my requests bought you from the other end of the world/but how do I bring you back from the world of the dead?” The background being that in “Sher Alam Khan-Maimoonai”, Sher Alam came back from India for her but then his paternal cousins murdered him. Yasir emphatically stated, “Imagine the power she has; imagine the agency. I would say that mother, daughter or sister would not exercise that power over man. But then that agency is available to a woman if she is in a social, legal or at times even in a biological relationship.”

Yasir was also of the opinion that *tappa* is the most popular genre of folk literature because it is public property; perhaps no researcher actually knows when it actually started. He thought it started with the heart beat—whenever the Pakhtun heart beat the first time at that time the *tappa* was born. Furthermore, the language in it is really very simple. It uses very colloquial expressions; it does not depend upon the beauty of the language; it does not



depend upon the conventional figures of speech; the main focus is on the idea. The main focus is on the body; it is not the cosmetics. Yasir reiterated the fact that some *tappay* are really very simple but if one looks at the thought process and the strings attached to the thought process some of them are really very loaded for example:

*Che maazigar tanoor ta kae numa*  
*Loogay bana kum jera taa pasay koama*  
 (In the evening when I bake bread  
 I cry and tell people the smoke brings tears to my eyes) (translation by  
 respondent)

This is indeed a loaded *tappa*. It is a comment on how woman is repressed because she cannot even openly perform her emotions of missing her love. Perhaps, because showing a sign of weakness will make her less of a woman. Or perhaps, one is not supposed to publically show one's emotions. Or perhaps, there are other problems which are more pressing than missing one's love. For example, most Pakhtuns work abroad on minimum wage and how they and their families or loved ones do not want to stay away from each other. But then there is a bigger need; the physical need is perhaps prior to the emotional need. The voice in this *tappa* wants to admit that she has this emotional need too. But she would not want to come across as a weakling. She would not want to come across as somebody missing her love because in the absence of her husband or father she may be the head of the family and she does not want her family members to see her as a weak person. Because given the environment that the Pakhtuns have seen and continue to see even today if the male family member is not there the rest of the family members will look up to the elder woman and one would assume that if she is baking bread at the *tanoor* or clay oven it is not only literal or physical but also metaphoric; she is providing bread for the family members. And if the elder of the family shows weakness she will not be in a position to explain to the rest of the family members why the man in their life is not there or how she is capable of fulfilling his duties.

However, another way to look at this *tappa* would be that how oppressive the society is which does not perhaps allow woman to publically display her emotions about how she is missing her love, or her fiancé, or her husband. And by not publically displaying her emotions she is singing it! This woman is so mindful of the physical limitations but at the same time is also admitting that she has her emotional needs too. So she would rather blame the smoke from the *tanoor* or clay oven to be responsible for the tears that she is shedding than to admit that she is missing someone. But it is noteworthy to see how she is performing her emotions of missing him and yet not publically admitting it. No doubt, it is a very bleak comment; a cutting comment on Pakhtun society in not giving woman that liberty, that agency where she can express her emotions. And that agency is provided by *tappa* which is why perhaps it is very popular. And it is equally popular among men and women.

Almost all *tappay*, with a few exceptions here and there, are sung by men. Perhaps it is an attempt to compensate for what Pakhtun men deny women in real life. So they sing women's songs. And the voice men do not allow her they sing those songs to accompaniment of music and to the traditional gathering of men. And in a way language and *tappa* gives woman that power which she cannot have in her personal sphere; it is a voice that she acquires, though a little twisted too, and sings it to everyone. So it seems as if the physical voice is what is denied to woman but the voice or the person who speaks to us in the *tappa* is actually celebrated. Pakhtun man in a very compensatory manner acknowledges this power.

With regard to Pashto folk songs Salma Shaheen, a Pashto scholar and poet, says, We have 85% folklore that is created by women. Why they created it is because they are the marginalized class. These Pakhtuns have a strange psyche...where [romantic] interest is generated or developed, there has to be a separation. You cannot meet anyone [you like]. When you cannot meet anyone, you are unhappy and when you are unhappy art is created... for creativity separation is necessary.

Apart from folksongs and literature there are Pakhtun women who are housewives, working women, or both and at the same time are poets as well. Besides, personal issues these women raised environmental and social questions. One of them said,

The fresh blowing breeze of the city  
Now whimpers through the skyscrapers  
The jasmine and roses  
Now await their gardener  
The night-glory in my courtyard  
Now yearns for a drop of water.

The second poet said,

I will only come when  
The sky turns azure  
The flower beds turn red  
The mustard flowers bloom yellow.

What is the ratio of hatred  
In the village-winds now?  
I will only come when  
The hearts are cleansed.

Come my dear!  
I will take thee to my village  
It has been a while in foreign lands  
That I have been venting my emotions.

These poems and the *tappay* illustrate that Pakhtun women, depending on their level of education, social status, and access to opportunities have various ways of practicing their agency, either quotidian or restricted.

## Conclusions

Althusser (1971) believes that all social individuals become social subjects when they respond to an ideological interpellation. However, their subject position is determined by the way they react to the interpellation, that is, as a good, bad, or a disidentifying subject (Pêcheux, 1982). Besides, ideology always needs a conduit, which Althusser calls the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), to interpellate an individual. Among others, culture is a strong ISA which interpellates both men and women. But Pakhtun men and women respond differently to the cultural ideological interpellation. Most Pakhtun men respond as the good or disidentifying subjects; yet some also afford to be the bad subjects. However, most Pakhtun women only respond as good subjects by abiding by the gendered cultural norms and expectations. As most Pakhtun women cannot respond as bad subjects due to cultural censures therefore they resort to a disidentifying subject-positions and use *tappa*, the most popular and accepted genre of folk literature, to voice their concerns and emotions. Since the disidentifying subject adopts a middle path as the not-so-good and the not-so-bad subject, therefore by using *tappa* as a form of expression, these women are not considered cultural rebels. Therefore, composing and singing or even prosaically uttering *tappay* give Pakhtun women quotidian agency of sorts.

In this paper, I wanted to demonstrate that according to the non-Pakhtun standards Pakhtun women may have restricted agency or perhaps no agency. However, one of the ways to practice that agency within restricted cultural structures is through the use of folk and contemporary literary genres.

Alcoff (1988) believes, the position of women can actually become the location of constructing meaning rather than the place where meaning can be discovered (p. 434). In addition, Raheja and Gold (1994, p.123) aptly justify women's folk songs by stating that in many cultures women's relationships are not given primary importance so these women use these folk songs as a way to challenge some tenets of the cultural discourse. As such, Pashto poems and folksongs prove to be the medium that strategically voice and advocate social, cultural, and gender issues. Hence proving that that agency should not be understood in the narrow sense; it can have different meanings for different people in different locales; at different times, and in different contexts.

## End Notes

1. Pakhtuns/Pukhtuns/Pukhtoons and Pashtuns are orthographic and linguistic variants used for the same ethnicity. The difference in pronunciation of the “kh” and “sh” sound is due to the two different dialects spoken in the northern and southern districts, respectively, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The British, following the Indians, used the word Pathan(s) for this ethnic group.

2. By “West” I primarily mean countries in North America, Europe, and other economically and technologically developed countries that lie to the west of Pakistan.
3. Mangay (or ghara in Urdu) is an earthen pot-bellied pitcher used for producing a hollow sound; tambal is a tambourine-like instrument; baja is the harmonium.

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