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# AN ANALYSIS OF THE LANGUAGE OF *TAPPA* (FOLK SONG TYPE) AND ITS ROLE IN GENDER IDENTITY FORMATION IN PAKHTUN SOCIETY, PAKISTAN

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**Abstract-** This research paper deals with descriptive analysis of language of Pakhtun folk *tappas* (plural of *tappa*). The study is based on qualitative analysis of 8000 *tappas* collected and recorded by authors from Pakhtu folklore. The objective is to explore gender identity formation and gendered patterns engraved in the language of these *tappas* in relation to Pakhtun society of KP, Pakistan. Although, oral in origin, they are now part of Pakhtun literary culture. This research study concludes that they serve as a guide and a source of gender socialization. Pakhtun social setup is gender-based favouring men at the cost of underrating women in domestic and public sphere. In this context, language employed in *tappas* play vital role in preserving, reinforcing and perpetuating gendered cultural expectations.

Key Words: language, gender identity, tappa; Pakhtun, folk literature, Pakhtunwali

#### Introduction

Language experts agree that Pakhtu popular literature originated from traditional folk songs. These songs are of different types but the general thinking is that among all of them the clearest, easiest, oldest and closest to Pakhtun nature is tappa (Tair, 1987: 59). According to Sahar Katozai (2005: 321) tappa is the earliest and most important genre of Pakhtu popular poetry. He further states that it consists of two lines with the first one short i.e. of 9 syllables while the second one is longer with 13 syllables. The lines do not rhyme with each other, but the last line always ends in Pakhtu suffixes like -ina, -una, əna or -əma (MacKenzie, 1958: 322). Regarding nomenclature of tappa, Dawar Khan Dawood (41-42) states that this genre of popular literature is known by three names i.e. tappa, landay, or misra (verse or line). Justifying the use of landay, he states that landay means short or concise and as the first line of tappa is short therefore it is called landay. As far as calling it misra is concerned, he identifies three reasons for it. Firstly, its first line is short and the second is long and both lines are sung or said as one line or misra. Secondly, some researchers associate misra with misri (sweet or sugar). To them, misri are sweet and misra also is sweet and welcoming to a listener. Thirdly, misra is associated with Egyptian sword known for its sharpness and effectiveness. Same is the case with misra which goes straight to the heart. The nomenclature of Landay is in currency in Afghanistan while tappa or misra is used in the areas occupied by Yousafzai including Peshawar (Tair, 1980: 28, Shaheen, 1984: 14 Enevoldsen, 2004: xiv, Abid, 2008: 335).

As referred to in the above paragraph, the first line of *tappa* is short or incomplete in comparison to the second

full or complete line. However, words like *Ya ka zaar, Ya qurban* etc. are added to the first line to equalize the syllables of the second line and with the course of time, these words have given identity to *tappa* and distinction from the rest of types of Pakhtu folk songs (Tair, 1987: 91, Shaheen, 1984: 19, Tair, 1980: 15). In addition, pithiness and collective appeal to Pakhtuns are its hallmarks (Abid, 2008: 335) while its singular distinction is that the whole story is told in a proverb-like fashion in only two lines (Enevoldsen, 2004: xiv).

As far as its origin is concerned, researchers disagree to its exact placement in history. On the basis of his findings, Sahar Katozai (2005: 322) notes that *tappa* relate to 16<sup>th</sup> century while to Salma Shaheen (1984: 10) it originated in 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. At the same time, there are other researchers who are of the view that as the poet or poetess of *tappa* remains unknown therefore, neither its historical period nor exact time and date can be ascertained (Tair, 1987: 92, Shaheen, 1984: 10, Shaheen, 1989: 164). In the same context, Abdullah Abid (2008: 335) argues that it is as old as the Pakhtuns are and its origin is difficult to be ascertained.

With regard to its substance, Mark Slobin (1974: 241-242) notes that *tappas* are mostly made and sung by women and they mostly relate to the expression of female feelings and emotions (see also Enevoldsen, 2004: xiii, Widmark, 2010: 6). According to Salma Shaheen (1988-9: 70) they also relate to the social conditions through which Pakhtun girls and women have passed or are passing. She argues that Pakhtun women are culturally expected to observe *purdah*, privacy or seclusion from the rest of the society. This seclusion in turn ties them and does not allow them to make public their emotions contrary to the cultural norm of *purdah*. To her, it may be one reason that most of the *tappas* survive in anonymity. Leaving this aside, the matter and substance of *tappa* mostly revolves around the concept of ideal manhood and other social virtues that a young girl would aspire for in her lover as delineated and defined by the Pakhtun code of honour- *Pakhtunwali* (Enevoldsen, 2004: viii, xiii). Most of Pakhtu *tappas* are romantic, dealing with the relationship of lover and beloved. However, as argued by Nawaz Tair (1980: 8), the above discussion does not mean to exclude men from the domain of *tappa*. He holds that anyone, either man or woman, can anywhere sing it whether at home, or in desert place or on top of a mountain or while working in the field.

#### Significance of the Research Study

The textual analysis of Pakhtu *tappas* is significant for their dominant role in the lives of Pakhtuns. It is so because they are frequently quoted and repeated to establish a point of view and those who make recourse to them during conversation situations both domestically and publically are given more respect and their wisdom is considered superior. Further, people take pain to quote and repeat *tappas* to render social approval and cultural currency to their speech. *Tappas* are 'ultra-short stories', are anonymous and have universal applicability thematically dealing with emotions and feelings of the heart 'stamped with the image of the soul of a people' (Enevoldsen, 2004: xi, xv).

Tappa, from earlier times, has been the representative of thoughts and emotions of its environment and people (Tair, 1987: 90) and has been the spiritual self-portrait of its people like other folk song types (Khan, 1993: 21). Regarding its folk nature, M. Parvesh Shaheen (1989: 164) observes that no poet or poetess can prove claim over it and is said and sung by everyone everywhere. And to Nawaz Tair (1987: 90) this is its singular distinction, and proof of its folk nature. The topics discussed and focused in tappa include beauty, love and loneliness beside courage, honour and Pakhtunwali (Shaheen, 1989: 164). The message contained in most of the tappas is beyond the limits of time and age and has the power to stir into activity the emotions of today's youth. Nawaz Tair (1980: 14, 21) notes that a host of tappas have reference to good and bad deeds and characteristics of the nation from which the coming generations take lesson and instruction (see also Shaheen, 1988-9: 30). Tappa contains both spiritualistic and materialistic aspects and is a natural reflection of masculine and feminine characteristics (Shaheen, 1984: 27). The customs and traditions are preserved in tappa for centuries and it is these tappas which are responsible for their existence and survival (Shaheen, 1988-9: 10, Shaheen, 1984: 36). In short, as a guide to his present and past, a Pakhtun cannot remain indifferent to tappa. In turn each tappa speaks for the nature of people which is the sum total of their social life and represents their feelings (Shaheen, 1989: 164). It also contains blunt criticism and ways to move forward as a nation. It also disdains crossing the limits of Pakhtunwali (Tair, 1980: 23, 36, Abid, 2008: 335).

Having thus established the deep interconnection between Pakhtun culture and *tappas*, the next section analyzes the language of Pakhtu folk *tappas* along with field observations to see how they contribute to gender identity formation. In this regard, language samples from *tappas* are selected in an attempt to underscore words and labels that attempt to propagate and reinforce division of society on the basis of gender and the relative social space they allot to both the sexes.

#### Method and Material

This study is based on the analysis of 8000 folk *tappas* collected through library method from books, newspapers, magazines, and journals in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan with assistance and guidance from Pakhtu Academy, University of Peshawar in 2010. KP is situated to the north-west of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan to its west separated by Durand line. On both sides of the line, the predominant population is Pakhtuns sharing same cultural and historical legacy and take guidance from the time-tested code of life- *Pakhtunwali*.

We a view to narrow down the rather extensive corpus to serve the purpose of this study, only those folk *tappas* are selected which have relevance to gender identity formation in the context of Pakhtun society. Thus, a two step method is adopted. Firstly, texts which directly related to gender are selected and secondly, the text of those tappas is selected which relate to gender identity without explicitly referring to or address gender. The search encompasses textual expressions and linguistic labels associated with the concept of gender identity formation.

The analysis of the *tappas* is approached from the perspective of psychological theories of gender mainly Social Learning Theory and Cognitive Development Theory that emphasise the crucial role of communication in the inculcation of masculinity and femininity (Wood, 2007) along with dealing the text of *tappas* as discourses in Foucauldian sense enunciated in critical Post-Structuralist Perspective to mean 'ways of constituting knowledge, together with social practices, forms of subjectivity, and power relations' (Durrani, 2008: 599, Weedon, 1997: 105).

#### **Results and Discussion**

Data collected for this research paper is based on textual analysis of Pakhtu folk *tappas* focusing gender identity formation in relation to the local culture in a qualitative manner. The analysis is presented in the form of headings followed by conclusion at the end.

The world of *tappas*, hints at bias and disparity in the depiction of masculinity and femininity. Man remains more visible, vocal and the focus of attention while women mostly exist as second class citizens both in domestic and public sphere. As far as morality is concerned, it is more centred on female characters as the family derives its honour from her. Similarly, most of

social prescriptions related to bravery, courage and display of power are addressed to men as they are expected to keep and defend family honour. Women are idealized to exist in the confines of their homes (Mumtaz, 1987: 7, Tair, 1980: 62), to support and reinforce traditional masculine virtues in their male members; while men are idealized in the display of their physical strength and their pre-emptive ability in handling social situations.

As referred to earlier, *tappas* are the true reflection of the mindset of Pakhtun society and so they portray women to the expectations of the society. They are more or less passive and subordinate to men and are as such portrayed as can be expected in a men-dominated society. The language employed in *tappas* is crucial in this analysis as it serves as vehicle to educate, socialize and perpetuate gendered social structure portrayed therein. As a product of male-dominated society, language in this respect relegates women to the background and renders them of less worth and value in comparison to men. Thus, it is said that the portrayed of women leave them at disadvantage to adequately contribute their part to the progress of society.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher has divided popular Pakhtu *tappas* into three categories based on theme and content with regard to gender. Initially, those samples are analyzed where men are focused with reference to their roles in society. Secondly, those *tappas* are analyzed where women's roles, identities and ideal type are referred to in the light of *Pakhtunwali*. Lastly, the focus is analysis of comparative presentation of masculine and feminine models form the corpus of *tappas*. In this connection, those *tappas* are selected that present a comparison between masculinity and femininity in the cultural fabric. Such comparison relate to areas like decision-making process, *purdah*, and honour.

### Masculine Models

The text of *tappas* identifies and associates masculinity with power and energy. It idealizes men for their honour, bravery and courage. Such qualities are described as men's legacy by associating them with prominent historical figures from Pakhtun society like Ahmad Shah Abdali (Enevoldsen, 2004: 34). They are idealized as never yielding and willing to embrace death as: If you return alive from Maiwand, I Pray, that God may keep you alive to taste disgrace (Enevoldsen, 2004: 34, Shaheen, 1984: 541, Shaheen, 1988-9: 53). The entire concept projected in tappa like that of Pakhtunwali is manhood (saritob) and honour (Ahmed, 1980: 6). Men are modelled as iron-like (Shaheen, 1984: 321) and emotionless in the face of challenges. Further, their portrayal is mainly with regard to their masculine characteristics and not by their mere biology. This is best illustrated in a tappa as: Saray pa num na saray kege (A man is not called a man because of his name) Saray haga day che ye kaar da saro wena (A man is he who behaves like men) (Katozai, 2005: 323). Thus, tappas project gender identities bumping up men and defining them for their social presence as indispensible to the societal structure and stability. They are exalted for their masculine traits and attributes performing acts of heroism, bravery, showing initiative and agency.

#### **Feminine Models**

On careful analysis of Pakhtu tappas, life for woman is a gloomy affair. A female repeatedly complains about her fate marked with loneliness, and exclusion (Enevoldsen, 2004: 58). Having said this, she finds no charm in life full of sorrows and miseries. She is often heard singing: The world is life's deserted bazaar, For sale is nothing but sorrow from start to finish (Ibid: 60). Similarly, married woman is also modelled as deprived and faced with the indifference of her in-laws. Thereupon, she longs for the comparatively good old days at her father's home (Tair & Edwards, 2006: 32). *tappas* also portray woman as weak and dependent on her male heirs. She considers men to be her saviours and defenders. She takes heart from the fact that she is not brother less and may often remind it to the one who attempts to dishonour her. This is best illustrated in a tappa, where she addresses her lover (husband) and sings: Brother less I am certainly not, If you won't defend my honor, then my brother will (Enevoldsen, 2004: 40).

Pakhtu tappas focus more on female appearance and behaviour than her characteristic qualities. Mostly, her looks are described and she is portrayed in a manner best suited to the concept of ideal womanhood in Pakhtun social setup. A famous tappa portrays a virgin like: Her dress is black, her veil is black, she wears black shawl over her head, she looks good (Shaheen, 1984: 169). As far as her behaviour is concerned, she is modelled as loyal in her conduct (Shaheen, 1988-9: 40), introvert in the expression of her sorrows and obedient in the acceptance of her life's decision by her men. The same is displayed in *tappas* where a girl addresses her fiancé and informs him that she shall never be fickle to the decision of her parents with regard to her marriage (Tair, 1980: 74). She may even go to the extent of sacrificing her love for the sake of her parents (Shaheen, 1984: 405). In the same way, woman is modelled as reserved in the expression of her feelings i.e. sorrows (Habibi, 1980: 1). The same is also noted by Huma Iqbal Khan (2008: 104) with reference to Pakhtun women who are expected not to make public their sorrows. The same is reinforced in a *tappa* where a woman sings: Sta na pa gham ke kama na yam / Kam asla na yam chi ba kali khabrawomana (I am no less in grief than you / But I am not ill-bred to let it be known to the village) (Shaheen, 1984: 461). It reveals that women survive at the mercy of men. With a view to ensure stability of family setup, she is culturally expected to follow men's decisions particularly mate selection. At the same time, she is also expected to keep her dissatisfaction to herself and not to make it known to others. Further, she is idealized in following the culturally prescribed feminine dress pattern and behaviour marked by her subjugation to the will of male family members.

# Comparative Presentation of Masculine and Feminine Models

In tappas, men are described as warriors and fighters while women are portrayed as secondary and lacking in strength to perform such feats. Men must decide the course of events while women are described in their role of only to support and encourage them (Habibi, 1980: 3). Female role in such situations can only be to the extent of menial jobs (Tair, 1980: 41, Shaheen, 1984: 81) as portrayed in a tappa: Take me with you when you go to war, I shall collect your empty shells for you, my darling (Enevoldsen, 2004: 42). When at homes, feminine role is to incite, encourage and enforce men into action (Roheela, 1988: 50). They may do so by praising them on the one hand while on the other they may present their own selves as alternative for their cowardice. To note, men always think and feel superior and would never allow women to assume their roles. In this way, the gendered social pattern is upheld and carried forward. A famous tappa says: If the young could not defend you, O my motherland, your maidens will defend you against your enemy (Abid, 339, Roheela, 1988: 14, Shaheen, 1984: 549, Enevoldsen, 2004: 36).

In the light of the above instances, tappas describe ideal manhood (Enevoldsen, 2004: viii) and associate virtues like honour and bravery with men. The honour, pride, status and social standing of women rest in masculine deeds. As women have no or less public role to play, they look to the amount of variety in their men's deeds and benefit from them to boost their ranking in the social world guided by the principles of code of Pakhtunwali. Among Pakhtuns, it is common to see people praised or condemned publically on the principles of the code (Spain, 1963: 68). It is therefore, frequent to find women rejoicing, praising and drumming courage in their male heirs in Pakhtu tappas (Enevoldsen 2004: 42, 43, 48, Katozai, 2005: 323, Shaheen, 1984: 72, 114, Habibi, 1980: 3). One of the famous tappas reflects the said sense of pride of a beloved when she says: Janaan pa jang ke tora okra, ma ta hamzolay pa tandi salaam kawena (My love proved his mettle in battle; my friends salute me with their hands on their foreheads (Shaheen, 1984: 183). Conversely, she is also aware that the least cowardice or unmanliness on his part may prove fatal for her reputation and therefore she warns him and prays that he may die instead (Abid, 2008: 338, Shaheen, 1984: 193). She conveys her apprehension in tappa: O' my beloved! Don't run away from the battlefield, otherwise I will get the blame from my companions (Roheela, 1988: 51).

Likewise, Pakhtu *tappas* identify bravery and courage as masculine. This acknowledgement is beyond gender and is adhered to by men and women alike. In other words, both the sexes look for the mentioned personality traits in men only and even mothers can be heard praying: *I pray to you God! Never bestow me with a son; who is bereft of manliness, even if I die in the hope of having one* (Abid, 2008: 338). However, no such longing on the part of mothers can be found with regard to daughters, which reinforce the same argument. Further, the world, as referred to earlier, described in *tappas* is predominantly masculine. Men seem to be central to the game of life with the rest of the world's objects as tools for their pleasure. They seek pleasure in whatever they do and wish for. They are often heard saying: *Two things give me pleasure in this world; the fair lips of my love and the sound of my old gun* (Enevoldsen, 2004: 62).

Women are also aware of their roles in this context. They may make provision to entertain their men but on the express condition of display of prowess on the latter's part (Katozai, 2005: 445, Widmark, 2010: 21, Abid, 2008: 337). Women also realize that in order to concentrate on iob at hand, men must be focused and free of worries particularly domestic. Therefore, they shall try to impress upon husbands that: The rope is yours and the neck is mine; if you sell me in the bazaar. I shall go with you (Enevoldsen, 2004: 44, Shaheen, 1984: 304). As far as physical appearance is concerned, here too, prospects of prosperity and social acceptance are limited for women in comparison to men. The former need to be attractive and beautiful otherwise they shall become butt of ridicule: Halak chi toor we kha khkaregi; Genai chi toora we bangri de kharsawena (A young man when black looks good; a young girl if black is only good to sell bangles (Shaheen, 1984: 637). With regard to failure in love, a disgruntled lover may leave for somewhere else in search of happiness or distraction but the bereft beloved has to remain at home, weeping and wailing her fate without complaint or making her feelings public (Shaheen, 1984: 461, 638, Habibi, 1980: 1).

Thus, the comparative presentation of masculine and feminine models is marked by superiority of men both in rank and status while women are underrepresented and culturally identified as subservient and secondary to men. In this context, the ingredients of language i.e. words are culturally manoeuvred in an attempt to form gender identities in the context of the culture. The sorrows and joys of women both domestically and publically are tied to the performance, initiative and activity of men.

# Gender Segregation and Gendered Power Structure in *Tappas*

Pakhtu tappas aim at constructing a definite social world where roles and expectations are segregated on the basis of gender. A sketch can be drawn from the content of these tappas which can broadly identify how masculinity and femininity is conceived in Pakhtun society. Members of the society are expected to stick to their own sphere of activity and discouraged to imitate the opposite sex (Tair & Edwards, 2006: 227, 293, Tair, 1980: 62, Tair, 1982: 63, Shaheen, 1988-9: 56). Similarly, the language is in major way, strictly polar with words and labels specified for the two genders. The mere pronouncement of such words may point to the gender they specify. Further, it is unusual to address one sex by the words culturally identified for the other. Tappas project a society where men dominate the power structure in decision-making, economic management, demarcation of friends and foes along with determination

of familial ties and relation with other families with mostly secondary and rarely supportive role reserved for women. The library data also reveals that masculine actions and decisions shape events both inside and outside home while women mostly stay away from such situations or remain passive.

Pakhtu tappas describe women predominantly in the confines of homes (Shaheen, 1988-9: 56) while men mostly remain outside. Women mostly remain dependent on men for their life accessories. Similarly, the social structure does not encourage women to go shopping for themselves and are often heard asking men for their needs that may include clothes, bangles etc (Enevoldsen, 2004: 48, Shaheen, 1984: 276). Such dependency is mostly because of the observance of *purdah* and privacy, which restrict women from going into public places like markets, offices, funfairs. Ideally, Pakhtun women are expected to observe purdah (Shaheen, 1984: 169) while men are expected to guard their women and to remain vigilant to ensure that the social norm of privacy, which is one of the most important pillars of Pakhtunwali, is strictly adhered to by them.

Having said this, privacy or *purdah* is observed to be a stumbling block for lovers in Pakhtun society. *Tappas* frequently refer to the sighs of lovers finding it difficult to meet. The lover may complain: *O girl! May your old* father die; he sleeps during day time and guards you during night (Shaheen, 1988-9: 67). The beloved remains confined to her home and is found anxious to avail any chance of meeting her lover. She may, at once, invite her lover when she finds an opportunity: *It is time* for you to come to my home; my mother is away, I am all alone at home (Shaheen, 1984: 518).

As far as gendered power structure is concerned, here too, women are less significant and less powerful in various spheres particularly decision-making process. Women are observed to be submissive and dependent on men (Tair, 1980: 41, Shaheen, 1984: 81, 193, 304). It is this dependence that leads them to say: *The rope is yours and the neck is mine; if you sell me in the bazaar, I shall go with you* (Enevoldsen, 2004: 44). This dependence owes its existence to the norm of veiling on the one hand and their assumed weakness and lack of strength on the other. These in turn, render men more powerful and authoritative. To further clarify the point, women depend on them for defence of their honour and respect (Enevoldsen, 2004: 40, Tair, 1980: 76) along with food, shelter and clothing.

In the backdrop, women are observed to be obedient, submissive and lacking in initiative, while men emerge all the more powerful to decide their fate. In this regard, various *tappas* refer to the miseries of women and their virtual absence at crucial situations and decisions. They are expected to passively accept and follow the wishes and decisions of men (Shaheen, 1984: 461). This may sound more relevant with reference to arranged marriages or misalliances, where the opinions of women mostly go unheard (Tair, 1980: 73, Shaheen, 1984: 306, 478). If a Pakhtun woman fails in

her love, she submits to her fate with honour and according to Pakhtun code, her parents decides her marriage without asking for her choice. She accepts it without complaint (Shaheen, 1988-9: 60). However, annoyance with such helplessness may find its expression in tappa (Widmark, 2010: 6) as: Da Pakhtano Pakhtu ta qora; Chi lor au khor laka sarway bea kawena (Look at the Pakhtu of Pakhtuns; like cattle they decide the fate of sisters and daughters (Shaheen, 1984: 299). Similarly, she cannot say yes to her lover. Pakhtun woman knows well that her fate is to be decided by her father or brothers and that she shall marry at their choice. Further, once she enters the house of her husband, all her life's decisions are transferred from her parents to her in-laws particularly her husband who has the final say in domestic affairs (Tair, 1980: 74-81).

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, tappas speak for gender segregated identity as enunciated in Pakhtunwali. This is achieved mainly by restricting and confining women to domestic sphere mainly by the social norm of *purdah* for them. Further, the power structure is also gendered with virtually negligible public space allocated for women. The data collected reveals that the cultural monument of tappas is built from a meaningful collection of words which vehicle gender segregation and defines power structure. In the context of culture, words and linguistic concepts like purdah (veil or seclusion); Pakhtu and Pakhtunwali (code of honour); asil au kamasal (well-bred and ill-bred); kor (home); saray (man); and khaza (woman) play significant role in the preservation and reinforcement of gender identity formation. Tappas describe various roles and events and also divide and segregate them on clearly defined gender lines. Men are socialized to be brave and bold while women are taught to support and assist them. Authority and decisionmaking power must rest with men while women must improvise to find ways and means to add to the comfort of their men at homes.

The language of *tappas* upholds traditional gender based division of society with men at the helm of the affairs. They describe women with reference mainly to their looks and physical appearance in comparison to men's weapons and guns. Stamped with the image of the soul of its people, *tappas* are linked to a worldview and way of life guiding the affairs of life over generations. They contain lessons about faith, honour, human nature, friends, enemies and power structure along with good and bad deeds characteristic of Pakhtun nation.

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