Sorrow and Joy among Muslim Women

The Pukhtuns are numerically and politically one of the most significant ethnolinguistic groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This important study of Pukhtun society concentrates on the lives, thoughts and *gham-khâdi* (funeral-wedding) ceremonies of the women, especially of the elite, wealthy and educated women (*Bibiane*) who have largely been overlooked in previous studies. Contesting their conventional representation as idle, it illustrates their commitment to various forms of work within familial and social contexts. It challenges the commonly assumed models of contemporary Pakistan society, which make a simplistic divide between rural and urban, Punjab and non-Punjab, and feudal and non-feudal spaces and peoples. It also contributes to broader debates about the nature and expression of elite cultures and issues of sociality, funerals and marriage, custom and religion, space and gender, morality and reason, and social role and personhood within the contexts of Islam in the Middle East and South Asia.

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A series list is shown at the back of the book
Sorrow and Joy among Muslim Women
The Pukhtuns of Northern Pakistan

AMINEH AHMED
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Bismillah ar Rahman ar Rahim. In the Muslim world, everything ideally begins like this, the beginning of a journey, a birth, a marriage, the bathing of the dead, and the various such gham-khādi events of life, including life itself.

This book is based on my PhD dissertation at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge titled: “The World is Established Through the Work of Existence”: The Performance of Gham-khādi among Pukhtun Bibiane in Northern Pakistan. It seems appropriate that this ethnographic research on Pukhtun women, for a PhD, was conducted at Cambridge University. It was at this very university where Professor Fredrick Barth, some fifty years ago, shaped the first ethnographic image of the Pukhtun people in social anthropology in his own PhD thesis on the Swat Pathans (1958). His ethnography published as Political Leadership Among Swat Pathans (1959) became a classic in anthropology – thus any subsequent study on the Pukhtuns refers to his work. But it is precisely because of this reason that his important ethnography has been challenged and revisited by many distinguished anthropologists such as Professor Akbar Ahmed and Dr Charles Lindholm, and it continues to be debated. I am grateful to my predecessors for their rich ethnographic contributions on their respective areas to the study of the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan.

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Note

In accordance with anthropological convention I have used pseudonyms in the text. For any shortcomings that may remain I take sole responsibility.
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In this book, I have translated Pukhto words and phrases according to Pukhtun Bibiane’s own pronunciation and understanding and as I understood them. Pukhto (Pashto or Afghani) is one of the East Iranian group of languages; it has several dialects, and is spoken by seventeen million people across north-eastern Afghanistan and North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan (although the national language of Afghanistan, Pukhto has no official status in Pakistan). Written in a variant of the Persian script (itself a variant of the Arabic script) since the late sixteenth century, Pukhto has a number of alphabets modified for sounds specific to it. Pukhto distinguishes two grammatical genders as well as singular and plural with a strict word order being: subject–object–verb. Although primarily borrowing from Persian and Arabic, a number of words in contemporary Pakistani Pukhto are derived from Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, as well as a few from English (e.g. ‘formality’, ‘raydoo’ from radio and ‘TW’ from TV). The adjectives ‘Swat’ or ‘Swati’ and ‘Mardan’ or ‘Mardani’ follow the usage in local English. I have tried to capture this linguistic diversity in people’s everyday conversations throughout this book.
GLOSSARY

abay/abaygane  (sing./pl.) mother, wet-nurse (also dai and aday).
abaya  Arab-style stitched garment covering a woman’s entire body.
adab  respect; comportment; bodily habitus; rules of conduct; civility.
adam  Adam: human.
Akhtar  Muslim festival (Urdu: Eid). There are three Eid festivals: Eid-ul-Fitr, celebrating the end of fasting during the month of Ramadan; Eid-Milad-un-Nabi, the birth anniversary of the Prophet (SAW); and Eid-ul-Azha, commemoration of Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail. Pukhtuns, in general, mainly celebrate the first lakotay (small) Akhtar and last loi (big) Akhtar; and rarely celebrate Eid-Milad-un-Nabi. Eid celebrations often last three days.
aql  social reason, intelligence and knowledge manifested in actions.
bāng  call for prayer performed by a mullah (Urdu: azān).
bad/badi/badda  bad/hostility/unpleasant woman.
badal  (1) revenge – a primary principle of Pukhtunwali; (2) exchange – marriage.
badmash/badmashee  a villainous man/woman.
Badshah/Badshahyān  (sing./pl.) king; title of male descendants of Badshah Sahib, the ruler of Swat.
bar Swat  upper Swat (e.g. Sher Palam, Jura etc.) (kooz Swat is lower Swat or Saidu).
Bareeze  Pakistani designed, machine-embroidered, unstitched three-piece suits sold in Bareeze shops across Pakistan; widely worn by wealthy Pakistani women.
bazar/bazarroona  shop/s; non-segregated public space.
be-aql  a person displaying a lack of knowledge, social reason or wisdom.
be-gerat  a person without gherat, courage and honour.
Begum  a title of rank and respect for a noblewoman: such as Madam.
Bibi/Bibiane  (sing./pl.) a respect title for a woman from a wealthy family.
chalāk  clever in a cunning way.
crore  100 lakhs: Rs.10,000,000.
daftar/daftari  Pukhtun land which enables the Khan to participate in the council of elders and make major and significant socio-political decisions.
daī/daīgāne  (sing./pl.) wet-nurse/s.
Glossary

dalbar  from Persian, originally: darbar (court); the inner, often women’s, quarters.
dars  Islamic segregated lectures where the Quran and Hadith are translated.
darzi/darzian  tailor/s.
Deoband  An Islamic movement and academy founded in 1867 in the north Indian town of Deoband which played a reformist role at the time of the British colonial rule in the subcontinent by calling on Muslims to commit themselves to religious and moral perfection and to embody Islam.
dera  a type of hujra; a men’s house in Swat.
dimagh  the mind; the intellect.
dodai  (1) cooked food/meal/feast; (2) flat rounded bread baked in a tanoor (oven).
dolai  palanquin carrying brides on the ‘Rukhsatee’ (departure to her husband’s house).
dozakh  hell.
dum/dummān  professional dancer/s, performers, musicians and actors; locally of very low status and reputation: prostitutes.
ezat  reputation (public persona); honour and family pride.
faqir  in Pukhto: ‘pakir’; landless, beggar or mendicant.
fikkar  thought; pondering.
fikkroona  (pl. of fikkar) problems; worries.
geenay  young and often unmarried girl; geenakai – girls.
gham  (1) specific meaning: death and mourning; (2) general meaning: sorrow, difficulties, sadness, loss, worry, anxiety.
gham-khādi  (1) life-cycle gatherings: of which the most significant or major gham-khādi are, in order of priority: funerals and then weddings; minor gham-khādi events are births, illnesses, birthdays etc.; keeping up relations; (2) sadness–happiness.
ghara/ghare  (sing./pl.) (1) dirge; (2) literally, throat.
gharib/gharibi  poor/poverty.
gup  (1) nonsense, gossip, idle talk; (2) friendly conversation.
Hadith  (pl. Ahadith) the sayings and traditions of the Prophet (SAW).
haj  pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca): one of the five pillars of Islam.
hajja  celebratory ceremonies of a newborn baby (e.g. shaving of hair).
hijab  headscarf worn by Muslim women to cover the hair.
hujra/hujre  (sing./pl.) men’s house; guesthouse.
janaza  funeral.
janimaz  prayer mat.
jannati  a person who is thought to deserve jannat (paradise).
jazbah  the force of uncontrolled emotions.
jihad  primarily spiritual struggle.
jirga  council of Pukhtun elders.
kacha  temporary, or makeshift; raw.
kafir  unbeliever; infidel.
kāl  celebrating ceremony of the completion of a year after death.
Glossary

kamaq/kamaqla/kamaqle person/boy/girl who lacks social understanding or wisdom: ‘foolish’.

kār work.

kasabgara maid who does gham-khādi work for a Bibi.

kashar/kasharān (sing./pl.) a person younger in age.

katke stool.

khār city.

kha-bade kha – good = khādi; bade – bad = gham.

khādi includes ceremonies of: wada (weddings), sunnat (circumcisions), paidaish (births), koydan (engagement); more general meaning: celebrations, happiness, joy.

kha-ikhlaqa a woman of good virtues and morals.

khairat charity or meal given to relatives, the needy and poor. In gham-khādi and other religious ceremonies it often takes the form of a meal or ‘feast’ which is consumed by wealthy guests and the community.

Khan/Khanān (sing./pl.) a title for a landlord. Pakistanis in general address Pukhto-speaking men (particularly merchants), regardless of class, as ‘khan’. Here the term ‘Khan’ more specifically refers to landlords.

khāpa to be sad; khapān (pl.) sadness.

khattam (to finish) recitation of the entire Quran.

khaza woman/wife.

khidmatgar/ān, khidmatgare/Naukar/Naukara helper/s, male servant/female servant.

khor sister.

khpal a complex term indicating a relative or close friend. Khpalwali – keeping up relations as relatives are expected to do.

khwasīhāli happiness.

kille village/town (often kor-kille ‘home-village’ implies to do gham-khādi).

kille-kor village house characterised by courtyards, large spaces and several rooms.

kor/koroona house/s.

lakh 100,000 Pakistani rupees: Rs.100,000.

lās niwa holding up the hands in prayer (Urdu: dua) for the deceased; condolence.

lewane/lewanai mad man/woman; socially inadequate people.

mairazane sharing the same father but born from different mothers.

mashar/mashari/mashartia senior/seniority, older person with authority; masharān elders.

mashara/masharāne older female/s.

mazhab/mazhabi religion/religious.

meeshtha the bond that develops as a result of living together.

melmastia hospitality – a major feature of Pukhtun identity or Pukhtunwali: (1) offering one’s food, home and gifts; and (2) on a symbolic level, one’s time and self.
Glossary

mina love, or affection.
moonz prayers.
mullah/mullahyan (sing./pl.) religious teacher, often based in a madrassa (religious school).
naghare coal hearth.
Nakreeza/Nakreeze (1) the first of the three days of a wedding (Urdu: Mehendi); (2) nakreeza is henna which is applied to the bride’s palms on the Nakreeza event.
na-mahram marriageable persons, i.e. not of the men forbidden by propinquity. Nawab/Nawabân (sing./pl.) a Khan of a very large area with considerable power, authority, prominence and above all land. Bestowed by the British, the prestige of the title, locally, is inheritable by the male descendants of a Nawab: e.g. nawab, nawabzada (son of Nawab), sahibzada (grandson of a nawab).
nazar (1) insight; vision; (2) evil eye. nazara struck by the ill-effects of nazar. Nazar-mät – breaking the nazar by reciting Quranic verses or by burning the leaves nazar-para.
nearat intentions.
okhyâr/okhyara (masculine/feminine) clever, perspicacious or having a ready insight into and understanding of things.
ombaraki congratulations; congratulatory visit in khâdi marking the beginning of a stage in the life-cycle, e.g. following births and marriages.
pabandi restricted/restrictions.
parathe local type of bread cooked in plentiful oil.
pareshani anxiety.
partoog-kameez-loopata (Urdu: shalwar-kameez-dupatta) Pakistani national dress consisting of tunic-like shirt typically with full-length sleeves, baggy trousers and matching veil.
peeshare criticising a person to his face; compare zghaibat.
peghar insulting public taunt when one falls short in acts of Pukhto. This is often an effective way of exercising social control and causes great anxiety among Pukhtuns.
pookha before, previously, in the old days.
pradee outsiders, strangers, opposite of khpal.
Pukhtana the Pukhtun collective self-reference in the Pukhto language.
Pukhtanna a Pukhtun woman.
Pukhto (1) the language of Pukhtun people belonging to Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province; (2) Pukhto is also the synonym of Pukhtunwali, the customary practices of Pukhtun people such as spontaneous hospitality (melmastia).
Pukhtun (1) a person originally from the North-West Frontier Province in Pakistan or from Afghanistan; (2) who speaks and does Pukhto; (3) a landlord (a Khan), as opposed to a barber (nai), etc.: by virtue of being a landlord a ‘Pukhtun’ is of the highest social status in the wider Pukhtun hierarchy.
Pukhtunwali previously defined as a ‘code’; or customary practices of Pukhtuns.
Glossary

purdah  (1) curtain; (2) veil of two distinctive types, not limited to gender assignations: (a) ‘literal purdah’, this often applies mainly (but not only) to women taking such forms as covering the body, head and face, and (b) ‘metaphoric purdah’, this is purdah of the heart, mind, eyes, ears and soul applying to both men and women.

qismat  fate as decreed by Allah.

quom  tribe/nation.

Ramadan  Muslim month of fasting from dawn to sunset.

rewâj  customary practices.

rishtinee  direct confrontation. This is seen as being equal to open conflict.

rogh-ranzoor  rogh – well (e.g. birth, new house); ranzoor – ill (e.g. accidents, miscarriages)

rogha  fixed, made up; healed. Opposite: wrana – fighting; broken, ruined.

roje  Muslim month of Ramadan: fasting.

rozgâr  employment.

sakhta  hard, strong; sakhte – hardships, difficulties.

salâm  salutations or greetings (peace).

Salwekhtamma  a specific event forty days after burial; part of burial rites.

saritob  display of masculinity and manhood.

sartor/sartora  (1) literally, blackhead; (2) bareheaded.

sath  (1) reverence, politeness; (2) invitation.

sattar  veiling/purdah; concealing, covering.

sawâb  religious merit.

sazar  (Urdu: chador) a large unstitched piece of cloth worn by Pukhtun women in various ways to cover the entire body, head and face and is often white in colour and embroidered. This contrasts with the Pakistani loopata (veil) – a length of cloth varying in size and typically, but not always, of lighter material.

shamiana/shamiane  (sing./pl.) brightly coloured tents which serve to enclose or segregate outdoor garden spaces in gham-khâdi.

sharam  (1) shame, embarrassment; and (2) honour, self-respect.

speen  (1) white; (2) purity; (3) to peel.

sunna  traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (after every mention of the Prophet, it is conventional to put the following: Peace Be Upon Him: Pbuh, or in Arabic: SAW).

tajdid  revival of the authentic Islamic practices based on the Quran and Hadith.

tapos-pukhtana  to ask; enquiry visit: part of gham-khâdi exchange.

tarburwali  agnostic rivalry – primary law of Pukhtunwali. Enmity with tarbur (father’s brother’s son). An alternative Pukhto word is ‘thrabgani’ (derived from the term thra meaning father’s brother).

thamma  expectation.

thor  (1) black; (2) a disgraced woman; (3) impure, or to be put off food or even a person.

tlal-ratal  ‘going and coming’, reciprocated visiting and a basis upon which gham-khâdi is built.


tleen

tleen is derived from talé which means ‘gone by’, e.g. a death anniversary celebrated after a kāl (year).

uzar

to attend or express sorrow at the time of gham (death).

wāk

(1) will, choice, authority, command, sway, control, influence; (2) power, might, force, capacity.

wada

(1) the wedding day when the Nikah is typically performed (often the second day following the Nakreeza); (2) a promise.

Wali

ruler, chief, sovereign.

Walima

the third day of the wedding (celebrating the consummation of marriage).

warwal

bride price.

weenze marae

a maid who is also a lifelong companion.

wesh

a past practice of decadal land redistribution within and between villages.

zamindar

(1) a landlord; (2) a man who works the land for a landlord or Khan.

zan/zanana

(1) woman/women; (2) women’s section of the house; (3) female, feminine, effeminate, womanly.

zeest-rozgār

(1) zeest – life, living, existence; (2) employment. Or keeping up relations by going and coming (tlal-ratlal, zee-razee), reciprocating gifts (warkra-rakra: give and take). Rozgār – employment or work (kār).

zghaibat

criticising a person behind his or her back.
Map 1  Pakistan, its provinces and neighbouring countries.
Map 2 The shaded areas correspond to Swat, Mardan and Islamabad.
Map 3  Pukhto-speaking regions are roughly indicated by the light-grey shade.