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978-0-521-86169-4 - Sorrow and Joy among Muslim Women: The Pukhtuns of Northern Pakistan

Amineh Ahmed

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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-khādi* (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.

AMINEH AHMED HOTI received her PhD from the Faculty of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge and is a Visiting Scholar at Lucy Cavendish College. She runs the Society for Dialogue and Action, which promotes understanding between people of the Abrahamic faiths, namely Jews, Christians and Muslims.

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remarkable *daigāne* need mention who left a marked impression on generations of members of Bibiane and Badshahyan: Sheereena Dai, Kharo Dai and Amrojan Babo.

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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.

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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.

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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.

bazār/bazāroona shop/s; non-segregated public space.

be-aql a person displaying a lack of knowledge, social reason or wisdom.

be-gherat 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.

dai/daigāne (sing./pl.) wet-nurse/s.

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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.

haqiqa 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.

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kamaql/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.

khapa to be sad; *khapgān* (pl.) sadness.

khattam (to finish) recitation of the entire Quran.

khaza woman/wife.

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

khōr sister.

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

khwashhāli 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.

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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/Nawabān (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-māt* – breaking the *nazar* by reciting Quranic verses or by burning the leaves *nazar-para*.

neeat intentions.

okhyār/okhyara (masculine/feminine) clever, perspicacious or having a ready insight into and understanding of things.

ombaraki congratulations; congratulatory visit in *khādi* 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*.

peghor 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.

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purdah (1) curtain; (2) veil of two distinctive types, not limited to gender assignments: (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.

rewāj customary practices.

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

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

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

roje Muslim month of Ramadan: fasting.

rozgār employment.

sakhta hard, strong; *sakhte* – hardships, difficulties.

salām 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.

sawāb 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-khādi*.

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: Pbh, 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-khādi* exchange.

tarburwali agnatic 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-ratlal 'going and coming', reciprocated visiting and a basis upon which *gham-khādi* is built.

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tleen the term *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 maraee 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.

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Map 1 Pakistan, its provinces and neighbouring countries.

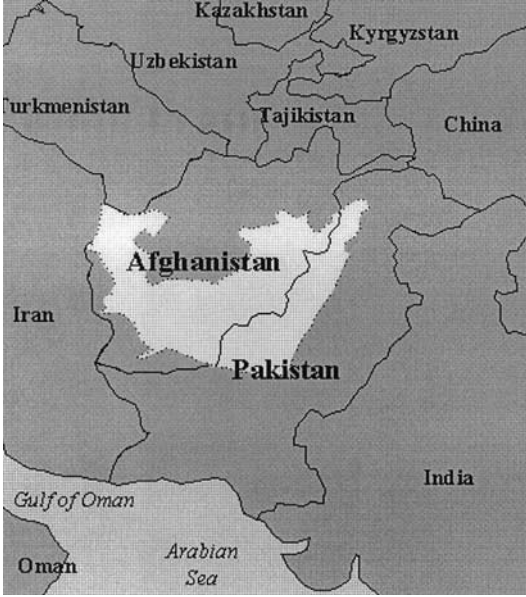
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Map 3 Pukhto-speaking regions are roughly indicated by the light-grey shade.