

Understanding Gender in Pak-Afghan Pashtun Society: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Folk Stories

Qaisar Khan

Abstract

Language serves as a main vehicle of transmitting culture over generations. It transforms our cultural values, norms and expectations into a comprehensible form which then permeates into the society. As a primary carrier, language preserves, propagates and reinforces culture. On the other hand, culture is dependent in large on language for its existence and survival. Likewise, folk wisdom embodies centuries old cultural setup that represents the true essence of that nation. One important hallmark of culture is gender role and gendered division of labor that gives it a distinctive coloring and serves as a major point of departure from other cultures. This article intends to examine gender pattern and gendered division of labor among Pashtuns residing at Pak-Afghan border in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The findings of the study are based on descriptive analysis of 45 collated Pashtun folk stories from archived (and/or) published collections through library method with considerable assistance from e-source (www.khyber.org). Primarily qualitative in nature, the analysis also employs quantitative approach to highlight the representation of gender. The study is intended to explore how gender is perceived and understood among Pashtuns as portrayed in folk stories. The article contends that the stories idealize gender segregation and give more space to men. They are ripe with incidents where heroism and power are associated with men and women are portrayed within the domestic sphere. The study concludes that the folk stories advocate masculinity and male domination in decision-making process and division of labor as advocated by Pashtun code of honor-Pashtunwali.

Keywords: *language, folk stories, gender, Pashtun, Pashtunwali*

Introduction

Folk literature or folklore has its importance for people. It represents and portrays the expectations of its people and is therefore guarded and recorded by them. Folk means people or nation and lore means knowledge or understanding (Shaheen, 1989). Its singular distinction is its popular nature but its authors or narrators remain unknown (Dawood, 1997). Commenting on its functions, Michiko Suzuki (1980) says that it ranges "widely from describing popular dreams and ideals to adding criticism and wit to the understanding of the reality, is one of the most refined vehicles with which people can identify, and, at the

same time, transmit these recognized identities to their descendants" (p. 118). Salma Shaheen (1984) observes that it helps in understanding the customs, values and traditions of a nation. She further adds that folklore called *Shifahi* or *Oulasi* or popular literature in Pashtu aims at the analysis of traditions by giving an estimate of the social system and mindset of the nation. Folklore is important as it facilitates comparison between past and present. It has made easy the analysis of mindsets and study of human nature. In addition, its study can point to the effects of evolutionary process and passage of time on a particular culture (Shaheen, 1989). In broader sense, folklore is a vehicle through which transmission of common feelings and values of society takes place giving rise to an ethnic or tribal culture (Suzuki, 1980).

As far as the corpus of Pashtu folklore is concerned, it is rich and various and is divided into two parts. The first part consists of folk poetry while the second part includes riddles, proverbs, stories and legends (Shaheen, 1984; Tair, 1987). The origin of folk literature may be difficult to ascertain (Tair, 1987) particularly in less educated society like that of Pashtuns but there is no denying the fact that only those oral traditions in literature survive which cater to the taste of their readers. It is pertinent to quote Widmark (2010) to whom "there is a close correspondence between the societal situation and the themes adapted" in Pashtu literature (p. 9). It has been representative of Pashtun nature. Therefore, instead of fearing its being forgotten or lost, it has itself protected Pashtu language and Pashtun nation from the danger of annihilation (Tair, 1987).

Folk stories form a valuable part of Pashtun folk literature and researchers have, in the recent years, painstakingly recorded them. According to Katozai (2005), these stories are told and retold by Pashtun men and women both young and old for entertainment and/or for instruction and learning. They are also quoted and repeated like proverbs to establish a point of view. Folk stories are a mixture of beliefs, customs, traditions, values, facts and fiction suiting the mindset of a society. They are transmitted from generation to generation orally with poetic embellishments- sung and celebrated by common folk and are therefore crucial to the identity and lifestyle of the nation. Pashtun culture greatly values their power to delight or to instruct having a moral in the end. Their origin is mostly in verse but they also exist in prose form (Katozai, 2005). Pashtun menfolk sit and attentively listen to these stories in *hujra* or guest-house during the long wintry nights as they reflect and reinforce their code of honor, *Pashtunwali* (Ahmad & Boase, 2003; Enevoldsen, 1987; Katozai, 2005). This code is unwritten and can be defined as the sum total of knowledge and wisdom contained in local maxims, myths, proverbs, folklore and folkways (Ahmad, 1980).

Pashtun folk stories mostly involve local events and flavors and relate to family affairs; therefore they serve as guidelines for listeners to evolve gender-based identities. It is important to point out that Pashtuns form a patriarchal society where men dominate in various aspects of life and women mostly remain supportive, submissive and subservient to them (Sufi, 2005; Tair, 1980). The same is also portrayed in the folk stories. In this article, the researcher attempts to erect a social structure out of the stories and bring it in consonance with the one existing among Pashtuns.

In the subsequent discussion, a theoretical overview of the relationship between gender and folk stories is presented and the significance of the analysis is emphasized. It is followed by the method and material used in the analysis of the stories. It is then followed by results and discussion over the texts of the stories regarding various aspects of gender under separate headings that lead to conclusion at the end.

Significance of Textual Analysis of Folk Stories

Folk stories serve as an instrument of socialization among Pashtuns as majority of them reside in rural setting and are comparatively less exposed to modern means of communication and entertainment. Further, the literacy rate among them is low rendering them at disadvantage to read and write (Shaheen, 1984; Widmark, 2010). These stories therefore play dominant role in their lives for both delight and instruction. In addition, they are frequently repeated, which allows them to form part of a person's memory and it is observed that they may be quoted like proverbs and maxims to warn, delight or instruct others. The purpose of this study is to explore the placement, roles, and identities of male and female in the stories, which are the products of long historic traditions. It also attempts to unveil the pattern of gender construction and its applicability to the society. Folk stories have been with Pashtuns for centuries and as the settings of such stories are indigenous, they serve as a way to explore the essence and growth of the nation (Hyman, 2002). Some stories are borrowed from foreign lands and nations but their content and purpose is localized to suit Pashtun culture and traditions.

Method and Material

The study is based on the quantitative and qualitative analyses of folk stories collected and recorded by scholars and researchers in written form. The analysis includes reference to the gendered titles of the stories. The characters are analyzed to highlight gender roles and gendered expectations in the society. To narrow down the rather extensive corpus of the stories and to appreciate the cultural understanding of gender, only relevant portions and scenes are selected for analysis. An attempt is also made to provide a brief overview of the content of the stories to make

them comprehensible. The analysis also includes text samples and illustrations quoted in original, wherever needed. An attempt is made to find out and establish the relationship of these stories with gender pattern and perceptions prevailing in Pashtun society. The aim is to analyze these stories to see how contextualized linguistic expressions and labelling coordinate, reinforce and perpetuate gendered cultural expectations.

The analysis is based on 45 folk stories collected through library method from archived or published (printed and online) collections. The stories were collected in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province of Pakistan in the latter half of 2013. The population of the province is predominantly Pashtuns with a huge number of Afghan refugees who have permanently settled after migrating during Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1980s. Majority of them also share the same language and culture with the people of KPK. As a whole, Pashtuns spread over KPK, Baluchistan and the bordering Afghanistan separated by Durand Line. Their lives are regulated by the age-old ethical code of honor called Pashtunwali (Rahman, 1995).

Results and Discussion

Gender Representation in Folk Stories

Analysis of Titles of Folk Stories

This analysis attempts to study the nature of title of each folk story in relation to gender. The researcher has divided the titles into four different groups. They include (i) masculine titles (ii) feminine titles (iii) mixed titles which contain both masculine and feminine attributes and (iv) others which are neither masculine nor feminine but refer to animals or abstract ideas etc. However, it is important to point out that in this category too, some titles may be gendered but they have not been included in the analysis (for details see annexure).

The analysis of the titles reveal that out of the 45 folk stories, 23 (51%) have masculine titles while the number of feminine titles is only 04 (9%). In comparison, the number of mixed titles is 11 (24%) while there are 07 (16%) titles included in the category of others.

It is interesting to note that out of mixed titles only *Gul and Sanobar* has a sequence where female precedes male label. The rest of the mixed titles i.e. 91% have male component followed by female name. This also alludes to the social standing and position of the two genders where man dominates female when they come together. Thus, the titles of folk stories are dominated by masculine nomenclature.

Analysis of Characterization in Folk Stories

In this part of the analysis the characters of the stories are investigated to find out gender representation. Minor characters are

excluded from the analysis however. The main characters are categorized into (i) male (ii) female and (iii) others (predominantly animal ones). Upon careful analysis, it is revealed that there are a total of 237 characters that are mainly active in the stories. Among them, there are 150 (63%) male characters while the number of female characters is only 71 (30%). Similarly, characters related to animal kingdom or abstract ideas are 16 (7%). It is observed that one of the main reasons of the increased number of male characters is the nature of plots. Most of the stories relate to events and incidents outside home which, in Pashtun society, fall in men's domain (Widmark, 2010). Agriculture, crafts and defense of the country are some of men's duties while Pashtun women remain confined to management of their homes as their entire universe (Habibi, 1980) and it is domestic concerns that most of the female characters find place in the stories. However, women do appear outside homes but such instances are rare in the stories as according to a famous Pashtu proverb 'for a woman either the home or the grave' (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 227).

Gender Bias and Disparity in Modelling in Folk Stories

The analysis reveals that majority of the stories support gender bias and disparity in modelling. The world of folk stories is predominantly masculine. Man is all free and allowed to perform his feats without limitations while feminine world is delimited to the four walls of her home. There too, she is expected to serve her male members of family by cooking and washing. Rarely, we see a woman leaving her home for an outside task. The same mindset also prevails in Pashtun society and it has been deplored at national level by prominent leaders including the father of the nation Muhammad Ali Jinnah who had said: 'it is a crime against humanity that our women are shut-up within four walls of houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for deplorable conditions in which our women have to live' (Mumtaz, 1987, p. 7). In few instances, the stories do depict women in public spheres but they relate to unusual circumstances where the honor of her family is at stake. Pashtuns prefer to educate women in the art of home-making and discouraged them to imitate men (Tair, 1980).

The analyses of the events of folk stories reveal that mostly male characters dominate the plot while female characters are either absent or found passive. This creates an impression that certain actions, events or adventures are only male-specific and the other sex has nothing to do with it. The argument is further strengthened when we witness women admitting certain tasks to be becoming of men only as did the princess in *Musa Khan Deo* when she says that 'I was a woman, but I did the work of a man' (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 110). The use of generic *he* in the story *Luck and Intelligence* employed for the two characters *Luck* and

Intelligence creates an impression that luck and intelligence are men's possessions or that women have nothing to gain from either of the two. Further, a man may be lucky or intelligent or both and may be rewarded with anything including a beautiful princess. *The Greedy King* is a story without female characters. It relates to wealth and power, ambition and adventurism and desire for more. The absence of female characters in such situations signifies their domesticity and limited domain (Widmark, 2010).

In the same way, the tale of *The Lion and the Jungle* relates to events and happenings occurring outside home. Here, a brave man helps a wounded lion and gets his reward in arranging for the marriages of his three young daughters who do nothing to support themselves or their father. No reference is made to the amount of worries they share with their father. *The Great Saint* and *The Saint of Baghdad* relate to the outside world and have therefore no female characters in them. Both stories are about sainthood and miracles where men are modelled as teachers and disciples. In Pashtun social setup, women are virtually non-existent in such fields. There are shrines of famous saints on Pashtun soil but almost all of them were men. Women are observed to visit them, however. The setting of *The Beggar, the Hindu & the Treasure* is market place and has therefore no reference to female characters.

As far as particular actions and tasks are concerned, it is observed that female characters never appear in certain positions. There is no story where there is a king along with a powerful queen. In no case, the king feels the need of consulting his queen. The reading of the stories indicates that kings employ male viziers or ministers to serve them. The right to inherit the throne of a king is the sole right of sons. In stories where a king has no son, he may marry more than once, may pray for one irrespective of the fact whether he has any daughter or not. The same trend is also pointed out by K. Daniels (1985) with regard to history books. He finds that they project women as "nonentities either ignored at all or their mentioning is synonymous to their being dependent or frivolous" (p. 27). Likewise, Doyle & Paludi (1991) also note that "for too long, women have existed as the 'other' in a second-class position" that may still be very much true for Pashtun society (p. 218).

To sum up the discussion, the folk stories assign certain tasks and positions to men only at the cost of excluding women. Such situations involve strength, power and nerves and are presented as natural to men only. If ever a woman is found involved, she is either made an exception to women folk or is termed as man-like. In the next part of this analysis, a comparison of men and women is given when they involve in the action of a story simultaneously.

Folk stories where both men and women occupy the stage can be marked for their distinct roles. They exist side by side but a line can be drawn and they can be identified and thus differentiated from each other. Men are modelled at the helm of affairs while women mostly justify their existence by supporting and assisting men in the performance of their tasks and duties. Both remain aware of their domains and do not trespass each other's turf. Masculine tasks portrayed are tough requiring strength and power. Consequently, women mostly remain at home while men do outside jobs. Beside some very few instances of women participating in public life, they mostly bring dishonor to their families when they go outside as in *The Two Unfaithful Wives*, *The Dancing Dolls* and *Gul and Sanobar*.

In *Sweeter than Salt*, male characters are projected as powerful and controller in comparison to female ones. Men are decision-makers while women are patient and submissive. When the king feels offended by his daughter's answer that she likes him more than salt, he at once throws her out of the palace. She submits to the decision without argument that idealizes submissiveness in her. Later on, when she is in the forest residing in the house of the young man, she supports him and assists him to win his heart. The whole story is about the commanding nature of men over women. Similarly, *The Gardener's Daughter* is a story about the adventurous nature of men. Women do abound the story but they mostly remain dependent and passive unless desired otherwise by their men. And if the situation arises where men are in trouble, women may become adventurous, bold and daring for the sake of their men. But this too can be accomplished provided they disguise themselves as men. In the story, the prince has forty wives and aspires for more. It implies that once impressed by her beauty, a man may own a woman and marry her and can keep her like any other commodity. Beauty as the major qualification of woman is also emphasized in *Sass Begum* where she can only tempt the prince through her beauty and the rest of the job shall be done by him.

In the same way, *The Sin of Pride* has a character called Gulzamani who has five wives. When Zubaydah, one of his wives, gives birth to a stillborn son, she is thrown out of home. Woman here is projected as a reproductive machine. She has to meet the expectations of her husband otherwise she has no right to live with him and has to quit. She is dependent on her husband but not vice versa. This is clear from the fact that when in the end, Gulzamani is in miserable situation begging for pardon, she does not question him for his previous conduct and at once accepts him again. The wife of the Hindu swindler is no less obedient to obey her husband in *The Swindlers*. When in trouble, she does not leave him and supports him when she is told that "tonight I shall pretend to be

dead, and you must spend the whole night weeping.” She performs this job skilfully and starts “screaming and tearing her hair: ‘O my husband is dead!’” (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 292). However, if a woman is found disobedient, she may get herself into trouble and the husband may react forcefully as does the mullah in *The Shepherd* by saying that “I lead the congregation in prayer and yet my wife has the audacity to insult and abuse me. I shall throw her out of my house to teach her a lesson” (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 302). A husband can resort to beating if a wife fails to honor his words as a farmer in *Nasruddin, the Holy Man* beats his wife when she fails to protect the bullocks that are stolen during his absence. Earlier, she is projected as weak and helpless after the theft and keeps wailing in anticipation of her husband’s reaction. The scene of beating hints at the traditional approach prevalent among Pashtuns to resort to physical assault when they find their wives in the wrong. This may be viewed as a common practice and a routine affair and in extreme cases may prove disastrous for the future of the family. In contrast, no such practice can be resorted to if ever a man goes wrong.

Likewise, in *The Clever Princess*, the wife of vizier is more intelligent than her husband but she remains at home and obeys his commands. She helps him and rescues him from his trouble but he never bothers about her while accepting the marriage proposal of Gul Deen’s daughter. Consequently, she has to leave home in frustration. This refers to the amount of liberty and rights available to her in comparison to her husband. Earlier, when the vizier tries to engage Gul Deen’s daughter, she says that “I shall acquire a bad reputation. People will say, ‘She is a young girl and has no shame; she has been seen more than once talking with a stranger’” (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 64). This shows the general social pattern of the society where women are not supposed to mix with men particularly strangers. In the same way, a man has the liberty but if a woman engages with a stranger, she may be punished to the extent of death. As discussed, the social space for women is limited and therefore when the vizier asks for solution to his problem, Gul Deen’s daughter says that “I shall tell you the answer on one condition, namely that you marry me” (Ibid, p. 64). She is therefore willing to sell her intelligence for marriage. This implies that the sole obsession of the girl is her marriage and this means everything to her. The same is endorsed by the study conducted by Lowenthal, Thurnher & Chiriboga (1975) and her associates which state that the main concern of girls centers “around marriage and family life” (p. 16).

In similar fashion, in *Khurram Deo* a princess agrees to marry Deo for finding her lost nose-ring and in the rest of the story, her discussion is with reference to her giving birth to a son named Khurram Deo. Unlike her

husband and son, she is portrayed as weak and fragile. She cannot move the boulder blocking entrance to their home (cave) but her young son does it, signifying masculine strength and energy. In another instance of woman's obsession with marriage, a widow in *The Widow and the Missing Corpse* plucks the beard of her dead husband to ensure her remarriage. Likewise, when the princess in *The Prince and the Fairy* comes to know about the death of her husband on her wedding day, she addresses her father in law that "I shall accompany you . . . and spend the rest of my life praying at my husband's grave" (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 123). This illustrates the conservative value of loyalty in Pashtun society where woman finds her husband to be the sole reason of her joys and life and his remembrance and worship is above everything. In *Pashtunwali*, the value of *Path* /pʌθ/ or honor signifies not marrying second time or remaining widow for the rest of life (Khatak 1990). The same is also supported in Pashtu proverb "*Khawand*" (Lord) [*husband*] is a name for God (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 221).

The Man-Eater is one of those few folk stories where woman is the central character. However, she is projected as monster-like man-eating woman. She is also shown as an extremely foolish woman later on tricked to death by a bald-headed shepherd. Similarly, in *The Two Unfaithful Wives*, women remain at the center of the plot for their abhorring and disgusting illicit relations outside marriage. In the end, their husbands, frustrated by their behavior "asked God to protect them from women and vowed never to marry again" (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 151). The same trend is also observed in *The Dancing Dolls* where the stage is occupied by an immoral wife who deceives her husband and keeps a secret lover.

In addition, the story *The Merchant and the Parrot* is also centered round the wife of a merchant and is immoral and establishes sexual relationship with others. Her husband is decent and honest who does everything to please her but she is incorrigible and takes false oaths to prove her innocence. Later on, he is forced to search for another wife who "is not only beautiful but also faithful, honest, and sincere" (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 174). In the same way, Gul in *Gul and Sanobar* shatters the married life of her husband by indulging in immoral acts. In yet another story *The Prince and the Fakir* the idea of immorality in womenfolk gets further impetus where a prince refuses to marry as he thinks women to be "fickle and cunning." Later on, he "takes a girl who is two years old" (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 152) to a lonely forest, educates and trains her in good manners. But she still betrays him by engaging in an affair with another man. Feeling disheartened and dishonored, he kills her and commits "never to marry again" (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 157).

The above discussed female models do no service to their sex. They warn men to strictly guard them and not to trust them. Further, such characterization restricts their chances of participation in public life. The same trend can also be observed among Pashtuns who do not like their women to be liberal in their approach. To them, a woman's world is her home and its members (Shaheen, 1989). In comparison to such perceptions, the stories project their secret lovers as non-entities in society. They have no familial background and are wandering men. While men of repute are mostly projected either staying away from immorality or are observed as legitimizing their lust by marrying more than once. The same is displayed in *The King's Dream* where a king loves his son's wife and opts to marry her by killing his son instead of attempting to establish illicit relations with her.

The researcher observes a similar pattern in folk love stories. Man is portrayed as much loyal and loving as a female character. But leaving this aside, female character is projected as weak and dependent on man. She is idealized at home. Her role is not only to keep her love intact but to follow the desires of her parents and to protect the honor of her family as is observed in *Adam Khan Durkhanai*, *Farhad Sherinai* and *Dulay au Shahai*. In comparison, man is portrayed with no such real compulsions and is relatively free from them as in *Rikhtini Meena* (Jan, 1930). For him, morality and honor is above love and the later may be sacrificed for the former. However, it is he who has to fulfil all conditions and overcome ordeals to achieve his love while the beloved waits and watches his moves. Farhad in *Farhad Sherinai* may go the extent of accepting the challenge of cutting a mountain and prince Saiful Malook in *Prince Saiful Malook & Badri Jamala Fairy* commits himself to follow his beloved Badri Jamala to the mythical Koh-e-Kaaf Mountain range but in both cases the beloveds makes no moves to assist their lovers.

Another important aspect of comparative presentation of masculine and feminine models is with regard to their possessions. Men possess power, energy, strength and above all an adventurous nature while women, except very few rare cases, possess only beauty and captivating looks. It is observed that predominantly, a man is appreciated, liked and loved for his bold nature while the major if not the only reason for a woman's appreciation is her beauty and attractiveness also revealed in the analysis of 4,294 television commercials (Lips, 1988). A man is idealized to guard his actions while a woman is idealized to guard her beauty for survival. Further, it is observed that a man can display his bravery and strength in her absence but she shall always need a man to appreciate and love her beauty. This in turn, makes her dependent on the company and association of man.

In *Sweeter than Salt*, the princess is loved by the woodcutter for her beauty while the prince in *The Gardener's Daughter* falls in love with the gardener's daughter as he thinks her to be "exceedingly beautiful" (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 40). Rustam's daughter is also described in relation to her beauty when inquired by the gardener's daughter. In another story *Sass Begum*, a prince is impressed by the beauty of Sass Begum. Again in *The Fakir and the Princess*, a fakir falls in love with a princess for her beauty and then maneuvers to win her. In the story *The Merchant and the Parrot*, it is after hearing about the beauty of a girl that the merchant decides to marry her "in exchange for her weight in gold" - condition laid down by her father (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 161). In *The Shy Prince*, a prince is so captivated by the beauty and looks of a princess "that he no longer had the strength to ride his horse" (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 191). Later on, her mother reveals that her daughter "has had more than a hundred proposals . . ." (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 195). In yet another story *The King's Dream*, it is bewitching beauty of the princess of the tower which blinds a king and his son resulting in enmity between the two. The princess Gulandama is also known for her beauty in *Prince Bahram* which forces prince Bahram to follow her to china to win her hand. However, it is the heroic feats of Bahram rather than his looks that stun Gulandama and he decides that "I must find out who he is" (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 230).

Likewise, it is the beauty of Princess Mahbooba in *Jalat Mahbooba* which is the main source of her proud nature. Her suitors find it hard to win her and during the course of the story, six young princes lay their lives for failure to win her hand. Her beauty provides, in turn, impetus to Jalat to display his strength and intelligence to win her love. Similarly, in *Dulay au Shahai*, the description of Shahai is mainly with regard to her appearance. She is described as exceedingly beautiful and enjoys public acclaim. In comparison, the description of Dulay mainly surrounds his material possessions. He is known and respected for his wealth, generosity, goodness of the heart, and swordsmanship (Katozai, 2005, p. 343).

To sum up, masculine models are idealized for their bravery, strength and power while feminine models are portrayed with reference to their appearances. Further, men are glorified for their assertive nature while women are adored for their supportive and submissive natures.

Gender Segregation-Gendered Power Structure in Folk Stories

With reference to gender segregation and gendered power structure, the stories follow a pattern which attempts to segregate men and women and assign them specialized tasks. The right and duties of each are determined and gendered expectations are thus built around them. A line can be drawn to divide the social world into two unequal halves. The first and the limited half comprises of home and domestic sphere reserved for women while the rest of the social world belongs to men. Interference or adventurism to the other half is discouraged (Shaheen, 1989; Tair & Edwards, 2006; Tair, 1980; Tair, 1982). Power rests in men and they are encouraged to enforce their will while women are expected to remain submissive and obedient. The world of the stories therefore is more masculine and has less scope for female. Apart from his own half of the social world, he is also empowered to make or at least influence decisions at home. In contrast, women may get punished if they attempt to interfere in the men's half or fail to mismanage their duties. Thus the world of folk stories is masculine where man is both the actor and the judge. Woman constitutes a beautiful and alluring segment of it to decorate man's life but this does not confer upon her any right to ownership. Her share of this world is subject to the choice and will of man. An analysis of the social world portrayed in some of the folk stories is presented to validate these observations.

In *Sweeter than Salt*, the good and obedient princess is a part of her father's palace and when she is thrown out of it for offending him; she comes across a young man and his old mother in forest. There too, she stays at home and assists his mother. It is observed that she stays in the palace upon her father's discretion. She has no say and cannot confront her father. Thus, her father decides her fate. The only option available to her is to submit to her father's will. Similarly, when she tries to convince the young man in the forest to allow her to help him in chopping wood, he refuses to allow her as, according to him, '*Chopping wood isn't easy*' to which she happily submits (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 34). The fate of Zubaydah in *The Sin of Pride* is no less pathetic than the above-mentioned princess. She is also thrown out of her home by her husband as she has given birth to a stillborn son. In the end of the two stories, the princess and Zubaydah prosper while the respective father and the husband are mistreated by fate. In both cases, there is no explanation, no warning or revenge but a straight away acceptance of the two men by them. This hints at the ever vulnerable and dependent position of women in society.

With regard to *The Gardener's Daughter*, when the prince sends marriage proposal to the gardener's daughter, it is revealed that the gardener has to take the final decision. She is not even consulted in the

process. Once her father agrees, the marriage is decided. After marriage, she, like the rest of his forty wives, stays in the confines of palace. Later on, when the same prince appears in the court of king Rustam to propose his daughter, here too, it is the father who decides the marriage and the princess only waits for the decision of her father. Earlier, when the prince is enslaved by Rustam, his wives decide to rescue him and for this purpose they disguise themselves in masculine dress and manage the whole affair in the same fashion as did the princess in *Musa Khan Deo* and the farmer's wife in *The Barber and the Farmer's Wife*. These disguised identities point to the masculine world where only men can find it convenient to achieve and surpass.

As referred to earlier, a woman may find it hard to offend her husband as did the vizier's wife in *The Clever Princess*. He is helpless to find answer to the king's riddle but once his wife hints at the solution, he loses 'his patience and picked up a stick' to beat her, showing the dismal social position of female at home (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 60). She is at home till the pleasure of her husband and when he marries second time, she has to quit and the only response one can expect from him is "Let her go" (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 65). Similarly, his reaction towards his second wife remains the same when she invites the king to dinner without his consent. "Don't hide" he shouted. "I shall give you what you deserve . . . I will take you to a jungle where you won't survive for very long" (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 68). Earlier, when the vizier is talking to Gul Deen's daughter, she resists him and declares that such attitude on the part of a young girl to talk to a stranger is both socially disapproved and shameful. Such remarks remain very meaningful in society with regard to socialization and education.

In *The lion and the Jungle*, there is no female character which is a meaningful hint at maintaining gender segregation. The setting is jungle and according to the scheme only men have the courage to go there. The man in the jungle is in search for job to earn for the marriage of his three daughters. The story portrays a society where men should earn and women should stay at home. Thus, the fate of women is tied up to that of men but not vice versa. The princess in *Musa Khan Deo* helps her father and proves her worth but she again has no say in her marriage decision and her father gives her hand to Musa Khan Deo. She submits to this decision although she knows that the brutal Musa will kill her. The story is marked for the words of Musa's mother who teaches her son to unveil the identity of the disguised youth as 'invite the youth to your room and place weapons and jewelry before him. You must then watch him carefully: if the youth is a woman, her hand will instinctively reach out for the jewelry; if the youth is a man, his hand will be drawn towards the weapons'

(Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 109). Thus a distinction is drawn between men and women in terms of weapons and jewelry, implying that weapons are becoming of men as signs of power, strength and adventure while jewelry, a sign of beauty and outward show are tools personifying womanhood. The king in this story desperately longs for a male heir. He has seven daughters but the absence of a son makes his life tasteless. Same longing is also observed in other stories but nowhere such restlessness could be observed for a female child. Rather in *Jalat Mahbooba* a king marries forty nine women for a male heir and in frustration orders every single female child to be killed. This alludes to the importance of male heir in the Pashtun social setup (Ahmed, 2004; Grima, 1992).

With regard to gender segregation, another incidence is found in *The Parrot and the Starling* where a starling scolds a parrot for entering her nest and says that “you have broken my daughter’s purdah. No male is permitted to set eyes on her, except the one she is to marry” (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, pp. 129-130). And so the parrot agrees to marry her daughter but on the condition that after marriage his “wife should remain indoors. To which, the starling replies that If you can look after her in the house, and give her plenty of food and drink, she will have no need to go out” (Ahmad & Boase, 2003, p. 130). This story is a splendid symbolic summarization of the foundation of Pashtun culture with regard to the concept of gender segregation. Accordingly, man is supposed to be the breadwinner by working outside and woman is to remain at home and to observe purdah (Shaheen, 1989; Tair & Edwards, 2006). Further, a man must ideally fulfil the needs of his wife which is a counter argument against those who speak in support of working women. In other words, Pashtuns look down upon those whose female family members engage in public life (Tair, 1980). In relation to purdah, it is observed that among Pashtuns, men are entrusted with the task of guarding purdah i.e., honor of their women (Johnson & Mason, 2008; Khan, 1993; Tair, 1980). The same value is communicated in the acceptance of marriage proposal by the parrot. Further, it is the notion of purdah and its observance that prevent women in Pashtun society to fully participate in public life (Kakar, 2004).

Princess Gulandama, a beautiful lady with captivating looks in *Prince Bahram* is confined to her palace. Her father owns her and has the authority over her. Although passive herself, her beauty gives rise to great events and upheavals in the story. Prince Bahram proposes her but he has to kill King Bayzad who threatens to destroy her father’s kingdom. After marriage, the only change in Gulandama’s life is that she shifts from her father’s palace to that of prince Bahram’s. Likewise, in Pashtun social set up, once a woman enters the house of her husband, all her life’s decisions

are transferred from her parents to her in-laws (Tair, 1980). Her fragility and helplessness is exposed when she is kidnapped by Toroban Deo. At the same, she also acknowledges masculine strength when she says that "Nobody but Bahram can save me. He is known all over the world for his bravery, so much so that when a child cries, the mother says, "Hush, hush, Bahram will come!" (Ahmad & Boase, 2003).

Nasruddin, the Holy Man is another example of gender segregation. In the story, Nasruddin works in fields and earn for his family. His wife stays at home. Her job is to prepare food and look after him. The same story includes another family where too, a farmer ploughs in fields while his wife is restricted to domestic affairs. This farmer, like the vizier in *The Clever Princess*, resorts to beating his wife when she goes against his orders. The scene of beating wife hints at traditional approach prevalent particularly among rural Pashtuns who resort to physical assault when they find their wives in the wrong. This may be viewed as a common practice and a routine affair and in extreme cases may prove disastrous for the future of the family. In contrast, no such practice can be resorted to by a woman if ever a man goes wrong.

Morality is also a major theme in the folk stories that also highlights the gendered power structure. To note, in Pashtun society, the center of power is man and it is he who decides women issues (Tair, 1980). They honor women and ensure their honor in society. However, any wrong on her part results in punishment for her and further restricts her mobility and contribution to public life. With regard to gendered power structure, it is observed that men mostly resort to more than one marriage and can keep as many as forty nine wives (*Jalat Mahbooba*). Relating to morality, when the prince in *The Prince and the Fakir* comes to know about the secret lover of his wife, he kills her to protect his honor. The fate of the wife and her lover in *The Dancing Dolls* is the same once the truth is revealed to her husband. In the same way, the immoral wife of merchant is also killed for her immorality (*The Merchant and the Parrot*). The fate of immoral Gul is no less tormenting when her husband knows about her conduct. The trend continues in *The Two Unfaithful Wives* where Gulkandan and his friend get rid of their unfaithful wives by killing them. The reaction of husbands in these instances corresponds with Pashtun famous proverb which states, "When a Pashtun has no Pashto (that is, code of honor), may he fill the hollows of the earth" (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 96). In other words, here "men's sense of honor, or virtue of chivalry (*ghairat*), was under threat, resulting in a revenge situation" (Widmark, 2010, p. 10).

Likewise, the pious and faithful Maamonai in (*Sher Alam au Maamonai*) is slaughtered by her husband Sher Alam only because his

second wife has levelled false charge of having illicit relations with Saida Jan. The story hints at the Pashtun concept of *Tor* (black action) (Ahmed, 2004) according to which if a man and a woman are accused of illicit relations, both of them must be killed to save the honor of the family. With regard to honor, Anders Widmark (2010) links the value of revenge (*Badal*) in Pashtunwali to it and adds that Pashtuns are tied up by their honor to avenge any insult. It also tells about the miseries of Pashtun women and their disadvantaged position to clarify themselves at the time of crucial decisions. Mostly, women in Pashtun society fall prey to such false traps and are killed. In this regard, they are not attended to by their male members. It is observed that those who do not kill their women in such cases and wait for investigation are termed as coward and are not honored. They also lose their status and people normally prefer to avoid such families (Hawkins, 2009; Kakar, 2004). This in turn may be a strong motive to fulfil their social expectations in such cases.

The stories lay down a harsh code of conduct for women in Pashtun society (Mehra, 2010) and warn men to be on guard and remain vigilant (Arai & Tabata, 2006). As family honor is in most part associated with women therefore there must be more checks and balances for them in comparison to men. Such mindset further restricts women to have access to public life among Pashtuns. As far as romantic folk stories are concerned, which according to the researcher, are widely told and retold among Pashtuns; also support gender segregation and gendered power structure. In *Adam Khan Durkhanai* both Adam Khan and Durkhanai chance to see each other in a marriage ceremony. Later on, family honor and restrictions do not allow them to frequently meet. Similarly, they are helpless to decide their marriage without their male elders. Durkhanai has neither the courage to lay open her heart to her father nor can she resist her marriage decision with another person, which ultimately results in the death of the two lovers.

In this regard, the observation of Steven L. Nock (1992) is enlightening when he says that in “no society are people permitted to marry whoever they wish. There are always methods of ensuring that certain individuals pair with certain others” (p. 74). Likewise, in Pashtun society, marriage decision rests with parents and male elders (Barth, 1965; Kakar, 2004). A Pashtun woman is expected to follow the decision. She does not have the right to mate selection (Tair, 1980). Likewise, Baibo is chained by family honor and Pashtunwali in expressing her feelings. It is revealed when Shadi Khan asks for a kiss, to which she angrily replies “that if he could not honor Pakhtu (code of conduct) how I could ignore it. And how could you think so?” (Khattak, 1984, p. 171). She further adds that he should better ask for her hand in marriage from her family elders.

However, Shadi khan proves obstinate and they depart never to meet again. With regard to the above referred code of conduct i.e., Pashtunwali, Akbar S. Ahmad (1976) observes that “it sets up ideal standards of behavior and acts as a constant yardstick to measure normative or deviant behavior” (p. 57). To Jonathan Hawkins (2009), it is a series of tenets on how a Pashtun must live.

Conclusion

To sum up, the world of Pashtun folk stories is predominantly masculine both in intent and content. They advocate a social set up and structure where men dominate at the cost of undermining the role of women. The power structure leaves less space for women to make a display of their talent and intelligence. The decision-making power rests with men. Likewise, the same trends can be observed in Pashtun society. Among them, the head of family is man who remains responsible for taking care of his family and to earn for them. His family women must be at his disposal and must obey him to the extent of worship (Lashkari, 2005; Tair, 1980; Tair & Edwards, 2006). Further, they must submit to his will to earn a good name and social approval (Lashkari, 2005; Tair & Edwards, 2006). In addition, they must remain at home and must ask for permission before leaving for any job or activity or function. They must observe purdah or *seclusion* (Ahmed, 2004) at any cost. It is observed that those women who do not observe purdah or do not remain mindful of it are labelled as liberal, which carries negative social connotation among Pashtuns (Khan, 2008; Tair & Edwards, 2006). As family honor is tied to its female members, therefore, no excuse is accepted and men do not compromise on such lapses.

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Annexure

Gender Representation in Folk Stories

S. No	Folk Story	Nature of Title				Number of Main Characters			
		Masculine	Feminine	Mixed	Others	Total	Male	Female	Others
1	Adam Khan Durkhanai			✓		05	04	01	
2	Dulay au Shahai			✓		04	02	02	
3	Farhad Sherinai			✓		05	03	02	
4	Gul and Sanobar			✓		05	03	01	01
5	Hazrat Ali Sahib	✓				06	04	02	
6	Jalat Mahbooba			✓		09	05	04	
7	Khurram Deo	✓				04	03	01	
8	Luck and Intelligence				✓	05	03		02
9	Musa Khan Deo	✓				05	03	01	01
10	Nasruddin, the Holy Man	✓				05	03	02	
11	Prince Bahram	✓				11	08	03	
12	Prince Saiful Malook & Badri Jamala		✓			03	01	02	
13	Rikhtini Meena (True Love)				✓	05	02	03	
14	Sass Begum		✓			05	03	02	
15	Shadi Khan and Baibo			✓		04	02	01	01
16	Sher Alam au Maamonai			✓		04	02	02	
17	Sweeter than Salt				✓	07	03	02	02
18	The Beggar, the Hindu, & the Treasure	✓				02	02		
19	The Barber and the Farmer's Wife			✓		06	04	02	
20	The Barber's Son	✓				02	02		
21	The Clever Princess		✓			08	05	03	
22	The Dancing Dolls		✓			03	02	01	
23	The Fakir and the Princess			✓		04	03	01	
24	The Gardner's Daughter			✓		13	09	04	
25	The Great Saint	✓				03	03		
26	The Greedy King	✓				02	02		
27	The King and the Clever Vizier	✓				04	03	01	

28	The King's Dream	✓				06	05	01	
29	The Lion and the Jungle				✓	02	01		01
30	The Man-Eater	✓				04	02	02	
31	The Merchant and the Parrot	✓				05	01	02	02
32	The Parrot and the Starling				✓	23	11	09	03
33	The Prince and the Fairy			✓		05	04	01	
34	The Prince and the Fakir	✓				06	03	03	
35	The Saint of Baghdad	✓				03	03		
36	The Shepherd	✓				03	03		
37	The Shy Prince	✓				07	05	02	
38	The Simurgh				✓	03	01		02
39	The Sin of Pride				✓	03	02	01	
40	The Swindlers	✓				03	02	01	
41	The Three Friends	✓				08	05	03	
42	The Two Viziers	✓				04	03	01	
43	The Weavers	✓				03	02		01
44	The Woodcutter	✓				04	03	01	
45	Thumbling & The Thieves	✓				06	05	01	
Grand Total (45)		23	04	11	07	237	150	71	16
In Percentage (100%)		51%	9%	24%	16%	100%	63%	30%	7%

