

The Linguistic Representation of Gender Identities in Pakhtu Proverbs

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Abstract

As an important marker in a human society, language performs a variety of functions. It serves the role of a primary vehicle for transmitting cultural norms, values and expectations from one generation to the other. It, therefore, emerges pivotal in connecting the past and the present and also determines the future trends. This research paper argues that language reflects as well as preserves, propagates and perpetuates gendered culture. Analyzing the language used in Pakhtu proverbs, the paper explores the significant role of language in the formation and construction of gender identity in cultural setup. The study is based on the qualitative analysis of 3000 collated folk proverbs from archived (and/or) published collections and their authors' interpretations. The collections primarily relate to Pakhtun social setup in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. They share the code of *Pakhtunwali* with Pakhtuns living in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan and on the other side of the border towards Afghanistan. The findings of the study therefore equally apply to them. The study contends that the proverbs adhere to the tenants of *Pakhtunwali* and reinforce patriarchal social structure. The gendered linguistic expressions also serve as a means to preserve the age-old gender inequalities, which in turn are manipulated and exploited to erect social structure marked by gender imbalance. The language of proverbs advocates masculinity and male domination in decision-making process, division of labor, domestic and public sphere.

Keywords: *language, gender identity, folk proverbs, Pakhtunwali*

Introduction

Pakhtu proverbs constitute an important part of the corpus of Pakhtun folklore. Proverbs popularly known as *mataluna* (plural of *Matal*) are highly valued for expression of Pakhtun identity and are "prized pearls of wisdom" to guide them throughout their lives (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. ii). The social traditions of Pakhtuns are enshrined in *Pakhtunwali*- the code of honor that defines what it means to be Pakhtun (Duncan, 1990; Hawkins, 2009; Johnson & Mason, 2008) while to Nawaz Tair (1987) *Pakhtunwali* still survives as it is preserved in proverbs. Pakhtu proverbs

dominate life affairs as they are believed to be a rich, authentic and eternal fountain of wisdom and faith of Pakhtuns (Enevoldsen, 2004). On the basis of this belief, they are learnt painstakingly and contextualized during conversation situations to add to the validity, credibility and acceptability of a point of view.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa spreads over an area of 74,521 sq km and has a population of over 22 million. Majority of them are Pakhtuns (also called Pashtuns, Pathans) speaking Pakhtu (also called Pashto, Pashtu) language. Other languages include Khowar, Hindko, Kohistani, Shina, Torwali, Kashmiri, Kalasha and Kaghani are also spoken. A considerable number of Afghan refugees are also scattered in refugee camps in different parts of the province. Formerly, the province was called North West Frontier Province (N-W.F.P.) but through 18th amendment in Federal Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 2010, it was renamed as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. *Khyber* represents historic Khyber Pass near Peshawar toward Afghanistan while *Pakhtunkhwa* implies *near the Pakhtuns*, is representative of the majority Pakhtun population of the province (Khan & Sultana, 2012; Khan, Sultana, Bughio & Naz, 2014).

As said above, Pakhtu is spoken in majority of the province with the visible presence of Hindko speakers in Hazara, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, Dera Ismail Khan and Peshawar. For all practical purposes, Pakhtu remains the major source of communication in the province. Urdu is also used for official purposes in government offices and courts. Incidence of the use of Urdu is also found in larger business centers like Peshawar, Mardan and Nowshera due to people coming from other provinces of the country. Afghan refugees who have settled in the province after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s are predominantly Afghan Pakhtuns thus speaking Pakhtu and sharing cultural norms and values and the code of *Pakhtunwali*.

In the subsequent discussion, a theoretical overview of the relationship between gender and proverbs is presented which introduces Pakhtu proverbs, their historical background and their currency and relevancy in Pakhtun interaction pattern with particular reference to the relative position of men and women as two representative but segregated segments of Pakhtun culture. It also highlights the significance of their contextual analysis to see as to how the content and themes contained in proverbs are perceived and understood particularly among Pakhtuns. Next are discussed gender modeling, gender segregation, gendered power structure and gender socialization in proverbs followed by a comprehensive conclusion.

Gender Identity and Proverbs

In most of the world's cultures, proverbs are part and parcel of everyday life that are spoken trippingly and understood immediately (Tair & Edwards, 1982). A proverb is a short but famous sentence which describes either truth or instruction. Commenting on the popularity and utility of a proverb, Shinwari (1999) says that it is that talk or sentence, which comes out extemporarily from the mouth of an experienced elder or scholar on witnessing a story, an event or incident. This sentence proves so meaningful and effective that other people also use it on similar occasions and thus it gradually becomes popular. He further adds that a proverb survives the ravages of time but its narrator and background are forgotten. Thus, today there are proverbs but their background events and stories are not known. In addition, the wisdom contained in Pakhtu classical poetry has also acquired the status of proverbs (Enevoldsen, 2004). Proverbs are the "molecules" of popular literature with particular reference to Pakhtuns as they express their cultural identity (Tair & Edwards, 1982, p. i).

Research studies including Akbar S. Ahmed (1980), Salma Shaheen (1984), Jens Enevoldsen (2004) and Tair and Edwards (2006) reveal that proverbs are the outcome of long historic customs, social practices and traditions. In the Pakhtun social setup, the practice of gathering together to a common place mostly *hujra* (guest house) or mosque to share and discuss social issues and problems, events and happenings can be said to be a major contributor to the enrichment of the corpus of Pakhtu proverbs. Culturally, Pakhtuns believe in sharing and caring and such occasions are marked by the presence of men of all ages, outpouring words containing wisdom, which have evolved into proverbs by virtue of repeated use over a longer period of time.

From semantic point of view, Tair and Edwards (2006) argue that the meaning contained in proverbs is so compressed and complex in relation to metaphor that it necessitates more social knowledge to properly understand and appreciate them. They further add that proverbs remain more or less meaningless apart from context. Similarly, they are of the view that proverbs are not "folkloric relics, verbal decorations, or collector's items" but the reflection, expression, or embodiment of cultural values, thinking and social labeling. In addition, they "can be used to propose a course of action, affect a change of attitude, or provoke a change in perspective. Proverbs are rhetorical tools to accomplish social or personal ends" (pp. ii-iii).

Among Pakhtuns, proverbs are alive and play significant role in their speech both formal and informal. They are abundantly found in oral culture and also in books, newspapers and literary dramas, novels and

short stories. Similarly, conversation situations both inside and outside the home contain frequent recourse to proverbs. They may be employed as penetrating weapons of verbal combat in heated arguments in conflict situations whether political, social or domestic. To Tair and Edwards (2006) Pakhtu proverbs embody the overall image of Pakhtun life and their world serving as prisms that “enable us to see and understand a colorful spectrum of images, beliefs, values, behaviors and customs” of Pakhtuns (p. ii).

Highlighting the significance of a proverb, Katozai states (2005) that it serves as a guiding principle of human life from which one gets instruction and guidance in every aspect of life, every occasion and every time. Mostly, proverbs depict and reflect the life style of a nation or residents of a particular locality’s ethnic or language group because their background contains much history, true events and instruction. In this context, Tair and Edwards (2006) observe that meaning contained in a proverb is linked to a worldview and way of life that give us an insight into aspects of culture including values, ethics, religious concepts, attitudes and gender relations. With particular reference to Pakhtun society, they argue that nothing is beyond the province of proverbs: they serve as a moral guide and resource in the affairs of routine life as they contain lessons about faith, honor, human nature, friends, enemies, power and revenge. They further add that “proverbs are not only a window into their world; they are windows that enable us to look out from their vantage point, and see the world through Pashtun eyes” (p. iv). Based on the findings of this research study, both from the literature reviewed and field observations, proverbs guide, teach, reinforce and perpetuate Pakhtun customs and traditions.

Method and Material

The present study is based on the qualitative analysis of Pakhtu folk proverbs through assembling or collating texts, by a review of archived and published materials and their authors’ interpretations. The locale of the study is the north-west province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (former N-W.F.P) in Pakistan which borders Afghanistan to its West. The residents of the province are predominantly Pakhtuns whose life is steered by the age-old code of honor called *Pakhtunwali* (Rahman, 1995).

The study is based on 3000 proverbs assembled, however, the approach is selective and confined to only the analysis of those representative proverbs which relate to the representation of gender identities in the context of the local culture. An emphasis on the language of these proverbs is also undertaken to appreciate the cultural construction of words and labels among Pakhtuns.

The assembled data indicates that mostly men have authored the books about proverbs. The main reason of it is the lack of access to education among Pakhtun women and their confinement to their homes only (Khan & Sultana, 2012). This may be a pertinent debating point to explore gender bias in these proverbs which future research studies may undertake. However, two works by a female author, Salma Shaheen (1984 & 1988-9), a renowned educationist associated with University of Peshawar were consulted but her collection of proverbs was found similar to the rest with particular reference to gender identities and representation. Furthermore, the anthologies do not actually report from field observation of any single instance of the performance of a proverb causing someone to choose to behave in a certain way. Rhetorically, they do admonish people to choose certain styles of action, and warn against others, but without the observation of actual pragmatic effects of speech events (where a received proverb leads to behavior), we can only say that they are designed rhetorically to dictate and evaluate action, in uncertain relationship to actual actions performed.

The study employs the perspectives of Social Learning Theory and Cognitive Development Theory that emphasize the crucial role of communication in the inculcation of masculinity and femininity (Wood, 2007) while dealing the text of proverbs as discourses in a 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, p. 599; see also Weedon, 1997, p. 105).

Results and Discussion

To start with, the pattern of gender modeling followed in anthologized Pakhtu proverbs is markedly masculine in intent and content. Display of courage, power and energy are masculine while patience, perseverance and submissiveness are presented as female virtues. In cultural context, men are associated with the outside world while female must remain in the confines of the four walls of home. As referred to earlier, proverbs encompass the whole of Pakhtun life and their language and therefore rich in instructional material to guide gender development within the context of *Pakhtunwali*. In the next part, we draw a sketch of gender modeling as enunciated in the corpus of Pakhtu proverbs.

Masculine and Feminine Models

Pakhtu proverbs express male ideology (Tair & Edwards, 2006) and project masculine models exuding strength, power and energy. They are symbols of bravery and courage. They are portrayed as relentless warriors as a proverb says that *A single son of Pakhtun is also an army* (Lashkari,

2005, p. 67). In another place it is said that *A brave son is known by the way he weeps in his cradle* (Lashkari, 2005, p. 70). The existence and survival of a male child is exalted and his death or an injury is considered as an unbearable loss to the family (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 280) whereas the presence or absence of a daughter is more or less insignificant (Tair, 1980, p. 66). So much so the birth of a female child is met with tears and goes uncelebrated (Ahmed, 2004; Grima, 1992).

More importantly, there is a tendency toward a negative or hateful portrayal of women in Pakhtu proverbs (Tair & Edwards, 2006). Instead of modeling women to be more progressive and participative in social life, these proverbs restrict, confine and seclude them. The seclusion or *purdah* is institutionalized as a means to gender segregation which is integral to the concept of *Pakhtunwali* (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Khan, Sultana, Bughio & Naz, 2014). Female fate is best illustrated in the proverb, *For a woman either the home or the grave* (Lashkari, 2005, p. 52; Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 227). In other words, she can either survive at home or embrace death to leave her home (Shaheen, 1988-9). Such proverbs tend to teach, educate and socialize women according to the principles of *Pakhtunwali*. They are consistently taught to behave in a socially acceptable manner. This whole process of schooling and guiding women subjugate them to the dictates of patriarchal social structure. They are idealized when they worry only about their skills at homemaking and not to worry about the rest of world: *When Tora* (name of a lady) *puts the cooking pot on the hearth, she puts all her worries under her feet* (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 168). They are socialized to step into the shoes of their mothers as a proverb puts it: *When the daughter proves that she is well behaved she steps into the shoes of her mother* (p. 325). Warning messages for women to behave themselves frequently occur in these proverbs. They are projected as weak, frail and having little wit in comparison to men (Katozai, 2005). In this regard, a famous proverb is that *Had women no noses, they would have fed on filth* (Lashkari, 2009, p. 85; Tair, 1980, pp. 45-53). Such belittling representations of women in the social setup render them secondary and force them to look for male support in order to thrive socially. In the same way, the fate of wives is no less pathetic. The proverbs incite women to carry out the wishes of their husbands (Tair, 1980, p. 77) otherwise they shall be considered at par with enemies posing a threat to the stability of family structure (Lashkari, 2005, p. 42).

On another level, in the proverbs generally, the word *woman* carries negative connotations and is used in a belittling and derogatory manner (Tair, 1980, pp. 45-53). William Fry (1972) notes the same with regard to sexual jokes and states that there also a woman “is represented as naive or simply stupid, easily outmaneuvered by the male, who gets

what he wants without cost" (p. 139). Further, negative personality traits like suspicion, weakness or lack of power and energy are associated with feminine gender. The display of such traits by men, are also termed womanish in a negative sense and such men are rebuked for their unmanly behavior (see also Stockard & Johnson, 1980, p. 6). Instances of such expressions in Pakhtu proverbs may include: *You became Hindu in Ramadan* (Islamic holy month of fasting), *A woman in harvest time* (Lashkari, 2005, p. 25), and *Woman was born on the day of suspicion* (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 299). The proverbs *A brave man's kick will force him to sit like a woman* (p. 159) and *The earning of a woman is as worthless as the load carried by a she donkey* (Tair, 1980, p. 53) are also significant in this regard. In these proverbs, personality attributes associated with womenfolk are conventionally termed as negative or vile, carrying social and cultural disapproval.

Thus, there is a marked difference in the representation of masculine and feminine models in Pakhtu proverbs. They project a gender segregated social structure where men remain at the helm of affairs with women idealized in domestic domain.

Comparative Presentation of Masculine and Feminine Models

A famous Pakhtu proverb says: *When the brother becomes a man of prowess, his sister basks under his protection* (Lashkari, 2005, p. 76; Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 337). It serves a sour commentary on the relative status and position of both genders in Pakhtun social fabric. It renders men powerful, strong and entrusted with the cultural responsibility of controlling and safeguarding the supposedly sans strength womenfolk. This dependency of women upon men ranges from the affairs of homemaking to the wider socio-economic sphere.

Pakhtu proverbs adhere to male ideology in that the world is viewed from men's perspective. Here, women are projected as additional, secondary and supportive in their social roles. The analysis of proverbs reveals that finding a woman for marriage is of less significance as long as a man has money and wealth: *When there is money, the woman will come even from Kalabat* (name of a far off village) (Shinwari, 1999, p. 21; Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 167). Involvement in meaningless quarrels and fights is attributed to women with particular reference to polygamous situations (Enevoldsen, 2004, p. 10; Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 182). Further, they are portrayed as extravagant in spending the hard-earned money of their men. A proverb puts it, *The khan is angry, his wife is happy* (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 218). It implies that men are constantly troubled by the lavish spending of their wives. They do not realize the pain of earning. In comparison, husbands are exalted to zenith height and women are

admonished to give them respect and regard to the extent of worship: "*Khawand*" (*husband*) *is a name for God* (Tair, 1980, p. 79; Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 221). Similarly, those men who remain cooperative and supportive to their women are ridiculed as submissive and hen-pecked: *Although his wife ground the flour, the dust lies on his neck* (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 287).

Regarding women's secondary but supportive role, instances from Pakhtu proverbs show that men are compared to mountains and kings while women are termed as their pillars and viziers respectively (Lashkari, 2005, p. 84). For instance, the proverb *A woman cannot replace a man no matter how good she is* (Lashkari, 2005, p. 88, Tair, 1982, p. 63) stipulates the inherent superiority of men over women. In Pakhtun families, women are mostly secondary in decision-making processes pertaining to homemaking and mate selection and if ever a woman is found at the helm of the affairs, this too is attributed to male patronization: *If the mother dominates, it is because of the father, who patronizes her* (Lashkari, 2005, p. 6; Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 29).

At another level, bravery in men is reciprocated by beauty in women. The former must take pride in their weapons while the latter must remain satisfied with their jewellery: *A malak (honorable man) needs sword a woman needs a house* (Tair, 1982, p. 62). Women must always be on guard and must safeguard their beauty otherwise the proverb, *Oh brother the infidel! Oh shameless sister* (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 349) becomes relevant to such situations where a brother must, in order to save his family's honor; prove severe upon his sister. It is interesting to note that a brother is to guard her before marriage while this responsibility shifts to her husband after marriage. The expression, *Oh, shameless sister (be-sharme khori)* is used to scold an immodest, shameless, or brazen woman, that is, one who fails to exhibit modesty in her dress, public behavior and demeanor, for example, not covering her head or face properly, wearing tight clothes, walking ahead of her husband, talking openly with men (ibid.). In other words, a Pakhtun woman leaving the confines of her home without *purdah* or veil is considered violation of her beauty and honor (Khan, 2008, p. 102).

In short, the proverbs teach relative superiority of men over women. A woman is supposed to stay at home and support her man in his responsibilities in the public domain. She is also expected to behave herself and not to create any untoward situation for her brother, husband or father. She is expected to follow men's decisions and to remain obedient. Men, on the other hand, are projected as decision makers and to look after the needs of female family members. They are also expected to

monitor women and to decide their futures according to the code of honor- *Pakhtunwali*.

Gender Segregation and Gendered Power Structure in Proverbs

Pakhtu proverbs are coined and repeated historically with a view to order and direct the coming generations to regulate their society. In the context of gender, proverbs advocate gender segregation as the distinctive mark of Pakhtun society. The proverbs propagate guidelines as to how the two genders are to act and operate in life, erecting gender hierarchies comparable with the spirit and aspirations of Pakhtun ideals of *Pakhtunwali*. They identify masculine and feminine spheres of activity and draw a clear line between the two. For instance, a famous proverb, *It is better for a woman to suffer the shaving of her head than to be cast out of the home by her husband* (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 293) clarifies the point. It is explicit in statement of gendered social expectations. It is also a clear display of patriarchy and the subservience of women. The power structure in Pakhtun society in general and the family in particular is gendered where women are belittled for their *Long hair, little wit* (Katozai, 2005, p. 388).

Pakhtu proverbs describe women mostly in the domestic sphere. They are expected to observe *purdah* (female seclusion and veiling) and hold themselves back from public appearances (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 349). They are also expected to invest and spend the earning of their husbands frugally, to limit their wants and be more tidy and clean with their household work: *I know a slut (untidy and dirty) who keeps more leaven than necessary, but does not clean the pot with residue on the edges* (p. 127). Women are therefore expected to worry only about their homes (Shaheen, 1988-9, p. 56) and leave the outside world to men who would earn and feed them as the proverbs state: *Man is mountain, woman is his support; Man is king, woman is his vizier; Man earns, woman spends* (Lashkari, 2005, p. 84; Tair, 1980, 62). In the same way, daughters are idealized in their roles of emulating their mothers and sons their fathers as stipulated in *Like mother, like daughter* and *Like father, like son* (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 208).

With regard to gendered power structure, women are at the mercy of their men. For instance, a proverb states, *A good wife leads her life according to the wishes of her husband* (Lashkari, 2005, p. 7). They must cater to the expectations of their husbands in order to enjoy comparative leverage in domestic issues like decision-making. More importantly, respect for men is absolute and there is no option available to the contrary, *A husband, good or bad but the wife must respect him* (p. 110). In this connection, Tair and Edwards (2006) note that Pakhtu

proverbs advocate decency, patience and goodwill of the husband as starting points for women to have a prosperous domestic life: *When a woman understands her husband, shall have ordered life at home* (p. 29; see also Lashkari, 2005, p. 41).

In short, the power structure is strictly gendered in the corpus of Pakhtu proverbs. Men are at the helm of affairs while women are to obey and follow their decision as integral to rules of business and survival in the society.

Gender Socialization in Proverbs

Pakhtu proverbs remain crucial for their role in gender socialization. Their language is steeped in instructional phrasing, the repetitive nature of which makes it a potent source of socialization in society. As mentioned earlier, the world of proverbs encompasses almost all aspects of the culture including gendered social patterns. From proverbs, one can construct the image of an ideal Pakhtun social setup with regard to gender. The language is ripe with meaning and is manipulated to erect particular gender norms. They attempt to draw and paint the best and the ideal in person, gender and situation. They also delineate the worst and the most hateful. In relation to gender, women are defined in their limited sphere of activity, desirable looks and with reference to their relations with men. By contrast, the latter's identity, as revealed in these proverbs, is progressive and liberal. A brief sketch of the gender socialization pattern in proverbs is presented as follows.

Pakhtu proverbs, with particular reference to marital relationship, socialize women to respect and follow the wishes of their husbands (Lashkari, 2005, p. 110; Tair, 1980, p. 77; Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 221). They are taught that *It is better for a woman to suffer the shaving of her head than to be cast out of the home by her husband* (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 293). They are also instructed to content themselves with the confines of home as their only abode till death (Ahmed, 1976, p. 47; Tair, 1982, p. 63; Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 227). It is only then that they shall deserve their place both at home and in society. By doing so, they shall also become a reason for the honor of their men: *White turbans* (symbol of honor) *are given to the men by the women* (Lashkari, 2005, p. 65; Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 291, 299). In other words, men deserve respect if they own well-behaved women as sisters, daughters or wives. In comparison, men are socialized to be on guard and not to refer to their wives in crucial decisions: *If you care about wife, she will turn you mad* (Lashkari, 2005, p. 43; Tair, 1982, p. 222). They are also informed about the insurmountable difficulties which they may encounter in feeding and clothing women: *Feeding a wife is like feeding an elephant* (Tair, 1982, p. 63).

Several instructional content in Pakhtu proverbs also relate to *purdah* (seclusion or veiling) - an effective technique to segregate gender: *A woman who does not observe purdah is like food without salt* (Lashkari, 2005, p. 127). Honor in Pakhtun society is associated with women and men are advised to guard their honor to earn respect for family (Lashkari, 2005, p. 20; Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 327). Similarly, both women and men are idealized to emulate their own sex as *When the daughter proves that she is well behaved she steps into the shoes of her mother* (Tair, 1982, p. 126; Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 325). In the same way, women are instructed only to worry about their household duties particularly cooking (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 168) while men are asked to earn and feed their families (Lashkari, 2005, p. 84). In context of gender socialization, it is observed that such instructional content has contributed to passivity among women in Pakhtun society. Girls, from a very tender age, attempt to emulate the role of their mothers. This has resulted in stagnation in the society with reference to the contribution of women in the progress of society.

Conclusion

Textual analysis shows how the language of proverbs is assertive in the formation of gender identity. It exalts men and defines their social presence as indispensable to the societal structure and stability. They are exalted for their masculine traits and attributes; performing acts of heroism and bravery; showing initiative and agency. Terms associated with ideal masculinity like *a brave son; iron-like; behaving like men; a brave man's kick; a man of prowess; don't run away from the battlefield; gun; Pakhtu* (code of honor) and *turban* (sign of honor) are frequently found in proverbs. On the other hand, the survival of women is subject to the goodwill of men and they must therefore obey them without protest. Further, she is idealized when she follows the culturally prescribed feminine dress pattern; to observe *purdah* (seclusion/veil); to content herself with the confines of her home; to submit to the will of male family members and to segregate herself from the public domain. The language of proverbs is ripe with key words and expressions particular to women like *home or grave; purdah* (dress or veil or seclusion); *ill-bred; oh shameless sister; jewellery; and suspicion* that highlight their social standing and position relative to men.

Pakhtun society adheres to the social structure portrayed and projected in proverbs. Consequently, the society is marked by gender disparity and unequal distribution of power. It affords maximum capacity to absorb its male members: "*Khawand*" (husband) *is a name for God* (Tair & Edwards, 2006, p. 221) but has lesser capacity to accommodate female members.

In a comparative presentation of men and women in proverbs, the society is divided on gender basis where men are projected at the helm of affairs while women are strictly defined and projected in a limited sphere of activity, that is, domestic domain. Pakhtu proverbs speak for gender segregation 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. The power structure is also gendered with virtually negligible space allocated for women. Pakhtu proverbs play significant role in gender socialization in the context of Pakhtun society. They 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 decision-making power must rest with men while women must improvise to find ways and means to add to the comfort of their men at homes.

To sum up, it is important to mention that there are other genres in Pakhtu, such as *landay* (also called *tappa*, which is folk song type comprising of two lines), a genre much performed and perpetuated by women, that carry very different portraits of women and also, especially, some critical perspectives on Pakhtun/Pashtun/Pathan men (Khan, Bughio & Naz, 2011). This necessarily points to the fact that no single genre tells the whole story of a community's social structure and values. Proverb, then, is one kind of rhetorical genre and there are others representing other equally indigenous viewpoints on social values and human character types. Proverbs are main source of expression of *Pakhtunwali* and contribute in a major way to its constitution alongside other genres however.

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