

The Image of Traditional “*Talib*” in Pashto folk poetry.

Barakat Shah Kakar

Abstract:

This paper is going to prob the image of the village and mosque based traditional *Talib* in the folk Pashto poetry. The paper investigate the etymology of the term and also analyze the distinctive features of traditional and political *Talib* as different characters evolved in specific circumstances. Unlike Political Talib, the people centered Traditional Talib has the tendency to follow and contribute in the traits of Pashtoonwali. Analysis of the folk poetry indicates that, traditional *Talib* is an ordinary person of the Pashtoon society, he lives with people, follow the ways of people, sings and creates the ballads, loves and express it, perform in public gatherings,dances in the festivals, plays the folk games and participate in the *Ashar*, the indigenous participatory approach.

The Etymology of term "Talib":

The word "Talib" is an Arabic term that literally means "the person who quest for something materially or metaphysically". According to the¹ ----- This term has been used in the Pashtoon society especially for the person who dedicates his life to seek and complete the course of religious scholarship. The scholarship mainly rotates on the theoretical understanding of the course entitled, "Darse-Nizami" composed in 17th century by a person called Nizamudin Qutab Suharvi (1677-1750) (2).

The term and character of Talib has gotten importance in the wake of Taliban's emergence in Afghanistan (1993-4). But we still have some glimpses from the colonial ethnography by some of the writers like Winston Churchill in his account of Malakand Field Force where he over simplifies the role of Talib in a traditional

tribal society of the late 19th century. Both and term and character "Talib" has become the most misunderstood in the discourses launched by media and academia in the wake of war on terrorism. According to Online Etymology Dictionary the term Talib is defined "*Sunni fundamentalist movement in Afghanistan, Pashto pl. of Arabic tālib "student;" so called because it originated among students group formed c.1993 in Pakistani religious schools.. Often incorrectly treated as singular in English.*"

In the net shell Talib is a singular noun, mainly used in Pashto language for a male who dedicates his life to keep constant travel for seeking knowledge and who abstain from the temporal duties till the time of the completion of his scholarship.

Traditional Talib Vs Political Talib

This paper is going to probe the image a traditional Talib, who has several distinctions in his character as compare to the Political Talib, a cadre produced in the result of joint venture of Pakistan and its allies Capitalist North and Arab Kingdoms of the Middle East.

S#	Traditional Talib	Political Talib
1	Mosque based	Madressa Based
2	Depend on community in terms of food, shelter, cloths etc.	Depends on politically generated external philanthropy and funds from various parts of the world.
3	Enriches and contribute in the cultural processes.	Participate in the religious ceremonies and political activities.
4	Socially motivated	Politically motivated
5	Loose knitted as a group	Part of viable networks and pressure groups
6	Live with people and as an agent of cultural processes	From the people and want to change the people according to his religious ideals
7	Creates folk poetry, perform in the festivals as signer and dance in the cultural events and play local games.	Believe that singing, art, traditional dance and cultural performances are meaningless and unlawful.
8	Remain accountable to the values and ethics of "Pashtoonwali" the tradition of Pashtoons	Intends to redefine Pashtoonwali in the puritanical frameworks of Shari'a.

The Ways Traditional *Talib* Live and Learn:

It is clear that, Talib is person who travels for seeking knowledge and affiliates to a teacher (Mullah) for a certain period and specific subjects. The affiliation of Talib and Mullah was based on the unconditional obedience of Talib to the instructions of Mullah and his dedication to the studies. Sayed Khairmuhmmad Arif, the folklorist and poet, shared in an interview that. "Talib was granted the space in the shared room (Hujra) in accordance to the level of books he reads. It was not the age but the scholarship that used to provide a comparative advantage to a person and vice versa.

Little has been said and written about the very important role and character of the Traditional *Talib*. Yet different Pashtoon writers and folklorist share their memories and observations regarding the ways of *Talib* learning and living in a village. The stories and observations recorded indicates that, each Talib follows a compulsory cycle of responsibilities conditional to his age and stage. For Talib who is in the initial stages is mandatory instructed to respect the other Talib that are senior. Quite the contrary, this hierarchal structure is on the basis of age not scholarship.

Dawar Khan Dawood, observes the responsibilities of a talib, "Young persons from different parts like Sawat, Buner, Chithral, or Kandahar travel for seeking religious knowledge, they affiliate with a village based religious teacher and dwell in the rooms adjacent to Mosque, called Hujra. Talib seeks knowledge from the Teacher (Mullah) and also collect food from door to door that is the core source of their survival¹.

Mirza Jahanzaib Yaar, in his reckoned Pashto novel "Gul Mina" written in 1950s also shares an account of the social life of a Talib. "Around Mullha(the teacher), the young bachelor Talib used to be there present all the time. Shahid Baba used to provide them good stuff of food and tea. When their number used to be raised, a young fellow of them having a Kassa (bowl) in hand used to knock the doors of the villagers with a particular prayer loudly, "Wazifa rawra, Khudai mu wa bakhshaPakhgeer warsara¹²". These three sentences means "Bring the Wazif (bread) along with a cooked item and may Allah Almighty bestow his blessing upon you" ... All of

¹²

Means "Bring some bread and God bless you all".

them used to sit around the food and after finishing the food, they used to pay gratitude to Allah Almighty.

Talib in love:

His life in the village is not only limited to his residence and the mosque. Although each Talib is a stranger to the people of the community and village, but he gradually create his space through his active participation in the cultural and social process. He plays the local games, sings in the festivals, hosts and signs in the folk music nights in Hujra, contribute in the indigenous participatory approach of collectivism that is Ashar and also participate in the diverse religious and social and cultural ceremonies.

Talib has no option to get marriage in most of the cases. He is brought out in the particular patriarchal society, therefore he remains close to his man fellows even after getting marriage, he rarely develop a marital relationship stemmed in collegiality or equality during his studies.

Traditional Talib in Pashto Folklore:

The folklore of almost all human societies embraces the diverse glimpses of the every day life of the human society. As traditional societies operate on the oral principals and hence an oral tradition prevails all around, therefore the folklore can be instrumental to retrieve the cultural and social histories of people and communities. The Pashto folk poetry and prose assist us analyze and articulate the role and character of Talib in the traditional Pashtoon societies.

The content analysis of the specific genres created by Taliban or for Taliban, it is evident that, Talib, like ordinary person of the society fell in love with a girl and then sustain that, while respecting the cultural and ethical limitations. Masooma Esmati in her research paper illustrates in the following words. *"Talibs or students always from their homes collect food for themselves from the home of the village where they study. Many of them would naturally would fall in love with the young girls of these villages. They would get a chance to see their beloved in the evening when they collect Tuk or food for other Talibs of Mullahs"*.

Traditionally “*Taliban*¹³” have been an active cultural group for contributing in the folk poetry and especially in the folk Pashto dances. The reckoned poet and folklorist Sayed Khair Muhammad Arif in his profound research work on the peculiar “Folk Attandre” (Folk Dance) has illustrated that an active participation of *Taliban* as performers in the local cultural and religious festivals like Eid and Marriages. “During the famous Chamman¹⁴ Festival, Taliban had to establish their own tent, where they used to sing song with particular local instruments. They had their peculiar flag, the highest one in the festival”ⁱⁱⁱ.

The specific folk ballads as sung by group of Taliban in a *Bandar*¹⁵ caters both the *Ishque Haqiqi and Ishqe Majazi*¹⁶. Their peculiar diction also cater satire and humor within the ethical frameworks of society.

***Talib* in the Pashto Romance Narratives:**

In the Pashto folk stories, the character of Talib has been presented as a complementary to the heroes or he himself becomes a hero. "Talibjan and Gulbashra", classical romance story paints the very natural and spontaneous image of Talib who gets in love with a princess and due to the social gape and the mandatory completion of Talib's scholastic course work; separation was occurred that ultimately caused the death of Talibjan. Gulbashra while following the footprints of other Pashtoon romance heroines also dies on his grave.

This story has long been told and passed on from one generation to another with substantial subtraction and additions. But the core message of the story still remains there. Milli Hindara, an account of Pashto folk romances, compiled by Gul Muhammad Noori, caters a complete sketch of the social life and expectations

¹³ Taliban the plural of Talib

¹⁴ Chamman literally means the “Grassy ground” a place in the north of Pishin district where cultural festivals used to be held during Eid (the religious festival of Muslims)

¹⁵ Bandar is a gathering, where a group of local singers mainly Taliban use to sing with the the local music instruments.

¹⁶ The love of God and love of beloved/man

from a Talib. *Tappa*¹⁷ the very prevalent form of Pashto folk poetry has embraced this story particularly. There are dozens of *Tappa* that are still remembered with special reference to this romance narrative.

The story of romance narratives proceeds organically with the support of poetry and narration. When the character wants to say something meaningful, it is quoted in a particular form/genre folk poetic form. Muhammad Ibrahim Atthai, the reckoned academician and folklore analyst has also pointed out that, "In Pashto folk narratives, we find a vivid combination of poetry and prose that is rare in the folk narratives of other languages".

In the mentioned folk romance narrative, some of the reflections of Gulbasha are reported as follows.

طالبه! خدای که به ملا شی

په کتاب پروت ئې یادوې شینکې خالونه (1)

By God, O talib, you cannot become a scholar (mulla)

You pretend to keep on upon book, but imagine your beloveds face

سر که را پورته له کتابه

ستا د کتاب تر حاشیو ډېر دي زما خالونه (2)

Rise your head from the book! O Talib

The charm in my ornaments is far attractive than the lines on your book

د طالبانو یاري مه کړئ

د طالبانو اسپې زین ولاړې دینه (3)

Do not be in love with a Talib! O People

Talib's horse is always ready to go away.

¹⁷ The short form of poetry created by all man and women almost from all parts of the Pashtoon territory. It is composed of two lines, the first with 9 and second with 13 syllables

حجره ئي شته طالب ئي نه شته
زه پر حجره لکه تور مار وگرخېدمه (4)

I found a *Hujra*¹⁸ without a Talib!
Like snake, I crawled rounded his room

په طالبانو دې اور وشي
سړي مئين کي کالي واخلي خني خينه (5)

Hell to all Talib! O People
For they leave a person after the addiction of his love

Talib in Tappa:

The folklore genre Tappa embraces memories and evidences that, portrays the sketch of a Talib as a person synonymous to the other persons of the society. Although Talib has been idealized by most of the girls for his neat white dress, long tresses, scholastic wisdom and somehow spiritual romance.

In a Tappa a girl instruct her mother about the design to her dress that will not be constraining the voyage of her love.

قميص مي لنډ ونيسه مورې!
يار مي طالب دی په منزله ورسره خمه

Design me a short shirt O mother
For I have to keep traveling with my friend, the Talib

په مولوي مي سلام وايه
زما جانان ته کتاب خلاص کړه چي رابخينه

Pay my regards to the teacher (Mullah)
To complete the books and send back my beloved.

¹⁸ Hujra is the room where a group of Taliban live in.

ته د جمات په کټ کښې مړ شي
چي درنه پاتې شي ساړه تاوده بادونه

May you died on the bed of mosque
May the collected food remain uneaten?

که مې طالب مخې له راغلی
د سپینې خولې به وظیفه وره وروړمه

My friend Talib came in my way,
I will definitely present my lips as a piece of bread he collects.

In Pashto Balads:

Hujra has been a center of the cultural and religious gatherings in the traditional Pashtoon society. Bandaar has been evolved from the spaces where male share and live in a collective manner. In today Pashtoon society, this practice is still observed in the traditional Hujra, a specific room in the mosque or its is seen in the circle of coal mine workers, peasants and daily wagers living collectively. But the term and practice Bandaar is mainly synonymous to the group of Talib.

In the Pashto folk ballads, Talib is not only a symbolized as a person isolated from the mainstream of the society, but he is also idealized by the virgins in their poetry. In one of ballad, a girl mourns over her separation from a Talib.

طالبه! وړانه دې شي ستا لېونۍ مينه چې ولاړې

لونگينه چې ولاړې

O Talib pierce to your crazy love, you went
O you, fluorescent like lawang, you went

و توره طالبه! ناجوره يمه

زما زخمي زړگي له جوړ کره تاويدونه

O the Blackish, Talib, I am ill

O the fluorescent one, I am ill

Talib in Kakarai Ghardi:

The very romantic and spontaneous folkloric form known as Kakari Ghardi/Narey indicates the very genuine feeling of a young girl while addressing a handsome Talib.

تر کاغذ سپینه طالبه
وايه خوله غوارې که ژبه
(12)

Whitish than paper, O talib you are
What do you like, tell, my lips or tongue

The traditional Talib has a determined vision to complete his scholarship; therefore he has to discontinue his affiliation with the village due to several reasons. Therefore he has to abandon his love journey half way. His firm commitment remains unchanged during the long journey of his scholarship. Therefore his attitude remains unpredictable in his emotional affairs. Following are some of the Kakari Ghari. In the following sentences, it is reflected that Talib unlike other Pashtoon has no control over his attitude of discontinuation of relationship.

د طالب اختیار ده خه دی
يله نوم د پښتانه دی (15)

Talib has nothing to do with decision
For he lack the basis character of a Pashtoon

One of the cross cutting feeling contained in this and other genre is the unpredictable nature of traditional Talib. As mentioend above, for his scholarship he has to leave the village without considering his stemmed relationship. According to Sayed Khair Muhammed Arif most of Taliban used to leave the village in the time of mid night. One of the Kakarai Ghara also indicates this very nature of Taliban.

طالبان ژړي گلان دي
خود به ولاړ شي رضاوال دي

Taliban like yellowish flowers
Are autonomous to leave or blossom

طالب ولاړ حجره يې پاته
کلی بر شوی بي جماته

Talib went and Hujra remains empty
Worthless has become the village

د طالب ياري د بر سي
کله سيوری کله لمر سي

Friendship with a Talib is Useless
On and off, like sun through clouds
The peculiar form of Athandre Gharri, the poetry for traditional
dance, also embraces some of the lines that illustrate the very
romantic image of Talib in the views girls.

زما ياره طالبه! هو طالبه ياره، خوله غواړي که ژبه
خوله به و تا جار کم، ياره زبه تر تالو لاندي غائبه (17)

O my dearest Talib, tell what would you like, the lips or the tongue
O yes, I bestow my lips upon you, while the tongue has disappeared
in the mouthⁱⁱⁱ.

Talib influence on the Folklore:

Talib is the very first literate person of the traditional Pashtoon society. Through his scholastic journey he explores the literature of other languages especially Persian and Arabic. Therefore we can see him giving a different flavor the folk poetry. Talib has influenced the diction of the folk poetry through inducing terms of the other languages particularly of Arabic and Persian. Bahauddin Majrooh, the reckoned Afghan scholar has shared in his paper

“All the folk poetry that embraces the terms of Persian and Arabic are either the creation of Talib, Mullah or the Mirza¹⁹. Such poetry also contains religious contents but these could be rated low due to its mechanical construction and sense of alienation of the people. The most influential poetry is that of the traditional man and superior to that is the poetry created by the women of this society.

Beside poetry this group has also carved deep impacts on the oral tradition while communicating the folk poetry and prose from one part of the Pashtoon to the another. The Pashto folk narratives and stories are mainly told by Talib as they have the specific skills of story telling and rhetoric.

Conclusion:

Traditional Talib has played vital role in the construction of Pashto Folklore and has always contributed in the cultural processes. The analysis of Talib image indicates that, the scholastic role of Talib did not isolate him from the mainstream cultural and social life. Due to the comparative advantage of a person as literate and legitimate to mould the society's modes, the traditional Talib did not choose to generate conflicts with social norms and set of values and ethics. It is also evident that, Talib a role is well reputed due to social characteristics.

¹⁹ The literate person that work with colonial masters as assistants

References

1. Rahi, Prof Akhthar Muhammad, Tazkira Musanifeen Dars-e-Nizami, published by Idara-e-Nashr Wa Ashauat Islam , Muhalla Jangi Peshawar (1994), P-6
 2. www.onlineetymology.com
 3. Dawood, Prof Dawar Khan, Pashto Tappa, October 1978, P-54
 4. Yaar, Mirza Jahanzai “Gul Meena” Pashto Academy Peshawar University 2005-6 P. 42
 5. Majrooh, Dr. Bahauddin, “Pa Landiyoo ke da Pashthani Mermani yawa Khasa sehra” Pashto Serani p-147
 6. Esmati, Mrs Masooma, “The Place of women in Pashto Oral Literature with special reference to LANDAI” Pashto 1978, Vol 1-2 Afghan Academy of Science Kabul Page 104.
 7. Arif, Khair Muhammad , “Da Attandre Narey” published by Pashto Academy Quetta,(2005) p-50
 8. Attaui, Muhammad Ibrahim, "Pashto Shfauai Dasthan" Millat Press Lahore (1376 hijri) p-76
 9. Noori Gul Muhammad, Milli Hindara Rahman Gul Publishers Muhalla Jangi Peshawar, p. 150
 10. Ibid p-151
 11. Ibid p-154
 12. Ibid p-154
 13. Ibid p-155
 14. Dawood, Prof Dawar Khan, Pashto Tappa, October 1978, P-55
 15. Dawood, Prof Dawar Khan, Pashto Tappa, October 1978, P-55
 16. Kakar, Prof Syal , “PAXWANEY GARI” Pashto folklore academy, Quetta, p-326
 17. Arif, Khair Muhammad , “Da Attandre Narey” published by Pashto Academy Quetta (2005), p-178
-

i
ii
iii
