

Thematic Analysis of ‘Angai’, the Voice of a Pashtun Bride

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Abstract:

The primary purpose of this research is to determine the themes portrayed in the bridal songs of Pashtun woman. This research employed qualitative research design using ethnographic case method in which only Pashtun bridal songs were included. The data was obtained from nine bridal songs which were chosen because of their acute fame among Pashtun people. In order to analyze the data, thematic analysis was carried out so as to determine the most influential themes in the poems. Edward and Weller have recommended employing thematic analysis when researcher aims to identify key topics and patterns in texts in order to create interpretive meaning. The findings revealed that there were four dominant themes: grief and departure, masculinity and gender Imagery, patriarchy; patriarchy and Gender Imagery. The findings also disclosed the fact that Pashtun culture is massively dominated by males. The findings of the study have implications on creating profuse awareness among different cultures pertinent to the feelings of Pashtun brides on the eve of their weddings. This paper also benefits all those researchers who are interested in cross cultural studies.

Key Words: Bridal Songs, Pashtun Culture, Thematic Analysis.

1. Introduction

Rich set of literary discourse be it oral or written has been produced, preserved and transferred from one generation to another generation through different means and medium. These set of literature is replete with themes which gives us an understanding of the people, their society and their lifestyle. Pakistan, which is a Multicultural State, has four dominant Cultures: Sindhi, Balochi, Punjabi and Pashto Culture. Pashto writers, who stand in creative relation to their Culture, have produced a valuable literature since ages. In such literary heritage not only Pashtun Man but Pashtun Women have also played a significant role. The present Research Paper aims to determine the themes of Pashto Folk genre, i.e. ‘Angai’, the Bridal Songs of Pashtun Bride of Baluchistan. These all songs meant to highlight the feelings and emotions of Pashtun brides which also reflect the existing norms being practiced in the said culture.

Background of the Study

Pashtun, historically called the Aryans, resides mainly to the North and South of Durand Line that forms the Pak- Afghan border. The language of Pashtuns i.e. “Pashto” is one of the unifying forces that has given them an identity in the whole world. Caroe (1976) in his book “the Pathans” clearly mentions that Pashto language is one of the indispensable attribute of Pashtun identity. Almost all of the Pashtuns would agree with assertion that Pashtun and Pashto language are inseparable. The interplay of semantics and lexemes of Pashto language and of Pashto behavior and

mannerism is embodied in a belief that ‘Pashtun is the one who does Pashto’, not merely who speaks Pashto’. (Bartlotti, N. 2010, p.115).

Pashtuns, the ruggedly independent people, are distinguished from other groups in the region by adhering to Pashtun code of ethics known as ‘Pashtunwali’. It includes the following main tenets:

Badal : Revenge in case of any injustice.

Melmastia: Hospitality

Tureh: bravery. Savings one’s honor and respect of family

Ghayrat: dignity and honor

Namus: respect for women

Jirgha : assembly of the tribal leaders for solving grave issues.

Sabat : loyalty

Rogha : reconciliation of the disputing parties (Wright, D. 2010, p. 10-11).

These are the fundamentals which demand almost every Pashtun to observe and abide by. All of these points shall be given due consideration prior to analysis of Pashto literature. It is these aspects which form the background for understanding the aesthetics and spice of Pashto literature. (Abid, Abdullah Jan., 2008).

Angai or Chaghian originated by Pashtun women of the Sanzaerkhail subtribe of Kakars. This form of folk poetry is practiced in Qilla Saifullah, Zhob, Loralai and Ziarat districts of Baluchistan. In Loralai Angai is also known as ‘Chaghian’. It is a part of the wedding ceremony. Pashtun bride on the last day of her wedding just before the departure to her husband’s home sits on a special place known as ‘Takht’ wearing a new dress and a special flower embroidered colorful veil known as ‘Gul Tikray’ starts singing ‘Angai’. While singing, friends of the bride and her relatives also weep and take turns singing. It is must for the bride to sing herself in case if she does not, she loses her status and reputation for social competence. Those who sings the best ‘Angai’ are considered as socially competent, who can express her protest in front of everyone without the fear of opposite gender. (Kakar, Syal. (1987). It is sung in a special mournful melody form in which the bride weeps with the halting voice inserted regularly in the common place In this form of poetry she remembers the deeds of her parents, siblings and relatives but she may not necessarily praise them for the perceived mistreatment if she had any. (Claus, P.J., 2003, p.17).

2. Literature Review:

Pashto literature comprises of two streams and is laden with rich world of cultural representations of Afghanistan and Pakistan. In order to understand Pashto literature it is important to clarify the difference between Afghan literature and Pashto literature. The former represents national heritage of Afghanistan whereas the latter represents the literature that developed on either side of Pak-Afghan border. A lot of research has been done to find out the exact date of the advent of Pashto literature, but the knowledge and notification of local traditions claim that Pashto literature

dates back to Eighth century, which is preserved in a compendium of Pashto popular poetry known as ‘Pata Khazana’ (Hidden Treasure). Thus it was and is oral in terms of all primary sources, modes of expression, transmission and in context of performances. It is the oral and not the written form of Pashto literature which is the major form of Cultural representation and expression. (Bartlotti, 2010)

In the domain of oral literature, Pashtun culture has been depicted in a popular folk poetry known as ‘Tappa’. It covers up the diversity of Pashtun’s social organization, civilization, values and traditions of the Pashtuns. It speaks volumes about the Pashtun history. It is also known as ‘misra’ and ‘landai’. According to researchers of Linguistics, all languages have been originated from their poetic genre, which is folk poetry. So in this opinion Pashto researchers and Linguists concluded that Pashto poetry originated from ‘Tappa’, the most popular genre. There are a number of folk poetic genres which has played a significant role in enriching the literature of Pashtun culture. It includes ‘Naara’, ‘Kakari Ghara’, ‘Angai’, ‘loba’, ‘charbetta’, ‘sundaray’ and ‘ghazal’. (Abid, Abdullah Jan., 2008)

2.1 Contribution of Women to Pashto folk Literature

A Pashtun woman is in no way different in her abilities and talents from the women of the rest of the world. Be it the land of agriculture or a land of battle, she has always played her significant part. Though in most of the social set ups and organizations she is considered a domestic commodity and a production machine, but it will not be wrong to say that even in the primitive societies we will exceptional cases of Pashtun Women who has set examples that of outstanding conduct. And this is so true about a Pashtun woman who is the author of thousands of Tappas, landais, kakari gharra, sundarey, naara, charbeyta, loba, Angai or chaghiyan and many more. The mind of a Pashtun woman is replete with volumes of poetic treasures. She has made classic and outstanding contributions to Pashto literature. The popular folk genre ‘tappa’ is often associated with women. ‘landai’ is another folk poetry which is also and mostly sung by female party of Pashtun tribe. In Afghanistan women sing ‘landai’ which is accompanied by musical instrument tambourine (tsamba), and they sing it when no men are around. There are two reasons for not singing in front of men. The first is the rules of purdah have limited such performances of female and the other is connection of low status being attached to class of performers. Grimma found that, Pashtun women sing it in occasions like weddings or working in the fields. (as cited in Heston, Wilma, 2010). ‘Qessa’ which is another form of folk poetry carries feelings and emotions of Pashtun women. Grimma whose main concern was to research on the poetic genres founded by women observed that all of the poetic genres in one way or another represent role of a Pashtun women in Pashtun culture. In this regard Heston, by scrutinizing the available cassettes, chapbooks and narratives authored by Pashtun women analyzed gender imagery in “Angai” one of the folk poetries. (Heston, Wilma, 2010)

2.2 Bridal Songs in Other Parts of the World

Women performances and their role in imparting literary treasure to their respective cultures include fables, legends, riddles, proverbs and songs both ritual and occasional. They are passed from generation to generation. Literary heritage of songs and stories provide an easy access to the past and it also gives rich information regarding particular culture and expected role of a woman as a mother, daughter, sister and wife. Women of Africa have covered up almost every occasion of life like wedding, declaration of war, announcement of political resistance or lamentation on a military loss. The bridal songs of African women as observed by researchers found several themes including, grief, sexism, gender imagery and patriarchal social system. (Daymond et al., 2003)

2.3 South Asian Bridal Songs

South Asian women have played a significant part in contributing to the South Asian literary heritage by producing life cycle songs according to occasions and situations. Hindu and Muslim women have documented thousands of weddings songs sung either by the bride or sung by her friends and relatives. In the realm of oral folk poetry there is a continuous addition of new bridal songs encompassing the topics which include, express of joy, gloominess, teasing, taunting and protesting. Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India, is a region where women sing “Suhag Songs” in which expresses the gloominess of the bride. One of the examples is as follows:

**“Father sought and brought a groom
From a distant land,
My tender heart is breaking
Look look girlfriend my hands are decorated
My hands are decorated with henna
Look look girlfriends my palanquin is setting off
My girlfriends weep from the palace balconies”**
(Nettl, B., (2000), p.414-415

3. Research Design:

In order to achieve the objective of the present study cited below, a qualitative research design was employed in which thematic analysis was used so as to determine the most influential dominant themes in the Pashtun bridal songs. Edward and Weller (2012) have recommended employing thematic analysis when researcher aims “to identify key topics and patterns in texts in order to create interpretive meaning” (p.205). This method moves beyond the explicit counting of words and phrases and focuses on both explicit and implicit underpinnings of the concepts or themes hidden in between the words which expresses ones feelings and all together a complete culture. (Byram, 2006). The frequencies of each theme were calculated so as to determine their influence in the songs

This study is aimed to determine the most dominant themes in Pashto folk genre ‘Angai’

3.1 Data Collection:

Nine of the bridal songs were extracted from the compilation of famous Pashto writers Syal Kakar and Late Abdul Khair Zalaand. These songs were included in the research due their wide fame among Pashtun people.

Theme	Frequency
Grief and Departure	10**
Masculinity and Gender Imagery	7*
Patriarchy	4
Patriarchy and Gender Imagery	3

**First most influential theme

*Second most influential theme

4. Theme of Grief and Departure:

Balya di wakhlam Zamana Wrora
Topak darwakhla kartoos par gora
Da zra par sar ma wala pa zora
Shadi war gham ka da zma la lora

Explanation. In the above mentioned Angai, a bride asks her brother to take out his gun and shoot her; so that the marriage procession converts into funeral procession. The grief stricken bride expresses her ‘grief’ of getting wed and being ‘departed’ to her in-laws.

Da spinni khuni pa wra wra zhe
Na da khor yam na ma khor ye
Na ma la mora zo kargi ye
Ta ba tar gurdu urmai rathle
Ta da badaanu malgari ye

Explanation: In most of the Pashto Bridal songs, it is found that Pashtun bride express her ‘grief’ and anger by calling her own father, sister, brothers and relatives as some unknown beings who shows no concern for the one who is going away from her homeland. In such bridal songs ‘grief’ and ‘departure’ are the dominant themes. In The above mentioned Angai, the line, “Na da khor yam na ma khor ye, Na ma la mora zo kargi ye” represents bride grief for her sister, and she rejects to be her sister, because she was the one who helped her at the time of need, but today she is with those who wants to get her married. Another bridal song in which the bride is angry with her father who has given his daughter in affiance to Khurasan Groom, a caste and family considered to be of low status by bride as she herself was from a rich and high caste family, she expresses her grief and anger in the following lines,

‘Za la baba sa khwabadgiyam,
 Na ma dai plaar dai na ye lur yam,

Wa khurasanoi te war kargi yam’

4.1 Theme of Masculinity and Gender Imagery

Zalima cheeri di walidam

Topak di dak kai wadi wishtam

Pa mra di nakam zakhmi di kam

Wazar mi math su ra wul waidam

Explanation: The above mentioned lines of bridal song, refers to marriage at an early age, in which bride has compared herself with the bird who has been shot by a hunter, though she didn’t die but got injured and lost her wings. The comparison which the bride has made shows her ‘grief’ for getting married at an early age when those were the days to play with dolls and enjoy nature. In these particular lines we also find the ‘hegemonic masculinity’. A man who plays the role of a hunter and shoots the independent bird and a man who in a real context plays the role of a groom who marries a small girl and makes her shoulder the giant responsibilities of a marital life. This bridal song represents the theme of Gender imagery, in which Pashtun man has been shown as a hunter whereas Pashtun woman as a victim

4.2. Themes of Patriarchy:

Sur wor di wa kor ta lwazhi

Kwandi yateeman da doi pathazhi

Khwandi de wraari buri garzazhi

Bya ba haal da pashtana khabrazhi

Explanation: The above mentioned Angai is basically sung by a bride who has lost her dear ones at the time when Pashtuns were in conflict with British Militants. In this particular Angai she expresses her ‘gloominess’ for the loss of her dear ones, her father, brothers and cousins. In Pashtun society manpower and man existence in a family is of grave importance. If in any case he is being killed, then the family members suffer a great deal. In the above mentioned bridal song, the theme of ‘Patriarchy’ has been explicitly elicited in the lines when bride curses British Militants and wish the same curse of time on their families and female wards so that they may realize the loss which actually the bride’s family has been through.

4.3. Theme of Patriarchy and Gender Imagery:

In Pashto language, paternal uncle are called as ‘**Tarboor**’. *Tarboor*’ has always been euphemized as evil-wisher or enemy of his nephews and niece. A lot of ‘**Angai**’ are found to have been sung against them in which they have been cursed for giving them in wed-locks against their wishes. **Ma la Tarbaruna ra nana wazhi, Zruna ye shadi pa dard gayezhi, Zeezi da bal di na pa zoblazhi.**” (Kakar, S., 1987, Angai 14, p.164.). In the above said Angai bride has portrayed the dual nature of her *Tarbaruna*, who apparently portrays a sad face but in actual they are happy because they have given their niece in affiance to someone without her consent. She being left

an orphan has been treated as an animal by her own **Tarbaruna**. Again the primary authority figures have played their central role in deciding the fate of an orphan, which represents a **Patriarchic theme** and there is a representation of **Gender imagery** as well, in which bride, the female ward has been shown as a subordinate being, who have no other option but to bow her head in front of what **Pashtun Patriarchs** have decided about her. Which is why she compare herself with an animal.

There is another cruel custom in Pashtun society. In a feud when someone is killed then the '**jirga**' (jury) settle the dispute by determining certain amount to be paid to the aggrieved party as a blood money or girls be given into marriage. This custom is known as '**nek**' in Pashto language. The victim girl then suffers torment and remains under humiliation for the rest of her life by her in-laws and leads a life of slave. Under this custom an innocent girls are sacrificed on the altar of sins committed by someone else and sometime much earlier than her birth. A girl given in marriage as '**nek**' to a family whose member has been murdered by her uncle, cries her torment in an '**Angai**' as:

**“Da spinni khuni tar manz ghanam,
Zma nasiba wrak di sa nam,
La meizho la wazo di za sama kam,**

In these lines the bride curses her fate for being considered as a sacrificial animal and best option for settling blood feuds.

**“Bad kako wakral za zobla swam,
Chi pa badai ki war kargi yam”**

The Pashtun bride in a very outright manner says that she is being sacrificed for someone else's crime.

**“Da dol o surna pa nacha ki khalgu
Halaal e do la ba za war zam
Ta khlass pama sway da marga pora
Za kaak ghundi swazam pa ore”.**

Pashtun bride who is being considered a **commodity** of sacrifice for settling disputes compares herself with the (**kaak, a bread baked in a kiln**) who will be burning in her in-laws till her death. Pashtun (**Jirgah, Jury**) leaders announced their decision, fulfilling the role of Patriarchs, and representing **Patriarchal theme**, whereas Pashtun girl, **stereotypical picture** has been portrayed by bride who is being considered as an animal for sacrifice to resolve disputes. So the image of Pashtun woman is being represented as an **entity or commodity or an animal** that must do what **Patriarchs** decides.

In Pashtun society a worst king of custom is that of '**Sarai**' or '**Mokhie**' in which a daughter, sister or niece is exchanged with a girl to whom the father, brother or

uncle himself desires to marry. Again a clear imbalance between the couple is seen as the person desirous to marry a girl of his choice does not keep in view the desires his ward. Sometimes the age difference is twice of the age of bride. The ‘**Angai**’ in which bride laments:

**“Da spinni khuni tar makh maakhi,
Baba warkam par sarai,
Par ma ye rawasta sha nawakai
Kshaye nawala par sha niyalai
Wus ma war basi sakhta garai,”**

In these lines bride sings about the custom of (*Sarai*) and says that her own father has brought a young bride for himself and has given his own daughter to an old man in exchange, both of the brides are young who has been exchanged by their fathers to get themselves married while fulfilling the custom of *Sarai*. Both male members who enjoy being male fulfilled their hidden hideous desires with the help of customs like *Sarai*, while giving no preference to the choice of their female wards. The will and desires of *Patriarchs* has been sated in the garb of practicing such customs like Sarai, in which main decision holders are again Pashtun male and the sufferers are Pashtun female.

**Da da bori pa sar ki dewa da
Pa pradai kor ki astoga sra da
Kor ye tanur gaaye lamba da
Bashar pa swazi tar taikh tera da**

Explanation: Joint family system is one of the most significant social structures of Pashtun tribe. In most of the families, be it urban or rural, nuclear family system is not appreciated and consequently is not in practice. So a newly married Pashtun bride is confronted with an entirely a complex set of joint social structure where she would be facing everyone with submission of her being. Above mentioned Angai depicts *Gender Imagery* of Pashtun bride in her in-laws. She says that the change of one’s social set up is difficult indeed. One would really burn alive in abode of the in-laws which is like a furnace and their speech a blazing fire. In Angai

**“Wa pradai khalgu te warkargi yam,
Pa haryaani ba waliyara yam,
Da kshni ow da loi pa raza ba zam
Ka ma zhagh wakai be plara yam,”**

The stereotypical role of bride has been shown in the lines when she says that at her in laws she will be one of the subordinate being as required by the norms of marriage in Pashtun society where her wishes be according to the will of her in-laws. And in any case if she refuses to accept any of their orders or demands then she must not forget that she is an orphan and is without her father, her strongest pillar that would then stand by her side and support her is now no more alive. In addition with the mention of father it is again clarified that how Pashtun daughters are culturally

and socially developed dependent on their Male wards. So there is a depiction of Patriarchy as another dominant theme.

4.4. Implications of the Findings

To create awareness about different cultures and their norms has been the prime concern of the social researches these days. The findings of the present study provide the deeper insight into the Pashtun cultural and it also sheds light on the feelings and emotions of Pashtun brides on the eve of their weddings. The finding also provided wide and spacious awareness of Pashtun culture among those who are keenly interested in cross cultural studies. The last but not the least, the findings of the present study contribute significantly on the existing literature on Pashtun culture.

5. Conclusion

Detailed thematic analysis of '*Angai*' revealed that essential tenets of Pashtun Culture have served the background for producing and shaping this particular folk genre. It has depicted the *stereotype Gender role of Pashtun Man over stereotype Pashtun Woman. Patriarchy* one of the dominant themes has been demonstrated in almost every line of above mentioned '*Angai*'. The stereotype cultural role of Pashtun man has been clearly marked and defined by cultural traits as *Pashtun man the authoritative*, who holds an authority to each and everything, be it moral issues, political or economic ones; he has been shown as *decisive*, who decides the fate of the opposite gender, in the form of different roles. Sometimes he is a *Mullah*, Muslim Priest who decides her fate, sometimes a father who takes a lot of *Walwar*, giving consideration to money while ignoring the will of his own daughter. Sometimes as a '*Jirgah*' leader who considers woman as a sacrificial animal to resolve blood feuds. Sometimes as a father who with the help of *Sarai* fulfills his own wishes, while giving no due consideration to his female wards.

Gender of Pashtun woman has been shown as **submissive, a domestic commodity**, who should bow her head in front of the authorities, decisions being taken regarding her fate and in front of her in-laws where her role is to *serve and produce*. Moreover she has been shown as a *dependent being* who lives a good life only if her father or husband is alive. Once they are gone, the life of the daughter and wife becomes miserable because from the very inception she is culturally and socially developed as dependent on her male gentry. *Pashtun male* has been shown **superior and strong**, whereas the *opposite gender* has been shown as *emotional and weak*.

Every culture and society comes up with its basic fundamentals and tenets which serve to maintain its real essence with peace and development. Tenets of any culture tend to resolve, to save, to protect and develop in the long run of life in this vulnerable world. Every fundamental is based on sound principles that come up with positivity. So is the case with Pashtun culture and its code of life '*Pashtunwali*'. It is not the tenet, the ritual or the custom which is wrong but it is always the hidden hideous desire of human which are wrong.

Favoring man power and man's decisions is not wrong if it is respecting woman and considers her as human being having will and emotions. Though tenets may appear as cruel if it kills independence and freedom of individuals, in that case it can prove to be disastrous if they do not maintain a balance among man and woman. *Namus* and *Nang* are the essential tenets that serve to protect and defend the honor of women at all costs and the Pashtun leader who takes care of his *Namus* is actually called *Nangyalai*, who does not only speak Pashto but does Pashto by taking care of his female ward. In the end I would say that imbalance and extremity of everything is dangerous. If Pashtun Culture happens to receive a *Nangyalai* Leader, then instead of hues and cries there will be expression of joy and happiness in any genre of Pashto literature.

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