Reflective Discourse On Badal In The Pak-Afghan Pakhtun Society

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Abstract
This article attempts to examine the discourse on badal (revenge) in Pak-Afghan Pakhtun society reflected in Pakhto idioms, proverbs and tappas. Pakhtunwali (Pukhtoon code of life) considers badal (revenge), a justifiable pursuit, and a code of honour, which requires a payback to the offender, sooner or later, an established attitude, better late than never. In Pakhtu language, badal (revenge) carries positive and negative connotations such as, exchange of gifts, hospitality, and/or the exchange of violence and revenge. Badal as exchange or reciprocate is highlighted and glorified through idioms, proverbs in the Pakhto language and literature. The textual and contextual sense of the term, badal, is presented and represented in linguistic, social, psychological, economic and communicative pursuits. However, the horrible consequences, ignorance, weak argumentative approach and religious teachings are never attributed to it. It is
never gazed from the perspective of weak judicial system and an impressive social discourse. Its links are always traced in sentimental whims and excessive power.

**Keywords:** Revenge, glorification, negative connotations, social discourse, power

**Introduction**

The Pakhtun as ethnic group reside on either side of the Durand Line: Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Pakistan, they predominantly live in the north-western part of Pakistan particularly, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, merged districts of FATA, and Baluchistan. In Afghanistan, the bulk of Pakhtun population reside in the south-east and south-west. The Pakhtun on both sides of the Durand Line follow Pakhtunwali as code of life. They all consider Qais Abdur Rashid as putative father of Pakhtuns. There are two major tribal groups of Pakhtun: Durrani and Ghilzais. All Pakhtuns are connected to these tribal groups through tribes, sub-tribes, clan and families.

The Pakhtun have faced and survived courageously in war and fighting, that’s why they are generally called warrior-nation. Even currently, the war on terror in Pakistan and the subsequent insurgency, has not yet ended. The Taliban in Afghanistan emerged in 1996 as reaction to the deteriorating law and order situations created by the Mujahidden, the remnants of the Afghan war (1979-1989). The core of the Taliban came from the Pakhtun stock. History testifies that the Pakhtun as nation have never accepted foreign aggression or dominance. For instance, the Pakhtun offered a strong resistance to Chengiz Khan the great Mangol Warrior and Taimur (Taimurlain). They never bowed to the Mughal rule in India and settled the score with the British rulers during the colonial period. The armed struggle of the Pukhtun leaders like Mirza Ali Khan (Faqir of Ipi), Ajab Khan Afridi, Haji Sahib Turangzai, and Chamni Khan testify this reality.

The history of this long reaction can be attributed to the value of badal (revenge). The Pakhtun believe in taking badal once the opportunity arises. Their physical structure and habits reflect their toughness, harshness and straight forward mode of expression. Their language and selection of the words speak volumes of their harsh behavior; linked with the harsh realities of history. The folk tales (dastans) of Pakhtun mirror the Pakhtun society and the concept of revenge reflecting in one way or the other. The obvious examples include: Yousaf Khan Sher Bano, Musa Khan Gul Makai. Tordil Shahai. Mehbooba Jalat and Sher Alam Memonai. These traditional tales were documented by Romantic Folk Tales of Pakistan, National Mirror (A Reflection of Pashtun Culture through Folktales) and Pashtun Tales from Pakistan-Afghan Frontier by Behram Tariq, Muhammad Gul Noori and Aisha Ahmad and Roger Boast respectively. In Afghanistan, Noor Muhammad Noori, published the collection of Pashto indigenous- dastans in his book Milli Hindara; for the first time, these stories were published in prose. The famous stories of this book are; Momin Khan Sherino, Musa Jan ao Wali Jan, Jalat Khan ao Shumaila, Khadi ao Bibo, Zarif Khan ao Mabai, Qutub Khan ao Nazo, dale ao Shahu, Adam durkhanai. Except the last one, all the stories are indigenous to Afghanistan. Besides,

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the referred books, the value of revenge is an integral part of the idioms, proverbs, tappas, poetry, history, prose and culture. They are discussed briefly as under:

**Pakhto Idioms**

Idioms are expressions of the living speech of a community and can be traced in the bloodstream of a language. Idioms have different sources; some of them have historical background, or story (incident). The linguistic vitality of idioms employs a sense to a language and it is vital for learners to understand and apply them. The meaning of an idiomatic phrase is sometimes veiled in several contexts. A few selected idioms, as discussed by Tair and Edwards in their book, Rohi Mataloon Pushto Proverbs, which reflect the concept of revenge, are discussed below:

**Arha Pa Arha Khlasegi**

As translated by Tair and Edwards (2011) ‘Only a bowlful food repays a bowlful of food. The English sense of the idiom is one good deed deserves another. It is employed as reciprocity or exchange. On occasions of happiness and gloom, the Pakthuns give gifts and contributions, which are repaid to them on similar occasions.

**Ogora! Pakhtun Sal Kaala Pass Khpal Badal Waghasto; Wail Che Zar Ye Waghasto**

Hundred years is a long duration, however, for pakhtuns, still it is a very short period. The Pakhtun code of honour requires a payback to the offender sooner or later and in the Pakhtun world view, “better late than never” so as to preserve honour. It can also be linked with the slow process of justice. Therefore, they don’t like to engage, however, this is also a fact that the modernized Pakhtun use nowadays state machinery/tools against their enemies wherever required. In the settled districts, this practice is in abundance, whereas in tribal areas, state use is rare for settling their scores. They would rather violate the state laws to take revenge from their enemies on their own as they consider it a coward act to refer their personal and family feuds to the state authorities.

**Badmazhabi la Kharmazhabi” Or “Kaga Khula Pa Sook Samegi**

The English sense of this Pakhto idiom is, “For a perverted man, there should always be a mischievous man”. The other translations might be send a thief to catch a thief or ghee cannot be pulled out with straight fingers. It means wrong things cannot be rectified through noble acts. It would require some harsh steps to put things in order.

**Badal Pa Badal Khlasegi**

‘Tit for tat’ or only a quid pro quo response would settle the matter. For a settlement of the dispute, the compensation package is always very huge, which include blood money, property, arranging food for the whole area and Swara (offender has to give his daughter(s)/sister(s) as compensation to the family of the victim). Swara is an evil practice in the
Pashtun culture and banned by state-law. The norms of Swara is not liked by anyone but they have to practice it for the sake of honour and settlement of disputes.

The case study of Ubaidullah Kaka would help explain the situation in a better manner. Ubaidullah Kaka was a resident of Mohallah Noohian in Kheshgi Payan village of Nowshera district. An influential family of his village had killed his brother. He was determined to avenge the death of his brother. He would carry arms all the time and would pursue his enemies whenever he would get a chance. During the struggle to take revenge his own family members including his brother and sisters had stayed away and left him alone. The rival family was very influential and they were making great efforts for a compromise. Finally, Ubaidullah Kaka agreed to make a compromise on the only condition that he would take blood money in cash amounting to Rs 450,000. The rival family happily agreed. At the ceremony for the compromise, Ubaid Kaka gave Rs 50,000 from the blood money to the jirga (the mediators) as a kind of service charges and set the remaining amount on fire. This was an unusual act. It was rather a more horrible revenge. It caused deep shock to his enemies, who were heard as saying that even the killing of a person from their family would not have been so shocking for them.

Wra Pa Wra; Minat Ye Pa Sa

When flour is exchanged for flour, why should one feel any obligation? It is about exchange of gifts and hospitality. The Pakhtuns are famous for their hospitality. They remember the gifts and contributions given to them at the times of sorrow and happiness and they return them on similar occasions. This phrase refers to the quality of selflessness of the Pakhtuns. It means that while giving a gift or support to their friends and relatives or even strangers, the Pakhtuns never expect a reward for it.

Pa Ta Me Wass Na Rasee; Mar Ba De Plar

I can’t hurt you, but I can hurt your father. The reference is to the coward who unable to take revenge on his enemy. The Pakhtuns have a history of fighting wars and keeping enmities and feuds. Majority of the Pakhtu idioms and proverbs are derived wars and feuds. This idiom refers to taking revenge from a weaker person in the feuds. Among Pakhtuns anyone from the rival family is killed to avenge the killing of their own family member. The stronger is often not attacked owing to his strength and security and the weaker is easily targeted.

Pa Qasab Na Warze Ao Pa Darzi Warze

You can’t complain to the butcher and you scold a tailor. It is similar to the previous idiom meaning that it is easy to attack or target a weaker person. Yet, another idiom denotes similar meaning i.e. Oba Pa Kamzoree Warakh Mategi – water takes its course on a weaker point.

Che Zoye, Rore Ye Cha Wajaley; Da Agha Laas Dee Cha Newalee
When your son or brother has been murdered who then has tied your hands. When a Pakhtun’s relative has been murdered, no law on earth can stop him from taking revenge. Normally it is the duty of the state to try and punish murderers. But in Pakhtun society, the victim’s family doesn’t aspire for the state’s action. They take revenge themselves. Rather they consider it coward to move to the state authorities in such cases. If they fail to reach to the actual murderer, they would kill another person from the rival family.

Sok Ma Waha Pa Gota; Ta Ba Na Wahi Pa Lata

Avoid beating a man with your finger and he will not kick you. If you don’t threaten a man with harm, he will not take excessive revenge. In a Pakhtun society, if some minor harm is inflicted on an individual or a family, they would give a fitting response. Otherwise, it is considered cowardly to stay silent in such a situation.

Khar Ghairat Kare Wo Nu Laarey Owaho

The donkey stood his ground and was killed by the bus. Ghairat (Honour) is a core value in Pushtoon culture, refers to a combination of zeal, courage, honor, pride and autonomy. This term, Ghairat is a powerful value in Pakhtun society. It forces the Pakhtuns to inflict severe harms. Sometime, they do aberrant things in the name of Ghairat.

Da Pakhtu Kaanry Pa Obo Ke Na Wrastegi

The stone of Pakhtunwali (code of life) cannot be dissolved in water. The psychology of the Pakhtun requires that eventually one will take his revenge from an enemy, even though, outwardly, he may appear friendly. It may also mean that the Pakhtuns’ word of honor does not grow old or Pakhuns’ enmity never gets older. The Pakhuns take revenge whenever they get the opportunity. They can even wait for a hundred years.

Ka Landey Ghwaey Pa Badal Ke Qablave Nu Plar De Ma Wajale

If you accept this puny bullock as blood money, then I have killed your father. This is about confessions. When the culprit is assured of paying nominal compensation for his crime to settle a dispute, he would confess his wrongdoing. Otherwise, he would never accept that he is the killer.

Pakhto Proverbs

Pakhto proverbs are short rhythmical sayings which express a general belief or truth or an integral cultural reality. Furthermore, this saying carries a historical context, a memorable statement that contains advice, warning or prediction and experience. A few proverbs, relevant to the topic, are discussed in the following:

Islam Tar Turey Laandey Dey
The semantics of the proverb is ‘Islam is under the shadow of a sword’. It glorifies the spirit of holy war (Jihad). It says Islam could be implemented and expanded through sword. Almost all the Pakhtuns are Muslims and they have great attachment to their religion. Islam and Pakhtunwali are the two slogans which have always remained a spirit of motivation. The main reason behind the resistance offered by the Pakhtuns to the invaders throughout their history is their love for Islam and their own traditions.

Che Ikhtiar Da Jang Laree; Pukhtana Pa Sang Laree

He who has the power to fight doesn’t negotiate. The Pakhtuns have great respect for their elders (Masharan), who have the authority to declare war or make peace. So, the ones who get the authority to declare war and come to the table of negotiation, they would always prefer fighting over talks and compromises.

Hagha Che Da Hindustan Na Daulat Ao Afghanistan Na Sar Rawree; Hagha Hokhia Dey

The man who brings wealth back from India or his head from Afghanistan is clever indeed. The people of India were considered as shrewd businessmen and those of Afghanistan as great warriors. This proverb refers to both the qualities of the two countries as the one who could do successful business and earn money in India and the one who could spend his day in peace in Afghanistan and turns back home safe are considered the clever people. Afghanistan has been the graveyard for various invaders armies and civilizations. To invade Afghanistan is too easy but to sustain it very difficult. This is history Afghanistan was and still is predominantly inhabited by the Pakhtun population and they are famous for their Pakstuns are intelligent too but have no one to speak for them, Alas. They have a history of resistance to foreign invaders. So, it is not safe to invade or visit the country with bad intention.

Che Jang Soor She; No Mozi Tood She

When the fighting, the cowards get all heated up. Mozi is a cowardly character, who expresses his anger after the fighting. The proverb actually pacifies it is useless to create hue and cry after the fighting. There are other proverbs in Pashto having similar meaning such as: “Kom Sook Che Da Jang No Roosto Yad Shi Khpala Khpala Pe Wahal Pakar Dee” meaning the punch one remembers after a fight should be hit in one’s own mouth.

Da Zoorawar Oba Pa Lwara Kheji

The powerful man’s water runs uphill. The right of the fittest, might is right and similar theories have remained the major theories in almost all human societies. The Pakhtun society is also having influential and powerful figures whose voice is heard and actions respected. They can even do things which common people can’t think of.

Da Khwar Akhund Pa Baang Sok Kalima Hum Na Wayee

No one will even say the Kalima at the call to prayer of a penniless mullah. Sharply opposite to the previous proverb, this one refers to the status of poor people in the Pakhtun society. Lack of money is not the lone symbol of poverty. Manpower is also considered as source
of power among Pakhtuns. The one lacking material resources and manpower besides poor tribal
lineage is considered poor and his voice is rarely heeded.

**Pakhto Tappas**

Tappa is a unique feature of Pakhto poetry. The two liner is written and spoken in a magnificent
manner. It is a folk poetry. Gun, sword, empty shells and other things and expressions related to
war are repeatedly used in tappa. Tappas are always written from woman point of view or the
focus of Tappa is women’s voices and emotions.

Che Jang La Zey Ma Boza Yaara;
Tashey Tooqey Ba De Pa Jang Ke Tolawama

    Take me with you when you go to war; I shall collect your empty shells for you, my
darling! In this particular tappa, the lover calls her partner to take her to the war as she would
support him in the fighting.

Ta Pa Ghaza Ke Zaan Shaheed Kra
Za Ba Khpal Shawl Sta Pa Ziarat Oghwarama

    Go to war and become a martyr; and then I shall spread out my head shawl upon your
shrine. The lovers love to see his beloved killed in a war instead of showing cowardice. She
motivates him in the tappa to show gallantry and get killed which would be a matter of pride for
her and she would lay her head shawl on his shrine. Spreading shawls on shrine is a symbol of
respect for saints and martyrs in this part of the world.

Jang Kho Da Kalee Manz Ta Raghey
Namarda Porta Shah Che Mla De Otarama

    They fight in the heart of the village; Get up now you coward, so that I can gird your
lions. In this tappa, a young man is provoked to take part in the war.

Ghag Sho Pa Kat Ye Janaan Rawro
Zra Me Papar Sho Che Ye Pa Sha Na Vee Zakhmona

    They have brought my friend on a stretcher, my heart is trembling—what if they found
wounds on his back? Getting hurt in the chest in the war is a sign of bravery and on the back a
symbol of cowardice. The lover her is worried about his beloved when his body is taken to
village. She doesn’t want him to have wounds on his back. She would be proud if he has wound
in his chest.

Janana Kha Da Che Zakhmi Shwey
Za Ba Da Khpala Ghara Haska Garzawama
I am grateful for your wounds, my love; now I can proudly lift up my head among people. The lover feels proud for the wounds that his beloved has sustained in the war. Now she would tell stories of his gallantry to his friends.

Jhandey Me Sre Pa Qabar Kegdey
Pa Shahadat Da Khpal Watan Jannat La Zama

Place blood red banners upon my grave; I go to paradise, a martyr for my country. Fighting for protection of motherland is a matter of great pride and honour in the Pakhtun society. The fighter loves to be killed in the battlefield. This would lead him to paradise.

Che Pa Maiwand Ke Shaheed Na Shwe
Khudego Laalia Benangai La De Saatama

If you return alive from Maiwand; I pray that God may keep you alive to disgrace. Maiwand war carries a special status in the wars fought on the soil of the Pakhtuns. The lover taunts her beloved who returned alive from the war. She calls her a coward and says she would keep him remembering for his cowardice.

Da Akbar Khan Ghazi Pa Toora
Watan Ranra Sho Dukhmanan Pa Maatey Zeena

By the sword of Akbar Khan Ghazi; Light broke upon the land, the defeated foe is fleeing. Akbar Khan Ghazi is a heroic character among Pakhtuns. This couplet refers to his bravery due to which the area got free and the enemies fled away.

Charta Chitral ao London Charta
Benangi Zor Shwa Peerangian Chitral La Zeena

Where is Chitral and where is London? Dishonor increases; the British go to Chitral. This refers to the Britishers invasion on Chitral. The couple says how far Chitral from London is but owing to the cowardice of the local population, the Britishers are making their way to invade Chitral.

Raza Che Otakhtoo Janana
Norey Khabarey Ba Speen Giree Speenawena

Come, let us flee together, my love; Let us leave the problems for the old greybeards to solve. Elopement is an unpardonable sin in the Pakhtun society. But here the lover seduces her beloved to elope and leave it for the elders of the area to settle the matter then.
If you are not brave, what are you then? You, who have sucked the breasts of a true Pakhtun mother. Pakhtun mothers give birth to brave children. Whoever show cowardice is rejected as the son of a non-Pakhtun mother. This couplet stresses that the milk of Pakhtun mothers nurture only brave sons and it is not possible for one to be suckled by a Pakhtun mother and he would come out to be a coward.

Conclusion

The history of Pakhtuns is replete with wars, fighting, and infightings. Badal reinforces honor, resistance and fighting as the prominent features in the Pak-Afghan Pakhtun society. Most of the discussions made in the Pakhtun hujras (council) and common gatherings, pertain to honour, fighting, tools of war, and bullets. Pakhtu is a very rich language. The Pakhto prose and poetry is full of tales of wars fought on the Pakhtun soil. Folk Pakhtu literature like Pakhto Matal (idioms and proverbs), tappa (couplets) are too full of stories of revenge, bravery, honour, cowardice and other such expressions. It has been found out in this paper that the Pakhto literature has always glorified the features of revenge, honor and fighting. The Pakhtun have always been motivated to fight wars in the name of Islam for protection of their land and for settling the personal and family feuds. This way Islam and the Pakhtunwali are the two identity tools in the Pakhtun society (mis)used in times when needed to safeguard their interests and culture. They have always been compelled on resistance and taking badal from their enemies. This is the reason that sustained peace and stability has rarely been found in Pakhtun society in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

References


