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**Globalization's Influence on Pashtun Cultural Values: A Study of Proverbs about Women across Different Age Groups**

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**Original Article**

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**Abstract**

*The study aims to understand the complex relationship between cultural tradition and societal change. It explores the interaction of proverbial knowledge, regional context, and age in shaping societal views of women. This case study focuses on Pashtun (also called Pathan) folklore, showing how femininity was expressed historically, with traces still visible today. The study does not intend to justify or excuse these gender-biased proverbs; instead, it seeks to understand them within their historical and cultural setting. This study examines the relevance of specific proverbs about women among various age groups, focusing on the complexities of cultural tradition and change in both rural and urban contexts, using qualitative analysis of narrative data from a diverse participant group.*

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**Introduction**

Mataloona, or Pashto proverbs, are imbued with wisdom that reflects the depth of Pashtun culture and ethics. These aphorisms encompass a diverse array of life lessons and experiences, offering insights on subjects such as retribution, compassion, respect for women, and the troubling manifestations of extreme, violent sexism. Proverbs are self-contained, propositional assertions with grammatically complete sentences, and their origins are associated with folklore. They represent conciseness, significance, and cleverness, and are frequently used during times of difficulty and struggle. Proverbs are classified into several types, including adage, aphorism, apothegm, axiom, cliché, expression, idiom, maxim, saying, colloquial language, and triteness. Proverbs are linguistic structures used in a variety of contexts, including poetry, aphorisms, philosophical discussions, and everyday communication. They serve two purposes: literary and practical. The literary function refers to the lyrical and harmonious syntactic composition of certain proverbs, whereas the practical purpose refers to their conciseness, lyrical quality, vivid imagery, and implied commentary. Proverbs provide a substantial framework of values and beliefs for culture members, embodying the wisdom, biases, and superstitions inherent in that civilization. They are easy to learn and recite, but their effectiveness as an instructional tool is frequently overlooked. Proverbs have an ambiguous origin, as they predate written records and represent popular wisdom. The widespread distribution of proverbs is not an illusion, as various ancient proverbs have pierced many places around the world. They were and continue to be the most powerful and effective means of passing down culture, social ethics, practices, and ideas across generations. Trench (1853) attributes three traits to proverbs: shortness (brevity), meaning, and salt. Shortness is relative, and a proverb must be succinct and condensed while delivering essential wisdom. Proverbs are regarded traditional and can be utilized in a variety of ways, including forewarning, forearming, and warning of extremes (Dabaghi et al., 2010).

Proverbs constitute a form of folklore that embodies the cultural traditions of a society. They encapsulate the knowledge and experiences of generations, embodying the cultural standards

that must be interpreted within their historical and cultural contexts. During the colonial era, proverbs were examined by the colonizers. Churchill, Kipling, and Caroe analyzed the colonial Pashtun populace (Sanauddin, 2015). Proverbs provide a vivid representation of the cultural traditions of the Pathans (Caroe, 1958). In Pashtun society, proverbs play a crucial role in establishing norms and assigning gender roles (Ahmed, 2013).

Some of Pashtun proverbs portray women as powerless, treacherous, and delicate, hence reinforcing male authority and female enslavement. (Lomotey & Chacha, 2020). Pashto proverbs encapsulate and propagate a patriarchal perspective and sexist mindset. N. Sanauddin, 2015. Enevoldsen (2004 [1969]) posits that proverbs constitute a “masculine genre,” hence reflecting the gender roles ascribed to women in Pashtun society by patriarchal figures. Foucault (1976) highlighted that the patriarchal power system is perpetuated by sexist proverbs. Moreover, sexist proverbs sustain gender inequality by legitimizing and normalizing discriminatory behaviors. These misogynistic expressions normalize sexist beliefs, rendering them seemingly fundamental and unassailable, thus perpetuating a dominating discourse that shapes and enforces gender roles and affects individual identities. Productivity is an attribute of power; it signifies that authority can generate stereotypes. The stereotype, as a tool of power, can dominate, isolate, and oppress specific groups, particularly females. Foucault's theory allows us to reveal the power mechanisms inherent in sexist proverbs that shape society views and perpetuate gender inequality. In Foucault's diverse and intricate power relations, resistance is vital. Resistance to stereotyping may originate from diverse sources, including oppressed communities; where there is power, there is resistance (Foucault, 1975).

The proverbs illustrate a Pashtun community in which women are subservient to men, possessing a low social standing and without influence in any matters. However, in this era of globalization, even tightly-knit societies such as the Pashtuns are not exempt from significant change. The swift proliferation of technology, media, and communication has led to the erosion of certain traditions and practices within Pashtun society. The dissemination of Western cultural values via accessible social media is undermining traditional Pashtun traditions. The essence of Pashtun identity is being jeopardized by this cultural homogenization (Shahrani, 2002). According to Ahmed (2013), globalization has resulted in the monetization of Pashtun cultural traditions, gradually fostering cultural appropriation and the destruction of local customs. Globalization's transforming potential has resulted in an “identity crisis, cultural dislocation, and social disruption” (Edwards, 2002).

The beneficial aspect of this globalization-induced transformation is evident in the younger generation of male Pashtuns rejecting sexist proverbs. The globalization-induced paradigmatic change is altering the significance and interpretations of these proverbs, mirroring evolving perspectives on women's roles and identities (Glatzer, 2002).

### **Thematic Analysis of Proverbs under Investigation**

The following proverbs were analyzed for the research:

1. Da khazo ka poza na wa no ghul ba ai khorak o.  
دا بنڅو کا پوزا نا واي نو غول به بي خوراک او<sup>1</sup>

If women didn't have noses, they would even eat excrement.

This proverb reflects the idea that a woman's judgment and decision-making are flawed. This stereotype, rooted in patriarchal ideology, is reinforced by the proverb itself.

2. Khaza pa makh khawakhigi.  
بنڅه پا مخ خواځېگي

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<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge that Pashto text of Matloona was copied from: Farid, N., & Dinakhel, M. A. (2023). Social Impact of the Gender Related Pashto Proverbs on the Life of Pashtun Woman. Pukhtunkhwa Journal, 8(2), 296-316.

A woman's face is the primary consideration in assessing a woman's worth.

This exemplifies a cultural paradigm where women are objectified, and their value is reduced to mere physical appearance. It has negative implications for a woman's self-perception and her status within the community.

3. Khaza ya da kor da ya da gor da.

بئخه يا دا كور دا يا دا گور دا

A woman place is either at home or in the grave.

A woman's capacity in society is limited to familial responsibility. This social reality is imposed on her by the social script dictated by the patriarchal society.

4. Khaza ganda bootay da

كه د بئخو پوزي نه وي غول به بي خورل

A woman is a dirty plant.

It demonstrates a sexist mentality, seeing women as intrinsically problematic. It illustrates a societal narrative that perpetuates negative perceptions about women, therefore legitimizing their subjugation and marginalization. Stereotyping is seen in the workplace, originating from the strong directed at the powerless.

5. Khaza saplay da, har kala i badlolay shay.

بئخه سپله دا، هر كلا ي بدلولى شه -

A woman is analogous to a shoe and may be replaced at any moment.

It signifies that a woman is expendable. It exposes entrenched cultural attitudes that commodify women, reducing them to mere objects for men's personal satisfaction in a patriarchal culture. The liberty, dignity, and individuality of women are not acknowledged. In society, a male can easily divorce and remarry, whereas a divorced woman faces shame.

6. Da khazay soch o da jami baad zar badlagee.

دا بئخه سوچ او دا ژمي باد زر بدليري

A woman's ideas resemble a winter breeze; they can shift rapidly.

It suggests that women lack clarity of thought. Their thoughts are unreliable due to their propensity for rapid change. Moreover, it implies that her ideas are acrid like to the winter wind. It also suggests that women are intrinsically capricious, emotional, and erratic. It underscores gender prejudices and biases.

7. Da khazay aqal pa pundo kay ii.

دا بئخو عقل پا پوندو كے وي

The wisdom of a woman resides in her heels.

It reflects the cultural norm that perceives women as cognitively inferior to males.

8. Da khazay nazar kali bahar na lagi

د بئخو نظر د كلي نه بهر نه لكى

A woman's perspective is limited to the confines of the hamlet.

It implies that women possess an intellectually constrained perspective.

9. Khaza mara sata or pa sapaary i landi saata.

بئخه مارا ساته او پا ساپيره بي لاندې ساته -

Ensure a lady is well nourished and subdued by physical reprimand.

It suggests that women's wellbeing is contingent upon male dominance and that physical violence against women is justified. A woman exhibiting disorderly behavior should be corrected with a smack.

10. Toora, uspa o khaza da mato landi sata.  
تورا، اسپا، او بنخه دا متو لاندی ساتھ۔

Keep the sword, horse, and woman under control.

It expresses patriarchal ideas that require women to be submissive and under control. It promotes uneven power relations.

11. Da zmakay or da khazay ghag na razii.  
دا بنخے او دا زمکے غرنه راخیزی۔

Neither the lady nor the ground speak.

Silence is a virtue for women, reflecting societal expectations that they should stay mute and accept adversity without complaint. They should be satisfied with whatever is provided to them. And must refrain from attracting attention to themselves. Both the earth and women are anticipated to endure hardships without complaint.

12. Sar khralay(sar kalay) kha da mera sharali na.  
سرخرنیلی خا دا میره شپرنه۔

It is preferable to have a shaved head than to be expelled from one's house by a husband.

A shaved head signifies humiliation (sar khralay, sometimes referred to as sir kalay in certain dialects), and the adage implies this pertains to women. Humiliation is preferable to being abandoned by one's husband.

13. Khay khazay wagoona na lari.  
خے بنخے غورو نا لری۔

A good woman is one who does not have ears. By implication, she does not engage in the dissemination of rumors.

14. Khaza chi da kusay or da kherkay sang ta odrayda da kor khaza na da.  
بنخه چی د کوخی او د کرکی خنگ ته ودریده د کور خزہ نه ده

If a woman is seen peeking out the window or door of her home, she does not deserve to be allowed to stay inside.

It is important to understand this within the historical context where women were expected to be content with their roles as homemakers and were barred from activities outside the domestic sphere. Therefore, a woman showing curiosity was considered unvirtuous.

15. Tawwakal saray o andaisha khaza.  
توکل نر او اندیشنه بنخه

Men are daring, while women are cautious.

It reflects the binary opposition theory in gender, positing that gender is produced by binary contrasts such as rational/emotional, among others. These oppositions are not innate; they are hierarchical societal constructs that privilege the masculine over the feminine (Beauvoir, 1949).

16. Da spee wafa or da khazay haya  
د سپی وفا او دا بنخے حیا۔

A woman's modesty and a dog's loyalty are exemplary.

This proverb is derogatory, as it figuratively likens a woman to a wild animal that is tamed, implying that devotion is expected from her, much like the expectation of taming and controlling a woman. In Pashtun culture, a dog may symbolize anything unwanted or useless, contrasting with the Western perception of a cherished pet.

17. Che pa khawand grana we no pa kali hum grana we.

چې په خاوند گرانه وي نو په كلي هم گرانه وي

If a husband endorses his wife, the community will also endorse her.

A woman's position and self-esteem are dependent upon her spouse. A woman's position is contingent upon her relationship with male family members. If they affirm her, she gains respect; if they criticize her, she loses societal esteem (Butler, 1990).

**Thematic analysis of the above gender prejudice proverbs showed the following key themes.**

A) Patriarchal Dominance

"Sar khralay kha da mera sharali na."

B) Stereotypical Gender Roles

"Kaza ya da kor da ya da gor da."

"Khaza chi da kusay or da kherkay sang ta odrayda da kor khaza na da."

"Da khazay nazar kali na bahar na lagee"

C) Commodification of Women

"Khaza pa makh khawakhigi"

It underscores a cultural concern whereby women are objectified and discriminated against mostly based on their appearance rather than their intrinsic characteristics, accomplishments, or abilities. The profound connotations of this proverb suggest that women may be esteemed or favored primarily on the basis of their appearance and submissiveness, rather than their intrinsic qualities as individuals.

D) The Depiction of Women as Fickle

"Da khazay soch or da jami baad zar badligi."

Women are portrayed in these proverbs as capricious, wavering, and emotionally unstable. They undermine women's credibility and decision-making abilities. This limits women's opportunities and empowerment while reinforcing patriarchal norms and power structures.

E) Perpetuation of Lack of Respect

"Da spee wafa or da khazay haya"

F) Women Control

"Toora, uspa o khaza da mato landi sata."

## **Methodology**

### **Population and Sample**

I went through the available information and spoke to over 150 individuals. Adult males who were native speakers of the Pashto language were all included in the study cohort. It was determined that the population could be separated into two primary groups: educated male urban settlers and male rural settlers. This was accomplished via the use of the cluster sampling approach. Depending on their ages, each cluster was further subdivided into two subgroups: those aged 40 and older and those aged 20 to 40.

### **Result and Analysis**

Both highly educated and less educated individuals utilize gender prejudiced proverbs, according to the report. The aphorism was universally acknowledged as accurate by the country's

older and less educated residents. "Pashtun people feel better about themselves and their turbans look better because of these sayings." (Khattak, personal communication, June 17, 2025). The countrymen believe that these proverbs teach women the proper way to behave and serve as the bedrock of their homes. You would do well to consider the suggestions made by those who came before you. Roughly a third of the male uneducated population who participated in the proverbs survey had this view. "These proverbs are timeless; like religion, the truths they teach don't change over time," (srar Shah, personal communication, June 13, 2025). "They remain true today, just as they did back then." (Khan, personal communication, June 17, 2025). Women are capable of great things in many arenas, not just the home. When it comes to making good decisions, however, it seems that the elderly in rural regions have really bought into these concepts. The proverbs are ingrained into the minds of the speakers to the extent that some Pathans believe that these proverbs largely refer specifically to Pashtun women since they don't think "OUR" women can think for themselves but non-Pathan women from all walks of life, like Maryam Nawaz, are welcome in Pakistani politics (Rahman, personal communication, June 17, 2025).

On the other hand, many members of the younger generation saw the proverbs through a more individualistic lens. Their outbursts of rage at these proverbs were more muted than those of the educated youngsters. Their answers were vague. An individual from the younger generation of Pathans said, "I really value proverbs and the wisdom they give. But I also have the utmost respect for my mother. What am I supposed to say?" (Arman, personal communication, June 17, 2025). 'These adages are significant to us, despite our disdain of them. (Kamran, personal communication, June 17, 2025).

It is worth noting that a lot of people who disregarded the proverbs had male relatives (uncles and brothers) who lived overseas and had either experienced life abroad or had seen their female relatives taking care of the household. "My wife proved she could handle both home and foreign affairs," said a young Pathan whom I met in a village who used to work in Saudi Arabia and whose wife took care of family matters in his absence. Another young rural participant reminisced about his friend in Islamabad, saying, "My friend works as a clerk, his wife takes care of their eight children and works as a secretary in an office. Neither has she abandoned her spouse nor has she ever neglected her household responsibilities. Those who want to become "Khans" probably made up these proverbs, which are usually bad for women." (Kalim, personal communication, June 17, 2025).

Conversely, the well-educated elite saw no need for the proverbs and considered them to be irrelevant and out of date. It became public knowledge that these items were harmful to women. A wise old man said, "Things have changed; these proverbs don't mean much anymore. Making use of these proverbs helps sustain a sexist society." (S. Khadim, personal communication, June 17, 2025.) He emphasized the need to challenge xenophobic discourse (Khadim, personal communication, July 16, 2025). He was more interested in having a discussion that welcomes and supports everyone, regardless of their gender identity.

"These disparaging adages are ridiculous and unrelated," said a well-educated young person. During this time of rising prices, we need our women to be by our sides, helping us out. (Mr. Khan, personal communication, June 15, 2025). The harsh vocabulary used in the proverbs angered a young, educated respondent. He said, "You must exhibit greater responsibility and refrain from making such unkind remarks. Since these women are our mothers, sisters, and life partners, to the educated, contemporary Pathan with any dignity at all, they (the proverbs) are virtually dead." (Khaleel, in a personal communication, June 15, 2025).

There are a lot of reasons why the poll found different viewpoints.

#### **A) The Ability to Think Critically: A Core Result of Schooling**

In order to cultivate the ability to think critically, one must have an education. Knowledgeable people are more able to see the sexism and sexism in adages. Proverbs and stereotypes that perpetuate gender prejudice may be better understood by educated persons who are able to think critically about them. Some gender prejudices do not have any basis in reality, and a perceptive

mind may examine the evidence and determine this. One way to better understand the effects of gender prejudice on different populations is to develop one's critical thinking skills.

Analyzing prejudice and sexist proverbs via a critical lens. In doing so, it aids people in advocating for and supporting causes related to gender equality and creating welcoming spaces that value variety.

### **B) Economic and social considerations**

During this inflationary time, women and men are working together. Due to the increased financial independence of women brought about by multiple income households, their talents, and accomplishments are now more widely recognized. Because of this, people's views and assumptions about gender roles have changed. More fair and progressive viewpoints have been promoted, and women's efforts outside the home have been acknowledged. As women are forced to work to support their families, social views of women may be changing due to economic factors. There is now a more welcoming and encouraging atmosphere for gender equality in the workplace because to the increased representation of women in fields including nursing, academics, law, and medicine.

### **C) Being exposed to other points of view**

One way to grow in wisdom and compassion is to expose yourself to other points of view. When people have a good education, they are able to look beyond the limitations of unfair and repressive social standards and realize the value of respect and gender equality.

### **D) How the media shape shared stories in society**

Public opinion is greatly impacted by what is reported in the media. Because of the media, even isolated communities like the Pashtuns have developed. The younger generation is more impacted by other cultures, in contrast to the older generation.

### **In Summary**

The research delves further into how Pashtun reactions to sexist proverbs have changed due to globalization. Young Pashtuns, in particular, are questioning the veracity of traditional sexist proverbs in light of the survey's findings, which show that exposure to diverse global narratives and viewpoints from different cultures has changed people's views of social and cultural issues. The Pashtun people should be enlightened by this change that is happening as a result of globalization. A more inclusive culture that values women and recognizes their rightful place in society is being fostered by this trend, which is good because it shows that people are becoming more conscious of the need for gender equality and are ready to reassess long-held cultural prejudices. Additionally, now is a time to be wary of cultural uniformity, cultural fragmentation, and the loss of cultural identity.

Our government should only support international trends that are compatible with our faith. By doing so, we may enjoy the benefits of globalization without compromising our core cultural values. People can't make educated decisions on globalization until the government tells them about its pros and cons. By finding common ground between positive and negative ideas, Pashtun communities may be able to negotiate the complexities of globalization. Because of this, they are able to adapt to new cultural norms without sacrificing who they are. With careful planning, local communities may reap the benefits of globalization while protecting their cultural legacy from its possible negative impacts. Pashtuns are able to navigate the challenges of globalization by adopting an adaptive-balancing strategy that allows them to embrace global influences while still protecting their traditional identity.

According to Rehman (2015), the Pashtun social code, *pashtunwali*, shapes the Pashtuns' views of Islam. Islamic law (*shariah*) and these proverbs, which are essential to *pashtunwali* (the Pathans' traditional code of behavior and honor, which Naumann (2008) calls "a blueprint for leading an honorable way of life"), are confused by certain Pushtoons." I support the ideas given in the proverbs, though I have reservations about the improper language used," a young, educated person stated. This is because the ideas are in harmony with Islamic principles. Islamic

law forbids women from holding positions of leadership because the religion assigns them specific household duties and implies a lack of trust in their decision-making ability. (Orakzai, private message, seventeen June 2025). The Pashtunwali rule, however, is not infallible when it comes to Islamic law. The topic of women's inheritance is one area where pashtunwali and Islam disagree. While Shariah lays down fixed rights, Pashtunwali gives male heirs preference, especially when it comes to land distribution (Khan, 2015).

Ghani Khan (1995) depicts the Pathan as a warrior who is both selfless and courageous. His colors resemble a spider's web, and his words are like a painter's palette. However, these qualities conceal the fact that his heart is softened by suffering. He prefers to remain silent and defiant rather than reveal his emotions to his wife. Instead, he chooses to be rebellious. His icy exterior makes him difficult to understand, much like trying to read a torn book. To truly understand Pathan folk music, you need to get your hands dirty and maybe even touch your face with your fingertips. It's clear that Pathans cannot grasp love that isn't based on marriage, as his poems are about reckless lovers who fell in love. His enemies admire his bravery, even if they disagree with him. Although he will have to work harder and earn less, the Pathan remains determined to get a cartridge. If you listen carefully, you'll notice his eyes turn rosy and dreamy when he sings about love and fantasies. Like rain falling on a sunny day, these moments are just natural.

Pashtuns are generally devout Muslims but also follow Pashtun code of honor called Pashtunwali. Sometimes Islam may not be compatible with Pashtunwali e.g., honor and revenge. Pashtuns mostly will follow Pashtunwali and ignore Islamic teaching and that is there is a proverb:

ايشتونوالى نېما كافرې -

A significant portion of Pashtunwali is diametrically opposed to the teachings of Islam. Ghani Khan (1995) vividly describes the contradictions in Pashtun character, portraying the Pashtun as someone lacking tact and practical self-expression, yet driven by ambition and impatience. He is skilled at theft, choosing ransom over charity when faced with difficult situations. His strong heart makes him a friendly companion and host. He prefers stealing to begging and would rather face the anger of both God and people than suffer the humiliation of poverty. The Pathan, despite his proud attitude and stubbornness, is valued for his discipline and willingness to endure hardship rather than compromise his integrity.

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