



A Comparative Analysis of the Poetry of Pashtun Female Millennials in Afghanistan and Pakistan

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Introduction

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The socio-political environment of a nation leaves an enormous impact on the individual and collective trends and thinking of its people. More than the thinking of the layman, it influences the thinking of the writers and poets, who are the highly perceptive and sensitive class of society. The socio-economic and political impact of the ordinary or even extraordinary events, also known as the spirit of the age is evidently reflected through the poetry and other writings of the poets and writers of a society.

The Afghan land, and the Pashtun region on the Pakistani side of the border, which is a part of Pakistan, has remained a witness to war and terrorism for a period which is spread over four decades. During this period, a whole generation was born and grew up. The impact of the socio-political conditions on the millennials' poetry on both sides of the border is visible in their poetry and can also be deeply felt by the reader. This is also an age of awareness through social media and that influence is also visible in their poetry. The awareness of the millennials about socio-political scenarios around them is really amazing, as it is a rarity in the writings of females of a few decades back. The restriction of females into the domestic sphere and their exclusion from the public sphere limits them to the household and domestic world. The wider social world belongs to man amongst the Pashtuns. The very open expression of these millennials is a like silver lining in the dark world of



Pashtuns and may bring far reaching positive results.

One book of every Pashtun millennial, two from Afghanistan and two from Pakistan, have been studied for this paper. From the four books of the four millennials, sixty-six ghazals (a form of poetry) and other poems have been selected for a more profound analysis and also to explore the trends, approaches and understandings of these young minds about the social and political world around them. The outlook of these four millennials from the very conservative Pashtun society and their understanding of the social and political issues around them is amazing despite the so many restrictions even on the thinking of Pashtun women.

Millennials

Millennials are that generation, who were born in the 1980s and onwards (Sellers 2016). Some critics have specified the period of millennials to those, who were born in the years 1982 to 2003 (Wilson & Gerber 2008), or from 1980 to 2000 (Howe & Strauss 2003; Sutherland & Thompson 2001). Considine, Horton, & Moorman (2009), Lauter (2014), Sellers (2016) and Pianar (2018) have further described them in terms of technology and internet and their non-traditional and liberal approaches, specifically to the current social and political issues and towards life in general. New technology has challenged the conventional meaning of literacy and the concept of text, which changed from traditional printed materials to a variety of media, including the internet, film and television (Considine et al. 2009, 471).

Looking into the context of internet power and technology generation, which has grown up since the emergence of the World Wide Web, and the assortment of related digital technologies (e.g. cell phones, text messaging, video games, and instant messaging), is now being referred to as millennial. Millennials have access to more information than any generation in history (ibid., 472). The defining factor that leads to the millennials distinctive character is that they are the first generation to be immersed in Internet and Communication Technologies (ICT) for their entire lives. Reading and writing are a pervasive part of millennials' everyday life (ibid., 475-76). Studies show that despite their preferences for print material, millennials are using electronic material for reading more frequently (Soroya & Ameen 2020, 559).

The generation, who have been born between 1982 and 2000 are the most civic-minded, compared to the generation of the 1930s and 1940s. It seems that this civic generation has a willingness to put aside some of their own personal advancement to improve society. Generational differences are cultural differences: as cultures change, their youngest



members are socialized in new and different values (Twenge et al. 2012, 1045). Despite some shared features, there are differences also within millennials across the globe due to social, cultural and technological factors. Therefore, millennials in different parts of the world need to be studied according to their particular social, cultural, economic and technological contexts. According to a research in America, millennials are not more caring, community oriented or politically engaged than the previous generations. However, the rate of volunteering, which is an important community behaviour, has increased among young people (ibid., 1060). With some differences, like access to advanced technology and economic conditions, millennials in Afghanistan and Pakistan share some common features with millennials of the rest of the world.

Pashtun millennials

Pashtun millennials have been discussed in the context of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement, which emerged in the tribal areas of Pakistan, a few years back. It was termed by some as a movement of Pashtun millennials (Zaman 2019). The majority of Pashtuns lives in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Potentials of Pashtun youth in general and particularly female millennials have not been utilised in productive activities. The young Pashtun men are faced with scarcity of resources and opportunities, due to which they do not get the chance for the utilisation of their potentials. In the educational institutions, the creative faculties of the young minds are not encouraged due to the very conservative structure of the whole society. There is also scarcity of economic resources and job opportunities for the youth.

Pashtun women are also restricted to the domestic sphere and there is complete exclusion of them from the social sphere and so they do not get the chance to utilise their potentials. Most of the young women have not access to education. Pashtun millennials live in various economic, social, cultural and political challenges such as displacement, migration, terrorism, religious extremism, social restrictions and gender inequalities etc. National and international factors have also affected different aspects of the lives of Pashtun millennials. All these factors have created some challenges for Pashtun millennials to accommodate their modern ideas in a very narrow and conventional world. In the socio-political scenario, Pashtun millennials' potentials need to be utilised for bringing religious harmony and civic engagements, so that they may support political leadership in providing basic needs to their communities. Pashtun female millennials' voice has always been suppressed. The only source for the expression of their feelings is poetry, which most of them do not get the chance to write as Pashtuns believe that it is used for the expression of love, which they do not allow to women.



Pashtun women's poetry

Even nowadays, Pashtun females are not allowed to write poetry and share it with others as Pashtuns consider it a shame that their sisters and daughters will be talking about love as poetry has only one meaning for them, which is the expression of feelings of love. To conceal poetry writing from their family, most of the Pashtun women would rely on their pen names a few decades back. Numerous cases of the burning of Pashtun women's poetry have been found (Dinakhel 2020). Traditionally, women's writing of poetry is seen as shameful and has even resulted in beatings or even death. A teenager Pashtun poet from Helmand, Rahila Moska, committed suicide on 8 April 2010 after she was found by her family while reading her poetry over the phone to a member of a women literary association. She was severely beaten and warned not to write poetry (Malikzay 2020).

Social and cultural restrictions on the expression of love for women is the dominant theme of Pashtun female millennials' poetry. These restrictions have resulted in the development of folkloric genre, *landai* or *tappa*. Landai is a couplet of folk poetry, which is relevant for the expression of all types of pent up feelings and emotions. It has traditionally dealt with love and grief. In Pashto, the word landai means "short, poisonous snake". In this folkloric genre the author is not known. It is a way of expressing one's emotions in anonymous poetry. Landai or tappa belongs to women. Tappa has provided a platform to Pashtun woman for the expression of those innermost feelings which she otherwise could not have thought about. Most of the scholars and critics on Pashto folklore have termed tappa a feminine genre.

Pashtun female millennials

As compared to males, Pashtun female millennials are facing social, cultural and a variety of other challenges. Despite all these hurdles and unfavourable conditions, a few Pashtun female millennials have dared to speak openly about those things which were thought as taboos a few decades back. The female millennials have been courageous enough to use their original names. Women would use pen names and would use male dominant themes and vocabulary for their poetry, in which the female character would not be so much visible, as they would conceal their identity. Female poets and writers were not socially acceptable. In Afghanistan, in the second half of the twentieth century, many women writers and poets were present, but they still could not develop a truly female discourse, the reason for which is understandable from the fact that because of social fear they would use male vocabulary and themes. To some extent they were successful in putting forward the cause of



women but their language remained masculinized to a greater extent.

In Afghanistan, the dark days of Pashtun female millennials' history begins in the 1990s and continues till the first decade of the twenty-first century. In this period, Pashtun female millennials were excluded from the public space. The voice of Pashtun female millennials was a far cry in the wilderness. Change is an inevitable thing and is the only permanent thing in the universe. In the past few years, a tremendous change has taken place about the issue and to add to it more, young women have gained courage to express themselves openly. Moreover, many rapid changes have taken place on the international front, which have influenced the Pashtun society as well. Education is spreading fast in the Pashtun society, which has positively influenced the cardinal trends of this very conservative society.

Due to the same positive impact Pashtun female millennials are seen raising their voice about a huge variety of subjects, including love, which was an utter taboo for their mothers, one generation ago. These voices were important because they reached the international community. They have the courage and daring to express their feelings as females without a sense of shame, conveying the fact that they have realised that there is no shame in being a woman, and again no shame in possessing love or loving someone. The female millennials, whose poetry has been analysed here, have published their books, which bares evidence of the change that has taken place and is taking place in the Pashtun societies of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework of comparative literature has been applied to this research study. Comparative literature includes comparative study of regional, national, and international literatures. It is also the study of literature outside the borders of one particular culture with slight differences (Bassnett 1993). Literature produced in a single language but in different countries such as English literature, American literature, Canadian literature, Australian literature etc. also fall under this framework (Dass 2000, 160). On this analogy, Pashto literature produced in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been comparatively studied under this theoretical framework. It is not just language that renders unity to literature but other social, cultural, economic, philosophical, religious and political factors, which play a role in this regard. Furthermore, all the above-mentioned factors such as social, cultural, economic, philosophical and political, have also impacted Pashto literature, which has been produced in Afghanistan and Pakistan.



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Comparative literature includes experiences of human life and behaviour as a whole. Mathew Arnold has made meaningful efforts in English as a critic about comparison between great literatures of the world (Dhawan 1987, 22). Delicacies in different literatures can best be explored through the framework of comparative literature, especially belonging to one region (Dass 2000, 4). A comparative study is not only limited to comparison but it also includes description, characterisation, interpretation, narration, explanation and evaluation of different works. It speaks the fact that comparative study of literary works covers a wide area, from the general to the very minute details about the works. It also covers thematic affinity and also divergences in themes about poetry or prose. Moreover, in comparative literature multidimensional aspects such as linguistic, cultural, religious, economic, social and historical, are also taken into consideration. It is not a restricted but a vast area through which the beauty and delicacies of different works of literature are explored and critically appreciated. For the study of Comparative Literature, an unbiased and impartial approach is needed, which the authors of the study have tried hard to observe.

Through this theory, various aspects can be analysed, namely cultural contexts, historical perspectives, intertextuality, poetic techniques, forms, themes and motifs. Cultural context explains how societal norms, historical events, and cultural practices impact the themes, style, and imagery employed in the poetry. Historical perspective examines, how the historical contexts of the two countries contribute to the themes and forms of poetry. It also considers how shared historical events, or divergent historical trajectories shape the poetry in each country. Intertextuality signifies the uncovering of the textual connections between poets from different countries. It explores how poets engage with and respond to each other's work, draw inspiration from shared literary traditions, or create dialogues across borders. Poetic techniques and forms allow for the examination of poetic techniques, forms, and innovations within the poetry of both countries. It identifies similarities or differences in poetic devices, rhyme schemes, meter, or other elements of poetic composition. Themes and motifs highlight shared or contrasting themes and motifs.

Therefore, comparative literature theory explores how poets address universal human experiences, social issues, cultural identities, or specific concerns within their respective contexts. It also identifies common threads that unite them within the broader literary tradition. In the comparative thematic analysis of female millennial poets from Afghanistan and Pakistan, all principles of comparative literature theory have been observed. Theme as a literary device has been used in this comparative analysis.



Theme as a literary device

There are four purposes of a literary text: to entertain, to teach a moral lesson, to convey some meaning or to make the reader aware of some aspect of human condition. Writers creatively share their ideas and express themes that are timeless and universal. Theme is the message the author conveys. It is an abstract idea (Baldick 2001, 258). It is usually about life, society and human nature. It is an outlook on life, consciously or unconsciously. With a specific purpose in mind, the author carefully crafts themes using literary tools. Common techniques through which a poet can express themes are: alliteration, metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia, personification, rhyme and repetition etc. (Hamilton 2007). There are explicit and implicit themes in a text. There are various ways of uncovering the theme in a text, such as checking out the title, finding repeating patterns, symbols and allusions which have been used in the text.

There are two functions of theme: organisation of message and expressing the interpersonal message and viewpoint. Choice of theme always affects the viewpoint of a poet. Certain themes are understood by people regardless of age, gender, geography and culture. Such themes are known as universal themes. Traditionally, theme is a recurrent element of subject matter. Theme is always a subject, but a subject is not always a theme. Theme is the branch of a subject which is indirectly expressed through the recurrence of certain events, images or symbols. Recurrent local features are better designated by the term motif. Critics may use theme to refer to those repeated parts of a subject, which controls different aspects of a work, perceived as formal as well as conceptual (Childs & Fowler 2006, 239-40). Makaryk (1993) has added that a theme is a manifestation of the relationship between the author and the world. Literary works may contain multiple themes (Pianar 2018, 47). Theme implies significant human experiences, in forms of human relationships to oneself, to others and the universe.

Many of themes found in the literature of millennial generation are complimentary and have common foundations (Eubanks 2006, 1). Common themes observed in the poetry of four Pashtun female millennials two each from Afghanistan and Pakistan are carefree life of childhood, desire for women empowerment, horrors of war, humanity and global thinking, inquisitiveness for new ideas in poetry, leadership, love binaries, love for homeland, love, migration, Pashtun unity across border, Pashtunwali, rebellion, religious harmony, social issues, social restrictions and discrimination, unfaithful love, unrequited love, war and the longing for peace, and war in the context of festivities.



Methodology

Predominantly two hundred and sixty-six ghazals (a form of poetry) and poems from four published books, written by Pashtun female millennials, two from Afghanistan and two from Pakistan, have been randomly selected. Dominant poetic genres in these poetry collections are ghazals, followed by rhymed poems, free verse and a few specific genres of Pashto, such as *tapaieza* etc. Comparison of the genres has not been taken into consideration as the study is about the analysis of themes and their exploration and the influence of extraordinary social and political conditions on the minds of the young female millennials. Thematic analysis of all these ghazals and poems has been made in order to make a comparison of these millennials on the basis of different themes.

Initially, themes have been randomly explored, which has been followed by its classification under twenty headings in alphabetical order. Those Verses have been cited which depict themes. All the themes have been interpreted and explained for understanding Pashtun female millennials' voices from both sides of the Pak-Afghan border. In the thematic analysis similarities are more dominant than divergences as poets and writers are influenced by the trends of eras similarly, but they their own distinct individual characteristics peculiar to them. It is quite amazing that a strong similarity of ideas has been found in the poetry of Pashtun female millennials, who are the product of the same age and the social and political conditions have affected them in a similar way.

Poetry of Pashtun female millennials

Pashtun female millennials have influenced the voice of today's literary community. This study reveals that Pashtun female millennials are fearless and liberal in their attitude to poetry as is common in the other parts of the world (Lauter 2014). This openness in Pashtun female millennials poetry is more about personal, social and political issues. Openness about personal issues needs an exceptional courage and character in the orthodox and conservative societies, especially if it comes from women. Cultural and Political affiliations of millennial poets are more extensive and multi-dimensional (Chepp 2014, 230). They have innovative poetic expressions of social issues, love, and independence (Vernon 2014, 2). Pashtun female millennials' poetry is to large extent different from previous decades because they experience a more diverse age (Pianar 2018, 45). Self-centeredness is also found as a dominant theme in their poetry.

This study has explored that Pashtun millennials have their particular ways of expression about their feelings. They are more expressive on



social issues. Pashto literary landscape of the twenty first century has influenced the millennials' approaches, which is reflected in their poetry. They have promoted new poetic forms and themes in the past two decades (Khpalwak 2020). Poetry has remained a significant tool for the expression of feelings on multiple issues in the previous two decades. An important way of expression, poetry matters a lot in the contemporary social landscape. Pashtun female writers face many challenges. Being a poet is also a problem and challenge for a Pashtun woman. For certain social, cultural and other reasons, they have expressed their feelings in poetry in different ways in the past, by not disclosing their names. Pashtun female poets have also used the concept of micro-poetry (Khpalwak 2020; Ikhlas 2021). Social media accounts of Pashtun female millennials reveal that they have used poems mixed with visual formatting, in which lines of poetry are written over pictures to create image macros. They also use Internet poetry (Khpalwak 2020; Ikhlas 2021).

Pashtun female millennials' poetry is in line with the abilities and tendencies of the millennial generation. Innovation is found in the works of poets under the age of thirty-five. The invention of the internet has affected not only the mindset of the contemporary generation of poets but also the publication and circulation of poetry. Millennials are more connected to technology than the previous generations, which has made their generation unique. These new poets work with certain linguistic and textual style that simply did not exist before the internet age. Pashtun female millennials are familiar with new textual tools and also have the excellence in the expressive art of poetry. This new generation of poets has not altogether abandoned all sense of tradition, and the writers from which they came, as they cannot completely break away with the shackles of traditions. Current Pashto poetry and particularly poetry of Pashtun female millennials acts as an amalgamation of traditionalism of the past and modernism of the present (Seller 2016).

The new generation has started innovative movements, such as introduction of new terms, by the replacement of traditional terms (Khpalwak 2020). The millennial generation demonstrates tendencies of working outside conventional structures, such as religion and traditional politics (Seller 2016). Pashtun female millennials have also tried to work outside the traditional structures to some extent. Most millennials either identify themselves as democratic or independents, with a democratic lean and demonstrate more liberal ideas in many social arenas such as gender roles, as Nangyalai (2019) complains against her mother. In one of her poems she says that she (her mother) did not stand by her and the right to education was snatched away from her. In that way, she



lost the right of becoming doctor or a lawyer, the potential for becoming which she possessed in abundance. Important global issues such as climate change and cosmic elements do not exist in the poetry, which has been studied and analysed for this research. Socio-political poems have a tinge of democratic and liberal politics. The political lean of Pashtun female millennials is expressive of their lean for diversity and inclusion of multiple themes (Ikhlas 2021). Millennial generation is more diverse than previous generations and more tolerant about the social issues, covering vast subjects.

Themes in the Pashto poetry of female millennials from Afghanistan and Pakistan

Carefree life of the childhood

A theme which has been found in the poetry of the Pashtun female millennial poets is the carefree life of childhood. A Pashtun woman enjoys her life for that brief period, after which the restrictions of family and society imposed on her make her life difficult and she is restricted and excluded from the social world. The longing for the past is very common with Pashtun women, which is reflected through their writings, if they get the opportunity to express it. Childhood is the brief time of their life when they enjoy freedom, the remaining part of their life they yearn for the past. As Baran (2020, 28) expresses longing for childhood in these lines:

دنيا نه بي خبره ماشومتوبه بيرته راشه
ما يوسه له دي خايه لپونتوبه بيرته راشه

Oh care free childhood come back and take me with you, o
madness of the past.¹

The loss of childhood has snatched the joys and happiness away from her. The same theme of yearning for the happiness of childhood has been expressed by Nangyalai (2019, 18):

خومره خوشحاله زندگي وه زما
چي ووم ماشومه ازادي وه زما

My life was full of joys and I enjoyed freedom as a child.

Desire for women empowerment

Pashtun female millennials from Afghanistan and Pakistan have also expressed their desire for women empowerment. Their aspiration and desire for women empowerment and liberty is also a theme found in their poetry as Khpalwak (2020, 72) from Afghanistan says in the following lines:



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راته شعر وايه چې نجوني توتكى وي
 وزرونه يې پرانستي وي الوخي
 د جنسيت داغونه يې نه وي په لمنو
 زره يې خپل كه تر اسمان كه تر كاله ځي

O confider! Recite to me verses about the freedom of girls, who fly like birds with open wings. Recite to me poetry which is free from the seduction of innocent girls by the lusty men, girls who are the masters of their free will.

The poet has expressed her desire for the liberty and freedom of women. She wants them to freely move, whenever they want.

سترگي دې پټي كړه څه مه وينه رنده پاتي شه
 د ازادۍ سندرې مه اوره كنه پاتي شه (Baran 2020, 56)

Close your eyes and do not look at anything. Do not sing songs of freedom, remain dumb.

Horrors of war

Pashtun millennial generation has been born and has grown up in a period of war on the Pashtun land. It is due to that reason that they have suffered from all the horrors of war. They have practically experienced horrors of war. That is why war is also a dominant theme with the Pashtun female millennials' poetry. One of the poets personifies the war and addresses it in the following lines:

جنگه ته سترې يې كنه يې سترې
 رانه دې گل واخست ربحان واخست
 زما له سترگو دې رڼا يوړه
 زما د غېږي دې جانان واخست
 له برېښو نه دې برېت وسول
 له رېږورو دې ايمان واخست
 له خوار شپانه نه دې رڼه واخسته
 له غريبانو دې ارمان واخست (ibid., 90)

O war! Haven't you got tired? You have snatched flowers and fragrance from me. You took the light out of my eyes. You took my beloved from my lap. You took honour away from the honourable. You took staunch belief away from the most religious. You have snatched the flock away from the shepherd. You have snatched aspirations and hopes from the poor.

The devastations brought about war is the theme of many poems.

پرون هم د يوې مور له غبرگو لپو
 دوه تازه گلان جوړه وو رږېډلي (Khpalwak 2020, 40)

Even yesterday a mother lost her two sons in war, the way flowers are broken from branches by the harsh winds.

*Humanity and global thinking*

Poetry of Pashtun female millennials reveals that they believe in humanity regardless of religious, geographical or ethnic affiliations. A Japanese social activist was killed by terrorists in Afghanistan. His unfortunate demise has been mourned by Afghan poets because of his humanity and services to Afghans.

ګاونډيه يو انسان يې بيا وژلي
دا انسان له لسو شلو څخه نه وه
دا انسان د مسيحا له ساه پيدا وه
دا انسان په وچه دښته كښي اېه وه (ibid., 33)

O confider! A human being has been killed again, whose life is not cheap as he has taken birth from the spirit of Christ. Man's presence in this world is like a ray of hope, like water in a desert, so, why to be slaughtered cold-bloodedly.

They are concerned about the smallest living things and feel their pain to the depth such as ants have been described in the following couplet:

ګاونډيه غبرګي پښي مي گنهګاري
نرولې مي پل کور د مېرټون دے (ibid., 54)

O confider! I consider myself guilty of a sin if I crush the hole of ants under my feet, unknowingly.

ګاونډيه څوک په څه ؟ ولي خود خواه شي
ولي ستره نړۍ خان ته ورکي کړي؟
ولي وځروي قلف په دروازه كښي
ولي بندي د کوتې ټولي کړکۍ کړي؟ (ibid., 58)

O confider! Why can one become selfish to an extreme? Why can one be scornful of the entire humanity? Why to stay inside and hide oneself from the fellow humans? Why to close all windows and refuse from meeting anyone? Why this alienation?

Inquisitiveness for new ideas in poetry

Pashtun female millennials in general, and female millennials from Afghanistan particularly, emphasise upon the importance of new ideas in Pashto poetry. Shafiqah Khpalwak, a poet from Afghanistan, is the most innovative of the four. She presents some themes about love, life, time, obsession with sex and sexuality of all humans, from which she is fed up. She opines that sex and sexuality is not the only subject in the world and literature. She is desirous of hearing poetry which is free of the instinct of sex and sexuality. She also talks about the rotten and clichéd themes in poetry like associating dog with loyalty, a clichéd simile like so many other traditional terms.



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شعر تڪرار دے نن سبا بي هر ڇوڪ ليکي
هر يو کس په تندي تڪي راتول ڪري
يا د يار يا د وطن غمونه ڙاري

موضوعات بي پکڻي کوم نوي راوري (Khpalwak 2020, 60)

Poetry is nothing else but just a repetition of clichéd words and phrases. Everyone has just collected words in the name of poetry. Poetry has become a game, which is just composition and compilation of words. Poetry is the expression of personal sorrows, yearning for the lover, or the oft-repeated themes, which is the miseries of the world. There is no innovation in poetry, no new subjects and themes.

راته شعر وابه چي وړانگي راڙوندي وي
د مار سترگي بس يواځي رڼا نه وي
يو ابه نه وي چي بس رڼي رڼي وي
او د سڀي وفا يواځي وفا نه وي (ibid., 70)

O confider! Recite to me poetry not about faded but bright rays of light. This poetry should not be about conventional themes where only the sancks' eyes are known for luster, where only water is considered to be transparent and where loyalty is only associated with dog.

Another themes in her poetry is the inquisitiveness for new ideas. The Hindu concept of time known as *karma*, has been the theme of a poem in context with time in the following lines:

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گاونڊيه وخت پائے نه دے دائره ده
دائره ده هيڃ هم نه تري پاتي ڪيري
دائره ده هر ڇه ڄان سره رانگار او ذره، ذره، ذره نه ڪڻي ورڪيري (ibid., 64)

O confider! Time is eternal. Anything which enters the circle of time gets trapped into eternity. Anyone who enters this circle is absorbed by time becomes a part of it and also a part of eternity.

She is scared that her thoughts will get stagnant.

زه مي سترگي وينخم نوي رڼا ڄارم
هسي نه ولاڙ افڪار مي چينجه اوڪري (ibid., 98)

I will wash my eyes so as to look at light with a new spirit. The dearth of innovative ideas may make my thinking stagnant to the extent of rottenness and will get infected with poisonous germs.

Leadership

The theme of leadership is more frequent in the poetry of Baran and Nangyalai. They wish to have a leader who will unite Pashtuns into a nation and work for them, a leader not in name but in spirit. Baran (2020, 60) expresses her idea of leadership in this couplet:



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د سپینو غوندي بنائست نه بي چي خان لوگے کري
داسي يو مشر او خادم په ننگرهار پکار دے

Ningharhar needs an ideal leader of character, who will be the real well-wisher of the people, to maintain the beauty of Nangrahar, who will be ready to sacrifice his life for the glory and splendor of this city.

Baran does not talk about the collective Afghanistan but only of Ningharhar. She belongs to Ningharhar, so has in mind only this province. The idea of leadership by Nangyale (2019, 84) is expressed like this:

ژوند د ائنده نسل روښان چي کري
داسي مي خپل قوم له يو سرے غورم

A very strong leader is needed for this nation who will brighten the future of the next generation.

Nangyalai's idea of leadership is a broader one, as she talks about *quam* (the collective nation), instead of Baran, whose idea of good leadership is restricted to Ningharhar. Baran says:

دا رهبر نه دے غدار دے محترمو
د جنگونو طرفدار دے محترمو
چي يوه شيبه کښي دغه شان حالات بدل کري
(مژدي) دلته يوي داسي پښتني ته ضرورت شته (Baran 2020, 36)

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He who supports war is not a leader but traitor. My dears how can the supporter of war be a genuine leader. Instead of fake leaders we need a Pashtun woman to change the situation in a single moment.

Ikhlas describes flaws in the system, the problems faced by the ordinary people, the inflation, the loss of all good values, besides so many other subjects which she has brought under discussion in her poetry. To resolve all these problems of the common people she is desirous of good leadership for the nation.

دومره ډېر خلق دے خو چا دا پاکستان بدل کړو
دلته کښي څوک بڼه راغلل چا مو دا نظام بدل کړو (Ikhlas 2021, 91)

No one has made sincere efforts for bringing change in the system of this country despite the fact that that a large number of them claim to be the leaders of the nation.

د پاکستان په پيسه خپل بچي ساتلے نه شم
د سکول خرچي خوراک حجره جماعت پالے نه شم (ibid., 35)

What to do in these times when Pakistani currency has devalued so much? To feed my children or to fulfil their educational expenses. I have so many other expenses, which I owe to society like the expenses of hujra and the mosque.



Love binaries

The love binaries or binaries in general is one of Khpalwak's themes.

هيڇ سپورمي بغير د ياره مونده نه شي
هيڇ نمر يواځي نه دے په فضا کښي
د يو نه يو چا لمنه پوري نغښتي

(Khpalwak 2020, 75) جلا کښي

The moon is yearning for its second part and so is the sun. Everything in the cosmos wishes to connect itself to the binary. The coming together of the binaries make one whole.

Love for homeland

Love for the homeland is something natural. The same passion of love for the homeland is one of the themes in the poetry of Pashtun female millennial poets. They want to motivate other young men and women for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of their homeland:

خوانانو پاڅپړی وطن اباد کړی کار پکار دے
هسي وزگار مه گرځی دلته څه روزگار پکار دے
زمونږ وطن دے د پردو په لاس کښي

(Baran 2020, 60, 87) تنکي گلونه د ازغو په لاس کښي

O young men! Awake and reconstruct your land. Utilize your time for this purpose because we need to work very hard. Our land is in the hands of other powers and we have no control over anything. Our land is the land of flowers but the enemy deals with it in a hard way.

Love

Love is a common theme for all the four millennials. It is a dominant and recurring theme with the two poets from Pakistan (Nangyalai 2019; Ikhlas 2021). They are afraid of revealing love to their lovers. Nangyalai, in her poems, is lamenting the unanswered love. In addition, Baran (2020) is lamenting the infidelity of her lover. On the other hand, Ikhlas' poetry has no such big laments. There is happiness in her poetry about love and the lover. Nangyalai expresses her feelings about contradictions amongst Pashtuns. They glorify the passion of love but deal lovers with strictness and contempt, but still she is obsessed with the unrequited love, which is the basic motif in her poetry. Baran's poetry expresses rebellion against the social servility but in one couplet she reveals her conservative self, saying that she cannot openly express the name of her lover to the world. The most outgoing and open of all the four poets is Khpalwak (2020). She addresses her lover openly and says that there is no shame in loving someone or to be loved in return. She does not feel ashamed of love, as it is a genuine passion with her and she expects the same from her lover. She believes that love which is to be kept



hidden becomes a myth and mystery. Love is a reality. In this way Khpalwak (ibid., 51) becomes the most innovative of all these four poets, the most creative and original as well. She explains love in the following lines:

كاونډيه مينه كومه مينه څه ده؟
دا چي شپه او ورځ دي خپله غېر كښي غواړم
يا ته اخلي ساه او زه دي ننداره كړم
بي له دي پلو كښي هيڅ هم نه رانگارم (ibid., 69)

O lover! Do you know the meaning of love? It is nothing else but the intimacy between me and you during the whole day and night, when I can even hear your breathing. Love to me is nothing else but the intimate moments spent with you.

كاونډيه مينه ولي شرم بولي؟
ولي؟ ولي؟ بي له هر چا پتوي؟
ولي؟ ولي؟ مي وجود عيب درنكاريزي؟
ولي؟ ولي؟ زما راز ته جوړوي؟ (ibid., 51)

O lover! there is no shame in love. Why to hide it from the world? Why are you running away from my existence? Why? Why are you making a mystery of myself by hiding this genuine love from the world?

She continues expressing her genuine love and says:

كاونډيه حق مي دے چي ونازېرم
يو سري ته پلو ډك له درده وروړم
يو سرے مي اندېښنو كښي راشريك شي
بي له چاره، غم د زړه په زغرده وروړم (ibid., 31)

O confider! I also wish to be loved and pampered. I wish to share my sufferings and apprehensions with the one who can profoundly understand me. I wish to express my grief to someone, free from any fear and taunts.

Migration

Due to war, social and economic problems, Pashtuns also face hardships of internal displacement and migration. The theme, although not a dominant one, is still rampant in the poetry of these four millennials.

له دي كلي كډه ورمه چرته لري
دلته ژوند بلا دشوار دے محترم (Baran 2020, 19)

I migrate from village to a far-off area because life has become very difficult in this village.

*Pashtun unity across border*

The spirit of nationalism is found recurrently in the poetry of millennials. It is dominant with millennials from Pakistan. Ikhlas (2021) feels the need for the spirit of one man among Pashtuns on both sides of the border to unite this herd into a nation. The same idea is one of the dominant themes in the poetry of Nangyalai. She uses the term *lar aw bar* (Upper and lower), means Pashtuns from the mountains of Afghanistan and from the plains of Pakistan, once in her book, while Ikhlas has used the term many times.

يو پښتانه يو څه جدا جدا قومونه نه يو
دلته يو والے ولي بيا د لر او بر نه راځي (Ikhlas 2021, 98)

We are not separate people but are one Pashtun nation. Why is unity not possible amongst the Pashtuns of lar (Afghanistan) and bar (Pakistan).

د لر او بر د پښتنو د حال پوښتنه اوکړه
بلها لاشونه موندے کيږي په صحرا اختره (ibid., 93)

O Eid! Ask about the devastated Pashtuns of the lar and bar (mountains and plains) before you visit my land. Many rotten bodies of the dead are scattered in deserts, waiting for proper burial.

کاش چي حالات ښه وے او پوهه ورسره وے اخلاص
نو بيا د لر او بر دا ټول ښه د سيالی خلق دي (ibid., 104)

Ah! If the situation had been normal and If Pashtuns had been enlightened, then of the people of lar and bar would have been capable to compete [with the world].

Ikhlas associates the term *lar aw bar* with her lover also:

صفت د يار مي
په لر و بر شي (ibid., 49)

My beloved is praised everywhere in the lar and bar.

She talks about *lar aw bar* in general also:

د لر او بر خلق مي وپيژندل
د سم او غر خلق مي وپيژندل
راشي اوگوري په هر ځايه کښي تيري دي
ملا کند او په کابل باندي خوري دي
اخلاص هم په پېښور مي زره خوربيږي
هم لغمان يمه بلها په سخته کړي
کابل کښي نشته امن دلته هم حالات ښه نه دي
ښه نو تر کومي به اخلاص کوي ژړا اختره (ibid., 53, 57, 77, 93)

I knew the people of lar aw bar. I knew the people of plain and mountain. Let's come and see darkness which has prevailed everywhere. It is spread over Malakand and Kabul. My heart bleeds to see Peshawar and Laghman burning. No peace exists in Kabul as well as in Pakhtunkhwa. For how long will I be crying for peace.



د لږ بر پښتنو ټول په اتفاق شئ
اتفاق کښي رب اچولے برکت دے (Nangyalai 2019, 83)

Pashtuns on both sides of the border should unite because unity is strength, and so is the will of God.

The idea of unity of the Pashtuns of Afghanistan and Pakistan has been expressed in the poetry of Nangyalai. On the contrary, the same theme of the unity of Pashtuns is not found in the poetry of Baran. In a nutshell, it can be deduced that both the poets (Baran and Nangyalai) possess a high political acumen and through their poetry, they express the need for a strong leader for the cause of the nation.

Pashtunwali

Pashtun women have played their role in preserving, sustaining and transmitting Pashtunwali to the younger generation (their daughters). In Pashtun culture the notion of honour, dignity and shame are described as the driving force behind all cultural values and structures. Pashtun women have always been appreciative and insightful about the meaning, history and cultural evolution of Pashtunwali (Aziz et al. 2021, 204). It is necessary to reconsider and revisit social heritage to better reflect on the changing notions and demands of the contemporary age.

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Main features and values of Pashtunwali have been discussed in the poetry of Pashtun female millennials. One of the poets has in her mind the image of an ideal Pashtun woman, the symbol of coyness, sacrifice, compromise and fidelity, which she does not find in the girls of the new age.

د پښتون لور ده خو چې ولي يې پښتو ماته کره
چرته تري لاره زه د پېغلو په حيا خفه شوم (Ikhlas 2021, 32)

How can a Pashtun girl break away with the code of Pashtunwali?
I feel gloomy for the loss of coyness in Pashtun girls.

One of the features of Pashtuns is their love for arts but not having any value for artists. They look down upon artists. Artists are considered as a lower stratum of society.

فن خوبوي خو د فنکار دلته کښي قدر نشته
کڼي په دې خاوره هر څوک مي قدروي سندرہ (ibid., 31)

They like art but do not value the artist. Otherwise, everyone values my songs in this land.

Hujra is a common guest house and a place for *jirgas* (consul of elders) of Pashtun. It plays an important role in Pashtun society. With the passage of time it has also become vacant and deserted, thus resulting in loss of brotherhood among villagers. Fellow-feelings have also disappeared giving way to selfishness and self-centeredness.



چرته تلي ورورولي ده
حجره ولي نن خالي ده (ibid., 61)

The hujra is lying vacant as brotherhood has vanished away from the land.

Rebellion

Both the poets (Baran and Khpalwak), besides the fact that they have been the prisoners of traditions and customs, are also prone towards rebellion. In this regard Baran (2020, 21) says:

بغاوت مي په رگو کښي چلېده لکه د ويني
بي پرواه ومه باغي ومه سرشاره ومه زه

The seeds of rebellion were spread in my blood and rebellious feelings have filled me with a new energy.

Despite all the social restrictions, Nangyalai (2019, 19) expresses her will, not to surrender in front of all restrictions, as she knows to stand and fight against them:

ننگيالي له طوفانونو نه وېرېرم
زه د ژوند د هر طوفان سره عادي ېم

My rebellious spirit has made me accustomed to the storms of life.

Religious harmony

Religious harmony and diversity are also a theme found in the poetry of Pashtun female millennials from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

د هر چا خپل مذهب او خپل ايمان دے
خو د پښتون سره حيا ښه لگي (Ikhlas 2021, 114)

Everyone has one's own religion and faith but modesty suits every Pashtun.

In some of the Pashtun areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, people belonging to other religious minorities also live. Sometimes they also convert from their religions to the dominant religion of the region, Islam. Such theme is uncommon but has found place in the following couplet.

څه خبر شوم په بونير کښي
سيکھان هم مسلمانان شو (ibid., 103)

I have heard that in Buner some Sikhs have converted to Islam.

Social Issues

Ikhlas (2021) shows awareness about a variety of social issues like the sufferings of widow, loss of brotherhood, as Pashtuns do not have time to sit in a hujra: the simplicity of village life, compared to city life, childhood engagements and then problems faced by boys and girls.



کله بنه دے د دی بنار د رنگینو نه
زه ویرپرم د دی خلقو د کتو نه (ibid., 50)

Village is better than the hustle and bustle of cities as the looks of the city people scare me.

Asma Ikhlas (2021, 78) has criticized early marriages and engagements of childhood in one of her poems, titled as "Da warukwali Rishta". False charge and ostracism is one of the themes in her poetry, as when girls refuse to marry according to the childhood engagement, they are blamed with having found a lover for themselves. As when a girl refuses to marry a man, it does not necessarily mean bringing dishonour to family. Pashtuns consider it a dishonour to the family when a girl refuses to marry the person chosen for her by parents.

مه كوه تهمت راباندي مه وايه
زيان وركړي ايمان له سر خورلييه
شوه رڼا ورځ راباندي توره گوره
چي زندگي شوه د پېغوره گوره (ibid., 69, 89)

Do not charge me with bringing dishonour to the family. Anyone charging me with disloyalty is damaging one's own character. I am ostracised from all corners and life has been made a hell for me.

ملا ووئېل خبرات په مري پسي
چي كال په كال كوي كمال به كوي (ibid., 106)

Mulla (clergy) is of the view that charity for the dead every year brings marvels in the life of the living.

Social restrictions and discrimination

The theme of social restriction on woman and discrimination towards her on the basis of gender is common in the selected poetry of Pashtun female millennials from Afghanistan and Pakistan (Nangyalai 2019; Baran 2020; Khpalwak 2020; Ikhlas 2021). All the poets are aware that the restrictions on them are because of the fact that Pashtun society considers the daughter as inferior and the social view about her is that she has to stay at home and look after the household as stated by Ikhlas (2021, 104):

لور د كور شے دے د كور كار به كوي نانا تعليم
دا جاهلان چي ټول پانسي شي د پانسي خلق دي

Daughter has to stay at home and do the chores and not to acquire education. Such ignorant people need to be taken to the gallows.

Baran (2020, 35) is of the view that being a Pashtun woman she is lagging behind everywhere and in every field because of the restrictions by parents and also society:



پښتنه بڼه له كوره وتې نه شم
زه خو ځكه له كاروانه پاتې راغلم

I am a Pashtun woman, so, I cannot go out of home. That is why I have lagged behind in the race of progress.

She further reveals her feelings in this way:

خوله دي هم وتړه ته مال يې د پرديو خلقو
حق دې هيڅ مه غواړه خپل كور كښې بېگانه پاتې شه
ته يا په كور شه يا په گور شه هم دا دوه لارې دي
يوه اسيره د ژوندون په دائره پاتې شه (ibid., 56)

You should not speak, as you will go to another home and should not be asking for your rights. You are either for home or the grave, as these are your two abodes. You are born a prisoner and will remain so all your life.

The same theme of restricting woman to home and considering her to be in home or in grave is found in Pashto folklore, particularly in Pashto tappas and proverbs (Farid & Dinakhel 2023b, 21). Baran (2020, 63) stresses upon the restrictions imposed on herself and every Pashtun woman by the Pashtun code, also known as Pashtunwali or Pashto:

تيريري مي د ژوند هره ادا په وېره وېره
قانون د پښتنو كښې مي موسكا په وېره وېره

All my life has been surrounded by fears while living amongst the Pashtuns and their code. Even my smiles are not free of fears.

Pashtun women sacrifice all of their hopes and aspirations for the sake of customs and traditions, as has been expressed in the following verse:

چې د دستور په خاطر وژني خپلې ټولې هيلې
دا د مژدې په شان معصومي پښتني دي ربه (ibid., 48)

They kill their hopes for the cause of customs and traditions. All Pashtun women are innocent like Mujda Baran, victims at the altar of customs.

As has been mentioned earlier, the Pashtun code is called Pashtunwali or Pashto/Pukhto. There are many restrictions on woman according to Pashtunwali. Every woman is supposed to follow this code of Pashtunwali, otherwise, she becomes a social outcast. There is no place for a woman in the Pashtun social structure, who rebels against the social code. The theme of social restriction which binds woman to the social code is common in the poetry of millennials, both from Afghanistan and Pakistan. In this research study, a Pashtun female millennial from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also laments the social barriers and restrictions in the name of customs and traditions, as has been experienced by every Pashtun woman. Nangyalai (2019, 19), in the following words speaks of the pain



which she is going through:

د رواج په زخېرونو كښې بندي ېم
زۀ د وخت د ستمونو پوخ قيدي ېم
وس د ستري ژوندون يو يو لمحۀ شمارم
خېژولي زۀ په دار باندي قاضي ېم

I have been imprisoned in the cage of customs and codes and have become a permanent prisoner with time. Now I am counting the moments of my tired life as society like a biased judge has kept eyes on me, till it takes me to the gallows.

She seems pessimistic about her future as she is living in this world like a prisoner. Similar ideas have been expressed in the following lines:

برخايك مي له لاسونو بسويډلې
هسي وخت تېروم مړه ستوري ته گورم (Khpalwak 2020, 26)

I have no control over fate, that is why I am living like a dead soul and looking at the stars with eyes bedimmed.

The same theme of restricting woman only to home, according to the customs of Pashtunwali, is also found in the following verses of Khpalwak (ibid., 27):

گاوندپه زۀ به څرنگه الوځم
نرمي پښې مي دي په غولي گندل شوي
زۀ نجلې، نجلې دي غلې كوټج كښې اوسي
په كتاب او په دستور دغه راغلي

O confider! How can I fly like a bird? I am a girl and am shackled in fetters by the code, in the name of cruel and inhuman customs. More than that, as a girl and as an insignificant creature, I have to restrict myself to a lonely corner in the house as it is fated for me.

In the poems of all the four millennials, a more or less similar approach to social restrictions, injustice and discrimination towards gender has been found.

Unfaithful love

The unreliability and infidelity of man is also one of the themes in the poetry of Pashtun female millennials.

يوه كور بله له گوتي رانيولي
زۀ دې رغيو كښې د كومي يوي نوم ړنگ كړم
تا پخپله د دوي پيڅكي دي نيولي
زۀ به چا سره په څه او ولي جنگ كړم
(Khpalwak 2020, 82)

How can man's love be relied upon when he is caught between two women? He assures his wife of his true love at home and gives similar pledges to the one outside. How can I fight another woman for the one whom I do not own? Such is the true nature of man's love.

*Unrequited love*

Unrequited love is an unreciprocated love. This is also known as one-sided love. Pashtun millennials lament one-sided love in their poetry, a very common theme in eastern poetry. Feelings about unrequited love are expressed by Mujda Baran (2020, 23) in the following lines:

يو سرے دے چي بي نوم اخستے نه شم
اه زما د زرة له درده نا خبر دے

The man whose name I cannot disclose to the world is unaware of the pangs of my love for him.

The theme of love is not a dominant theme in Baran's poetry (Baran 2020, 14, 16, 25). On the contrary, with the poets from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, love is a dominant and recurrent theme throughout their poetry. Nangyalai (2019) has frequently given expression to her feelings about unanswered love and more than that about the unfaithful lover:

ننگيالی تير نه ووخي نور په دي بي ننگه جانان
خومره ظالم دے چي زما هر يو ارمان ژروي (ibid., 9)

She refuses to believe in the words of her lover as it is he who is the killer of her dreams.

She suffers from the pangs of separation as the lover has not proved true to her, and furthermore, cannot express love openly due to the social restrictions and Pashtun customs. She criticises society for the double standards as has been expressed by her:

مينه مني خو مئين نه پيژني
دغه دستور د دي جهان ولي دے (ibid., 16)

They put in esteem the passion of love but do not allow this passion to the lovers as has remained the practice of the world.

Nangyalai (2020, 22, 57) discusses her lover with reference to the heroes of the folk tales like Adam Khan, Majnoon and Farhad, as he would make big claims like these legendary lovers but has failed to fulfil his promises. Folk tales having these legendary lovers are ripe with incidents where heroism and power are associated with the lovers in them. As Pashtun culture associates power with man and woman is portrayed as physically and mentally inferior, so declares her fit for the domestic sphere (Farid & Dinakhel 2023a, 191). That is why Pashtun beloveds expect more courage and bravery from their lovers like the heroes of the romances (Khan 2017, 108). The world of Pashto folk tales is predominantly masculine both in intent and content. The power structure leaves less space for women to make a display of their talent and intelligence (ibid., 124). The unrequited love fills the poet with deep



melancholy, to which she finds no remedy. On the other hand, Baran (2020, 35, 54) compares herself with Pashtun legendary women. She has alluded to Malala, Nahida, Mahsa and Farkhanda, who have suffered for numerous reasons:

زۀ یادگار د ملالی او ناهیدی پم
نو بیا ولی له جهانه پاتی راغلم
د مهسا غوندي زندی شمه (مژدی) که
فرخندی غوندي سنگساره شمه وایه

I am a memorial monument of Malala and Nahida. Then why am I lagging behind the world. Should I live like Mahsa or be stoned like Farkhanda?

As has been mentioned earlier, Khpalwak questions everything. One of her poems titled "Pukhtane"- which means "questions", raises numerous questions regarding various phenomena and ideas. In this poem she asks many questions such as why is the darkness of night so scary to certain people. Why do we believe that stars are bright, although they do not have a light of their own? If time is a circle, then it is eternal. She concludes that there are numerous questions, to which there are no answers and among all these questions, one which is more like an enigma is that why do humans break the hearts of other humans (Khpalwak 2020, 93):

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کاوندیبه راته ووايه چي ولی
ولی خلق ماتوي باور د زرۀ
ولی خلق داد د زرۀ له کونجو اخلي
شناخته سترگي خیانت کوي په څه

O confider! Tell me why do people break the trust of others? Why do people break others' hearts? Why do people turn eyes back from known and acquainted ones?

As has already been discussed, Khpalwak questions everything and tries to explain different phenomena through questions. In one of her poems regarding the reality of death she asks many questions regarding death and finally tries to prove death and separation as two sides of the same coin:

کاوندیبه مرگے څه دے؟ مرگے څه دے؟
یو سکون د پائشل شویو احساساتو؟
په رښتیا هر څه ته تکه د تمام ردی؟
کنه پائے او بیلېده دي په کراتو؟ (ibid., 40)

O confider! What is death? Can you make me understand? It is a peaceful state after all feelings and aspirations have been ruthlessly crushed. Is it the end of everything or a perpetual state of separation after the sweet meetings of love?

*War and the longing for peace*

It is one of the major and dominant themes in the poetry of millennials. All the four poets are politically and socially aware about the destruction of war. The poets from both sides of Afghanistan and Pakistan know how society has been affected by the devastation of war. Khpalwak (2020, 39) says:

په وطن کښي څه ارزانه دي مرگونه
سترگي اړوي مری په دار څریري
ساوي نه رغري، نفسي زندی کیري
ژوند سراب د بنو رپ کښي پنا کیري

Life has become cheaper and death has overtaken the land. Every day humans are slaughtered openly and one cannot breathe freely. Life is uncertain but now one can lose it in a moment.

Khpalwak (ibid., 70-73) also draws a detailed sketch of the havoc which war has played with the life of Afghans:

راته شعر وايه چې توري يې وحشي نه وي
گرد نري ټول او څلېدونکي اينه کري
راته شعر وايه ماشوم پکښي موسکے وي
پلار يې نه وي وژل شوے په جگره کښي
خور يې نه گرځي ټاکي پښو کوڅو کښي
مور يې حس نه کري چې اوسي په ځنگله کښي
راته شعر وايه ماښام يې د سکون وي
شپه ارامه وي غر نه وي د بمونو
په رانه سحر چې پرانيزم موبائېل
پک ښي نه وي خبرونه د مرگونو

Recite to me poetry in soft words, which are free from dust and shining like mirror. I wish to hear poetry which depicts smiling children, whose fathers have not been killed in the war and whose sisters are not begging in the streets, bare-footed. Whose mothers are not living in the open fields. I wish to listen to poetry about peaceful evenings, where nights are serene, where there are no sounds of bombs. When in the morning I look at the mobile and see no news about killings.

The poet wishes for an end to that poetry which is about deaths and loss of life. Ikhlas (2021), a poet from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is influenced by the terrorism in this region. She talks about children, who have lost fathers in the bloody terrorism and who beg in the streets. She has broader vision as she feels the plight of Pashtuns on both sides of the border. The pain of Kabul, Malakand, Peshawar and Laghman means the same to her:



راشئ اوگورئ په هر ځائے کښي تيري دي
 ملا کند او په کابل باندي خوري دي
 اخلاص هم په پېښور مي زړه خوربيږي
 هم لغمان يمه بلها په سخته کړي
 کابل کښي نشته امن دلته هم حالات بڼه نه دي
 بڼه نو تر کومي به اخلاص کوي ژړا اختره
 (Ikhlas 2021, 53, 57, 93)

Come and see darkness spreading everywhere. Malakand and Kabul are covered with darkness. My heart bleeds for Peshawar and also Laghman. There is no peace in Kabul as well as here (in Pakhtunkhwa). For how long will I shed tears, tell me O Eid!

The poet in these lines is referring to the different places on both sides of the of the border. She mentions Malakand, Kabul, Laghman and Peshawar and laments the loss of peace in the Pashtun region due to war. Her beautiful land is bleeding, so, how can she celebrate festivals like Eid, when there is darkness everywhere. She mentions Peshawar and Laghman, and her heart bleeds at the destruction brought by war in these cities. She has written one poem on the subject of peace, where she holds everyone, including herself responsible for the loss of peace:

دلته ټولي ډيوې مړې شوي امن نشته
 دلته ټولي جذبې مړې شوي امن نشته
 دلته هر ماشوم د بم سره کړي لوبې
 دلته هره مور د غم سره کړي لوبې
 دا چې زړه مي ناقرار دے
 بس يو امن مي پکار دے
 علم هم گوري هوبنيار دے
 بدامنۍ نه ډېر بېزار دے
 امن ما او تا وژلے
 امن ما او تا شرلے
 د دي مونږه ذمه وار يو
 که د کلي که د ښار يو (ibid., 51, 58-60)

There is no light as peace has left the land. Spirits are dead and even children are playing with bombs, like toys. Every mother has got used to death and grief. My heart is restless as it also wants an end to war. Every heart is now aspiring for peace. Knowledge, which is the symbol of light, is aspiring for peace. Anarchy is no more required. We are all responsible for bringing peace to this war-stricken land, whether the countryside or towns and cities.

Baran's poetry reflects the impact of war on her and her people. She describes the influence of war in various ways. She says that amidst the smell of the gun powder, festivities cannot be welcomed.

ټوپک ټوپک ماحول او د بارودو سرو لمبو کښي
 زه څنگه به اختر ته خوشحالي کوم گلابه (Baran 2020, 18)

When the whole surrounding is filled with gun powder, how can I celebrate religious festivals?



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In another couplet, she says that everyone has a gun in hands, while she is holding a pen, but is happy that her pen has not been broken in the tumultuous times, symbolising that knowledge will overpower war and ruthless minds behind the bloodshed.

ستا لاس کبني ټوپک وۀ او زما لاس کبني قلم کتاب
شکر دے چي مات په دغه جنگ کبني مي قلم نه شو (ibid., 25)

You had gun in your hand and I had pen and book. I am grateful to God that my pen was not broken in this war.

Baran, in another couplet expresses optimism that she has dreamed of peace coming to the land. The intensity of her desire for peace can be perceived from her poetry:

جگره به ورکه شي ما خوب ليدلے سوله راخي
خو بس راتلو ته يي لږ نور هم انتظار پکار دے (ibid., 60)

War will be finished and peace will be restored as I have dreamt. It will take long as it requires sacrifices and patience but still she will wait.

Her optimism is at its climax that change for the good will come to the land. The lines speak that the poet is socially and politically aware of what has her land gone through. The sadness and melancholy over how her land has been used by outsiders is evident in her lines. Baran mentions war and its devastation from different perspectives. Nangyalai (2019, 13), in her poetry also mentions the war in Afghanistan and says that the beauty and freshness of Kabul of has been vanished:

وس په کبني د خلقو هيلي مراوي دي
کوم دے هغه بنکلے کابل چرته دے

Now the hopes of people have faded. Kabul has lost its beauty.

The war imposed by humans on her land has so much affected her people, that they lost their trust in humanity, their hopes for peace from humans, rather they prefer seeking shelter in the company of wolves as described in the following lines:

ورشه، ورشه، ورته وايه، ورته وايه
په تير پرهر په لاسو کبني بلا ورم
دې وحشي جگري بم دومره داره کړي
له انسانه د لېوه غېر ته پناه ورم (Khpalwak 2020, 48)

Go and tell him with emphasis that there are deep wounds in my heart. The bloody war has filled me with terror. Man has become beast and threat, and danger from a wolf is lesser compared to man.



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During these destructions, devastations and horrors of war, the poet wants a companion, who will accompany her so that she may be able to face the dangers of war:

يو څوڪ باند واوسيري
چي جگره کيني راته موسک وي
د بارودو لوگے ځندي
او راوري يي بويئ د مشک وي (ibid., 87)

My ideal is the one who does not lose hope in times of war, who can smile when the smell of gun powder is spread all around. During this whole disappointing environment, he will bring the fragrance of hope with himself.

The air pollution due to the gun powder is mentioned in the following lines:

د کابل زهري هوا مي ستونے خورين کري
گاوندپه ما به ورکه ما به مره کري (ibid., 44)

O confider! The poisonous air of Kabul will choke my throat, as I feel it is polluted with gun powder. It will kill me and I will be vanished forever.

As has already been mentioned, the war has spread over to Pakistan and has also affected the lives of people here as has been expressed in the following lines:

د پاکستان خوانان راشمار کرم که د بلي خاوري
د هر چا تلي دي د زرونو نه د وينو داري
(Ikhlas 2021, 33)

The blood of the young has bled during the war, whether from Pakistan or another land.

War has widowed women and orphaned children. This sorrowful state of the life of widows and orphans is also a theme of the millennials:

ځکه چي دلته کيني د کوندي څه مقام نشته دے
دي معاشره کيني بي اخلاص هيڅ احترام نشته دے
بيا دا بي پلاره بچي يا خو د بمونو بنکار شي
يا لپوني شي د کوڅو اخلاص د غرونو بنکار شي (ibid., 37)

There is no regard and respect for a widow in this society. Sincerity and regard for others as human beings has vanished away. The orphans lose their life at the altar of war or beg in the streets in sheer madness or go to the mountains.

Two poets from Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, whose poetry has been analysed in this study, have collectively written about Pashtuns living in Pakistan as well as in Afghanistan. They have also mentioned the names of different places in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Asma Ikhlas, a poet from



Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, has mentioned the names of various places of Pashtun land in Pakistan, such as Nowshehra, Mardan, Peshawar, Swat, Malakand, Pakhtunkhwa, Khyber, Dir, Buner, Swabi, Dargai as well as names of places in Afghanistan such as Kabul and Laghman. Nangyalai (2019, 26), uses the term "Afghan" for all Pashtuns regardless of their country to which they belong. Historically, the word "Afghan" has been used for ethnic Pashtuns living in this entire region.

د وخت ستم وو ننگيالی وژلي
چي په کاله د هر افغان راغلم. (ibid.)

They had been killed in the cruel war as I passed by each deserted home of Afghans.

From the discussion about war in the poetry of these four millennials, it can be concluded that all of them have portrayed a picture of war in their poetry. The Pakistani Pashtun female millennials have also deeply felt the pain and misery of the Afghans. The imagery, words and diction of the millennials from Afghanistan show more innovation and originality.

War in the context of festivities

The idea of festivity and war converge in the poetry of two poets (Khpalwak and Baran), both of whom belong to Afghanistan. Khpalwak (2020, 33) welcomes the coming of the New Year and is hopeful that it will bring peace and harmony, but she is of the view that there can be no festivity and celebration, where there is no peace in the land:

کاوندیہ نن د کال وروستے ماہنام دے
لکه ستا وروستے نظر چي رانه ټول شو
په ناهیلو سترگو نوي کال ته گورم
گوندي ډکه شي جولی مي د گلانو

O Betrayer! The last evening of the year is passing by swiftly, the same swiftness with which you changed. I welcome the New Year with wishful eyes, though surrounded by gloom and melancholy. Hope still prevails with me that New Year will fill my lap with flowers.

Ikhlas (2021, 102) welcomes New Year only and wishes that it may bring happiness and peace for everyone:

ارام راوړه سکون راوړه هر چا له چي راځي
قسم درکوم واوړه نوي کاله چي راځي

Bring ease and peace for everyone with you. O New Year, I plead you to come in an easeful way.

Baran (2020, 18) welcomes Eid (Akhtar) but with a heavy heart, as she believes that festivity can be made if there is peace all around. Festivities are the symbol of joy and happiness but in an atmosphere of gloom one cannot celebrate:



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ټوپک ټوپک ماحول او د بارودو سرو لمبو کښې
زه څنگه به اختر ته خوشحالي کوم گلابه

When the whole surrounding is filled with gun powder, how can I celebrate religious festivals?

Baran's poetry reflects the impact of war on her and her people. She describes the influence of war in various ways. She says that amidst the smell of gun powder, festivals cannot be welcomed.

ټوپک ټوپک ماحول او د بارودو سرو لمبو کښې
زه څنگه به اختر ته خوشحالي کوم گلابه (ibid.)

When the whole surrounding is filled with gun powder, how can I celebrate religious festivals?

The unfortunate incidents of how festivities have turned into mourning due to war and its terror, have been described in the following lines by Baran (ibid., 22):

تل مو جشنونه بدل شوي ماتمونو باندي
څومره بدرنگه ده زمونږ د اخترونو کيسه

Our festivities have been converted into mourning always. The stories of our festivals are nothing else but stories of gloom.

The above mentioned twenty themes are more evidently dominant and prominent in the poetry of Pashtun female millennials. Beside these themes, a number of sub-themes are also found in their poetry.

Conclusion

The region of Afghanistan and Pakistan, which is dominantly Pashtun, has remained a witness to war and terrorism for a period, which is spread over decades. During this period, a millennial generation has been born and grown up. The socio-political environment of Afghanistan and Pashtun region in Pakistan during the age of millennial generation has influenced the thinking of Pashtun female poets, which is visible in their poetry. The impact of the socio-political conditions on the millennials' poetry, on both sides of the border, can be deeply felt by the reader. This is also an age of awareness through social media, which is visible in the poetry of these young women. The awareness of the Pashtun female millennials, about socio-political scenario around them, is really amazing, as it is a rarity in the writings of Pashtun female poets of the few decades back. Millennial poets, selected for this study, have expressed innovation ideas, which once again is a rarity.

All four millennials, whose poetry has been studied here, lament their helplessness against restrictions and traditions, but the strains of rebellion against the cruel traditions are also dominant in their poetry.



Pashtun female millennials' poetry reveals that the swift changes around the world have influenced their thinking. Pashtun female millennials, as compared to the generation of a few decades back, are more open. They express their feelings about the restrictions on woman and her unfulfilled aims and ambitions, due to social bondage, but they also talk about going against these restrictions. They wish Pashtun women to rise and bring a change. They bring into poetry themes and issues of daily life like poverty, inflation, the repercussions of war and terrorism, etc.

An unbiased and neutral analysis of the poetry of the four Pashtun female poets reveals that the poets from Afghanistan are more innovative in terms of themes, openness and diction. Twenty dominant themes have been explored and analysed in the poetry of the four Pashtun female millennials poets, two from Afghanistan and two from Pakistan. Twenty themes have been discussed in alphabetical order, which are about 1. carefree life of childhood, 2. desire for women empowerment, 3. the horrors of war, 4. humanity and global thinking, 5. inquisitiveness for new ideas in poetry, 6. leadership, 7. love binaries, 8. love for homeland, 9. love, 10. migration, 11. Pashtun unity across borders, 12. Pashtunwali, 13. rebellion, 14. religious harmony, 15. social issues, 16. social restrictions and discrimination, 17. unfaithful love, 18. unrequited love, 19. war and 20. longing for peace and war in the context of festivities.

There are other themes, which are the distinct characteristic of the millennials such as the concept of time, life, death, and the need for new terms, themes and ideas, are specifically found in the poetry of Khpalwak, from Afghanistan. Rebellion against the social restrictions is a unique theme in Baran's poetry, who also belongs to Afghanistan. The unity of Pashtuns on both sides of the border is a unique theme, and is found in the poetry of two poets from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The need for a strong woman leader is also one of the themes, as a strong woman is needed to fight for the cause of women. This theme is found in the poetry of Baran from Afghanistan and Nangyalai from Pakistan. The most striking point about all the four Pashtun female millennials is the originality of everyone in her own peculiar way, the innovation in ideas and the simplicity of diction.

Brief introduction to books and authors

Da guluno qise [Stories of flowers]

It is a poetical collection of Sawera Khan Nangyalai. It is published by Shahbaz Khparandoya Tolana Jalalabad in 2019. There are 105 ghazals and poems in this book. Sawera Khan Nangyalai was born in 1987 in Peshawar. Her father's name is Awal Khan. She passed her matriculation examination from Noor Public School. She was not allowed to



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pursue further education, that is why she joined a religious seminary and studied religious education there. She started writing poetry from early age. Twice in her life she has recited her poems in a *mushaera* (poetry recitation gathering). The title of her book is taken from her following verse.

زمونږ په للمو باران نه کيږي سوکړه وي همېش
(Nangyalai 2019, 91) مه چپره دلته کښې سپرليېه د گلونو قيصي

Always there is no rain on our dry farming land. It is useless for spring to come here for flowers.

Gawandi [Neighbour]

It is a collection of twenty-four poems written by Shafiq Khpalwak. It is published in 2020 by Sarosh Booksellers at Kabul Afghanistan. It contains ninety-eight pages. The author has written a preface of ten pages to this book which is started from an epigraph by Ernest Hemingway "There is nothing to writing. All you do is to sit down at a typewriter and bleed" (Khpalwak 2020, 6). She has discussed many themes in her preface. She has explained the reason for abundance of poetry created by Pashtuns. She is of the opinion that due non-availability of other sources of expression such as dance, music, theatre, cinema, painting and photography, Pashtuns are inclined to give an outlet to their creativity through poetry. Social restrictions have contained their poetry.

She rejects the idea of writing poetry for aesthetic satisfaction or for passing leisure time, rather she stresses on introducing new ideas and themes into poetry. She also emphasizes upon symbolism in poetry. She also ignores the theme of didacticism and morality in poetry, rather stresses on new ideas and new themes in poetry. She also stresses on the introduction and usage of new vocabulary and non-traditional phrases in the poetry. Her innovativeness in poetry can be seen through the title of the book, *Gawandi* (neighbour), instead of beloved. She also says that new ideas and new themes also need new angles of reading and outlooks. Titles of her poems include: neighbour, gradual death, girl, hiding, last evening of the year, pain, death, habit, elegy of Nakamora, secret, unfair, limits, poetry, karma, love, freedom, time, male, friends, power, questions, last letter.

Malgin baran [Salty Rain]

It is an anthology of ghazals and poems written by Mujda Baran and published by Khatiz Khparandoia Tolana Nangrahar in 2020. It contains ninety-four pages. This poetic collection comprises on sixty-three ghazals and poems. Reviews of a few Pashto writers and critics are included in this book. The poet admits the shortcomings in her poetry due



to certain social and cultural restrictions. She tries to reflect on social issues, including peace and justice in Afghan society. She graduated in 2017 and started teaching in a private school. From that onwards she has started composing poetry. Although she is a Dari speaker but she is too much fluent in Pashto that she seems a Pashto native speaker. She wants to bring forward the ideas of peace among Afghans (Baran 2020, 9). The title of her book is taken from her following couplet:

بیا له سترگو می مالگین باران ورپیری
آه په سترې زندگی کبني می زړه تنگ شو (ibid., 47)

Once again, the salty rain (tears) are shedding from my eyes. Alas!
I am suffocated in my tired life.

No pa de me wajni [And they kill me for this]

It is a poetic collection of Asma Ikhlas. She belongs to the Malakand division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. It is published by Shahbaz publishers Jalalabad in 2021. It contains 166 pages. Besides some other literary genres such as tapayiza, qiata and bait the book predominantly consists of seventy-four poems and ghazals (different poetic forms). Reviews of a few Pashtun writers are included in the book followed by the preface of the author. From the preface it is revealed that she started her poetry since 2010. This is her first book. She has also appreciated the cooperation of her family members, who allowed her to get higher education and also to write poetry. She is popular on social media such as YouTube and Facebook. She remains grateful to her audience and followers on social media for the appreciation of her poetry. The title of her book is taken from one of her poems, repeating the same line. One of the couplets of that poem is given below:

د بلها وخت نه می زلفان بند وو کمځی کمځی وو
بنه نو چې زلفی خورومه نو په دی می وژني (Ikhlas 2021, 71)

Since long my locks (hair) were closed. When I opened it, they
wanted to kill me for this reason.

Endnotes

¹ All translations were made by the authors.

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