

Epical Elements in Pashto Tappa

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Abstract

This paper examines epical elements in Pashto Tappa. Pashto Tappa, a unique and popular genre of Pashto folk Poetry, or expressive song, composed and sung by men and women alike, has been instrumental in depicting the emotions and expressions of Pashtuns since ages. It has reflected the social, cultural and religious expression of Pashtuns. The traits of valour, honour, and prestige of Pashtuns in times of war and battles against the invaders or outsiders such as, the Mughals, British have been articulated in Tappa. Besides, the elements of love existing in Pashtuns, also articulated in Tappa. Possessing tremendous creative possibilities, Pashto Tappa can be manipulated according to myriad situations. A highly-valued verse form, it has been a popular and distinguished way of expressing emotions and feelings in verse. Poetry sung in Tappa, expresses intense emotions with deeper thought and effect. It also reflects the Pashtun code of life, Pashtunwali, and the cultural development associated with the epical elements. Due to these aspects, Pashto Tappa has its own individuality, popularity and importance in Pashto literature.

Key Words: Tappa, epical, Pashtun, folklore, Mughals, Sikhs, British, Rokhanis, Islam, 9/11.

1 Introduction

An epic is a genre of poetry having a theme of grandeur and heroism,[1] in other words, epic is a long story in verse narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures of the past history of a nation.[2] Just like epic, Tappa is the oldest and most popular genre of Pashto folk poetry. It may be termed as Tappa or Misra or Landai. Tappa, a unique form of poetry, and specific only to Pashto literature is not-existent in other literatures. It touches upon almost every aspect of human life such as, social, cultural and political. Most researchers are agreed that verse in Pashto literature originated from Tappa. A two-lined verse, the first line of Tappa, is half and the second is full, comprising 22(9+13) syllables. According to Yar Muhammad Maghmoom, Tappa or Misra or Landai is perhaps the oldest form of Pashto poetry, representing the natural culture, and civilization of Pashtoon, and describing their virtues of an ideal manhood, honor, bravery and justice.[3] In Tappa, legendary figures such as Malala, Haroon, Ramdad, Chamni Khan, Akbar Khan etc have been articulated, showing their heroic features. Pashto Tappa, articulating these heroic features of Pashtun, will be discussed in this paper.

2 Epical Elements in Pashto Tappa

Pashtuns are considered generally hot-tempered, hardworking, and soft hearted; they are not supposed to be hypocrite, liars, or mischievous. They adore religion, and love their home land. They do not compromise on honor and respect. Besides, love their Most researchers are agreed that verse in Pashto literature originated from Tappa. Tappa is a two-lined verse, first line is half and the second is full, comprising 22(9+13) syllables. affectionate, patient, and hospitable. The bravery of Pashtun is expressed in these lines;

پښتون په توره کښې پیدا دے
په توره لوه دے هم به مړ په توره شینه [4]

The Pashtun has been born with bravery
He has grown up brave and would die as brave .

Besides, when a child is born to a Pathan family, the youth and elders of the family shoot some target with fire. When someone is found coward or unmanly in Pashtun society, people scornfully ask him so,

“Was it you on whose birth there was firing?”

Similarly, if the child is baptized, or the youth has engagement, or marriage ceremony or any other celebrations, the tradition of firing is followed. Besides, when the Pashtun,s mothers lull their children to sleep, they sing to them the songs of honor and valor of their forefathers. When these children grow up, they are told stories of the Holy wars and battles of the Holy Prophet and his Companions. They also attend musical programs in their localities, where stories of wars, battles, and love are sung with the local musical instruments such as Rabab, Guitar and Mangai.

The Pashto Folk Lore poetry, contributed greatly to the cultural traditions of honor and valour, has reached to the present era or contemporary period by words or mouth. Orally, it spread through generation after generation while, in written form, literature recorded it. This folk genre not only adds to our literary contributions, but also to keeps alive the features of bravery and honour. The poetic contributions, have safeguarded the notable deeds of Pashtun fighters who sacrificed for their land,s honor and religion. Muhammad Zawak has expressed his views about folk poetry such as he says,

“In Pashto language , the folklore embodies all the aims and targets of common thoughts in themselves such as religious and love stories and wars and political events, Pashto Landai, lyrics, ballads etc and other Pashto lyrics are considered as a part of the Pashto folk literature, which are unwritten to this day, and transformed orally from one generation to another.”[5]

According to Sadiquallah Rishteen, Pashto Tappa is divided into two major categories of war and love, articulating thus;

“In Pashto folk literature, charbetas form the Qaseeda and Masnavis of the Persian language and are used as such. The Charbetas are priceless assets of our folk literature and need to be preserved from becoming extinct. Secondly, in Charbeta a vivid history of the wars and battle of our brave forefathers are wrapped.”[6]

Raza Hamdani has expressed his views about the origin and evolution of Pashto epic poetry, in his book “Ramie Dastanain (epical Stories) he writes,

“In Pashto literature, epic poetry starts with a war anthem of Amir Karor, which is written in 139 Hijra , according to Muhammad Hotak (Pata Khazana). Later on, epic poetry deals with tribal skirmishes, armed conflicts with Mughals, sikhs and duels with the British Imperialists. There are hundreds of poems of songs, anthems, lyrics, and Charbetas (quartets) present in Pashto literature dealing with the wars of 2ndcentury Hijra.”[7]

Farigh Bukhari articulated his thoughts in ”Sarhad ke Lok Geet” such as,

”The nature of the residents of the frontier Province is essentially epical. In Pashto language also, mostly epical tones are found. Patriotism, honour, self-esteem, Zeal, thrill, sensation, courage, boldness, freedom and mental toughness are the qualities which are the central theme of the folk songs of the region.” [8]

Pashto Folk poetry reflects its surroundings; it also contains epical poetry in abundance. The Pashtuns since long have been associated with battles. They have been actively involved in wars, battles with non-Muslim invaders, kings, unknown strangers and armies. They fought side by side (in company) with the armies of the Caliphate of Baghdad in the Islamic holy wars, with the Mughals, with Sikhs and Marhats and with the British.

Keeping this background, the epical Pashto poetry enriched quite well. Tappa produced the spirit of love, affection and sacrifice for Islam in Pashto language. It also highlighted the spirit, and feelings of national and tribal honour, against the foreign rule. In this regard, Muhammad Nawaz Tair has expressed his views thus,

”Peshawar remained under Sikhs rule for a few years, during this brief period too, the Pashtoons struggled intensely against them. The Pashtoon warriors fought many battles and holy wars against the Sikhs during this period. For the practical purpose of arousing common public to take active part in this action of war and fight, the thing which proved most effective, beside the public and sermon, was the folk lyric or song especially the Charbeta (quartet). This was sung by Pious Poets in Hujra and courage, Pashtoon brother hood, sacrifice for the sake of religion Islam and the armed struggle for achieving freedom from the foreign rule were the basic topics of these folk songs and Charbetas. In these songs the stories of the Islam wars of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan and Sardar Muhammad Akbar Khan, the movements of Syed Ahmad Shaheed Barevli and Shah Ismail Shaheed Barevli and their wars and battles have been narrated with special reference. And in Tappa ,Loba and Nematikai , besides Charbeta, these qualities have been produced to some extent”.[9]

Besides, Muhammad Nawaz Tair has expressed his views about the origin of Pashto Tappa, in the book *Roohi Sandary* by, Salma Shaheen. He states thus;

”The historians have held different opinions about the oldness of Landai or Misra . Some call it the genre of Century. While some are of the view that it originated in the 1st Century Hijra . Whatever is the disagreement of historians and researchers may be, I myself think that no one can say with authority about the origin, nomenclature, poet or poetry of Tappa or Landai . Similarly its era time can also not be determined.”[10]

Although it seems difficult to determine the origin of Pashto Tappa despite historical evidences. Professor Dawar Khan Daud has articulated in his book ‘Pashto Tappa’ he narrates,

”In the era of Mughal King Akbar, the exponent of ”Rokhani Movement”. and founder of Pashto Prose, Peer Rokhan has raised sword against the Mughals, and for two consecutive years the Mughals could not get rid of the onslaught of this movement. ”[11]

During that times, the epical verse narrated such ,

د مغل ظلم به نسکور شي
چې پير روښان توره په لاس جنگ له ورځينه [12]

The cruelty of the Mughals will fade away
While pir Rokhan with sword in hand fighting against them

که روښان نیاں سره یو ځای شول
مغل به وایره په پهانسی اوخپژوینه

If the Rokhanians are get united
All the Mughals will be hanged to death

پير روښان زبرگی دے هم عالم دے
ظلم زیا ترے به د مغلو خاورې کرينه [13]

Peer Rokhan is a Saint and is also a learned man
He will bury the cruelty and brutality of the Mughals

دا پير روښان د خداے ولي دے
مغل له ور به کړي د ظلم ځوابونه

Peer Rokhan is the companion of Allah
He will respond to the cruelties of Mughals

In Pashto, some Tappas are remindful of Ahmad Shah Abdali (Pashtun King) and his brave deeds. He attacked and succeeded every time India. He fought against the Sikhs, Marhatas, and defeated them in historical battles.

Ahmad Shah Abdali, a brave warrior, and a just king, loved Islam and his own people. The Pashtuns companions, fought side by side with him against the Sikhs and Mughals, and every soldier was proud to be a part of his army, and was happy in persuading others to join his force, as expressed in this epical verse (Tappa) .

اسمان به خود زما په خوا وي
چه د احمد تر بېرغ لا ندې جنگ کومه [14]

The Heaven will definitely take on my side
As, I go to the battlefield under the flag of the

In the early years of twentieth century (1919), Amir Amanullah Khan declared jihad against the British. The British too declared war on Afghans. The Amir asked the Pashtun tribals for help, many Pashtuns joined him. A renowned Khan, Mir Zaman Khan of the Kunar, also joined him. In 1929, his son and relatives suffered great cruelties at the hands of Bacha Saqa (a Tajik king of Afghanistan). These events are expressed in Pashto Tappa, such as,

د مير زمان مغلي لونه
اوس د رابرت په مخ کښې ځي سرتور سرونه

The modest daughters of Mir Zaman
Are now going bare face and headed in front of Robert.

د مير زمان ملوکې لونه
د سر کانه په ډاگ کښې وري ټولوينه [15]

The daughters of Mir Zaman the honorable Malik,
Are now collecting corn cobs in the field of Sarkana.

د شين کوچک په بره ډډه
ژړا يې خېژي د خانانو کډې وړينه [16]

In the upper side of Sheen Kodak,
There are cries, and mourning of the displaced Khan families.

ما ورته وې شېنگل ته مه ځه
فرانسیسي تابه خپلو توپو ته ترینه [17]

I disallowed him go to Shengal
The French will fire you with their Canons.

Similarly, the Pashtuns fought battles against the Sikhs, and Britishers. Malala, a Pashtun warrior girl, has made a history of honour and bravery, while fighting against the British in the Second Anglo-Afghan War in 1880. She called the Pashtun to fight against the British. Therefore, the call of Malala was expressed in Tappa such as;

که په مېوند کښې شهید نه شوې
گرانه لالیه بې ننګۍ له دې ساتینه [18]

If you could not martyr at Maiwand
Someone, is enslaving you as a token of shame

Similarly, in an another battle, Ramdad Khan, a Pashtun took part in a battle against the British at Maiwand, and was martyred. The situation at his death, is sad and melancholic, however, the brave mother and sisters of Ramdad, express their brave feelings on his death as such, in Pashto Tappa.

رامداده جنگ نه په شا نه شې
ماله به جور کړې د همزولو پیغورونه

O,Ramdad do not be afraid of war ,
For my friends would taunt me of your cowardice.

رامداده پاسه توره ډال که
تاله د سر کمر مومند راغلي دینه [19]

Oh,Ramdad, getup and wear your sword,
The Mohmand have come from the SoorKamar to see your valor.

رامداده خړې جا مې اوکه
په کوپر جنگ دے جینکی دې یادوینه [20]

Ramdad please put on brown clothes in the Koper war
For the girls there are whispering about your bravery.

رامداد دے دا واري خدا مے جوړ کړي
که دوباره په کوپر جنگ وي مړ دې شینه [20]

May God make healthy and fit Ramdad this time
No worry if he would die in the following war

د رامداد خان د مرگ اواز شو
پاس په اسمان کښې زانو وړان کړل قطارونه [20]

Translation: The resonant of the death of Ramdad did spread over.
The Cranes disarranged in the sky of sorrow

پاس په آسمان راشه رامداده
د کلي لارې رانیزو نیولې دینه [21]

Translation: O, Ramdad, Come down straight from the Sky,
The travelling routes have been occupied by the Ranizais

The Pashtun martyrs sacrificed for the sake of religion or homeland, are not considered dead, rather, they alive. People love and admire them. They are buried with heavy hearts .This is expressed in Pashto Tappa as,

رامداد د خاورو لایق نه دے
ترې لاندې واچوی بخمل په امبارونه [22]

Translation: Ramdad does not deserve to lie on the soil,
Scores of Velvets must be spread under his body.

The First Anglo Afghan war (1939-42) between the Pashtun and the British has historical and Political significance. Heavy casualties were received on both sides. The war was fought by Pashtun with valour and spirit. This brave spirit shown in the war, has been expressed in Pashto Tappa, such as

کابل ته مه وايه چه وران شي
پکښې پراته دي پښتانه د ننگ مپرونه [23]

Translation: Do not send curse upon Kabul.
For there are lying great Pathans's heroes.

وطنه زېرې مې درباندي
ټول پښتانه دې په وطن سر ورکويڼه [24]

Translation: O,my land bless be upon you
For All the Pathans are ready to sacrifice for you.

سبا کابل ته روانېرم
ترې خداي مې جار کړې بيا به وکړم ديدنونه

Translation: Tomorrow I am leaving for Kabul
As Kabul is dearer to me, I will see you later

په پښتنو کښې غلغلې شوې
زلميان ټولېرې په وطن سر ورکويڼه

Translation: There arose a noise among the Pathans
The youngsters are gathered to sacrifice for the land

وطنه ستا په مينه مست يم
که ستا په مينه مې سر ځي لويې پرې کړمه

Translation: O, my land I am indept of your love.
It would be my lot, If could sacrifice for you.

وطنه قلاړه قلاړي شوه
چه پښتنو زلمو پرې کېښودل سرونه

Translation: My homeland is calm all around,
Because the youth sacrificed their lives.

During the war, (1939-42) the young girls encourage the youngs to win the honour. They believed their young's to be either martyred or emerge as victors. These feelings were expressed in Tappa, such as,

سبا په سپين مېدان غزا ده
خداى مې ترې څار کړې پښتانه غزا له ځينه

Translation: There will be bared battle tomorrow,
Oh God, me die for them, how they are going for war

سبا په سپين مېدان غزا ده
ځوانان به وينې تويوي جنگ به گټينه

Translation: There will be bared battle tomorrow,
The youth will bleed themselves, but win the battle

مورې لنډې توره مې راکه
په دين غزا ده زه خپل ځان شهيدومه [25]

Translation: O, my mother! give me my little sword,
It is a religious battle, I want to be martyred.

د ننګيالي جانان د پاره
زه دواړه لاسه په نکريزو سره کومه [26]

Translation: For the sake of my brave lover,
I am intended to colour my hands with Hina.

جانان چې ته دا بې ويښله
چې تر قيامته پورې نشته ديدنونه

Translation: My lover uttered while leaving,
Now we will not meet till doomsday.

پښتون به ولې توره نه کړي
چې د مېراني نوم ئې تللے تر ملکونه

Translation: Why may not the Pathan show bravery,
His fame of heroism is spread all over the world

پښتون د جنگ په ډگر مړ شو
پښتنې پېغلې بې په وینو ږدي خالونه

Translation: The Pathan has died in the battle field,
The Pathan girls are putting moles of his blood on their faces

پښتنې پېغلې خوشالي کا
چې زلمیان کاندې د انگرېز سره جنگونه

Translation: The Pakhtoon virgins celebrate happiness
For the youths are at war with the British.

که تور وړبل مې میرا تېري
په وطن جنگ دے جانان نه منع کومه [27]

Translation: If I would likely to be a widow,
I will not restrain my lover to fight for homeland

په وطن ځان ټوټې ټوټې کړه
بیا به د سرو شونډو ملهم درباندي ږدمه

Translation: Cut yourself into pieces for the mother-land,
Then I will heal your wounds with my lips, cure

ته د وطن بې وطن ستا دے
زلمي د قام د پاره سر قربانوینه

Translation: You are for your land, and the land is for you,
The young always sacrifice themselves for their mother land.

سورے سورے په گولو راشے
د بې ننگی اواز دې رامه شه مئینه [28]

Translation: Come with your body bruised with bullets O' my lover,
Lest I hear the voice of your unmanliness

په سپین میدان به درسره یم
زه پښتنه د تورو نه تښتم مئینه [29]

Translation: I will stand beside you in the battle field
Being a Pathan girl, I will not leave the field for you

A Pashtun is not generally expected to turn his back in a war for his homeland, nation or religion. The Pashtun may be disunited among themselves but united against common enemy.

چې په سینه دې پر هر نه وه
په شا غلبیل شي خه پرواه دې نه کومه [30]

Translation: If you are not shot at your chest ,
Despite countless wounds on your back , I will not honor you.

که د زلمو نه پوره نه شوه
گراڼه وطنه جینکی به دې ساتینه [31]

Translation: If the young's could not defend you, O my mother land,
The girl swill defends you against your enemy.

جانانه جنگ نه په شا نه شي
چې د همزولو مې رانه شي پېغورونه [32]

Translation: O, my lover, do not run away from the battle field,
Rather I will have to bear the blames of my friends.

که دې په جنگ کښې مېدان پرېښوو
کور دې ځای نشته درنه مخ به واړومه

Translation: If you ran away of the battle field,
You will lose home, along with respect

A Pashtun is generally unexpected to refuse going to war. Such a man considered unmanly and coward. This is expressed in Tappa as,

ځوانان په تورو کښې ورگډ شو
موزيان په تورو کښې ولاړ تندي وهينه

Translation; The brave men entered the battlefield
The Mozian (cowards) scream in fear standing in the field

په سنگر بيا ټکونه اوشول
زلمي به مري موزيان به بيا کور ته راځينه [33]

Translation: The enemy has attacked again,
The brave will die while coward will come back home

Pashto Tappa is evident in reflecting social, cultural, and political aspects of Pashtoon way of life. Currently, the impact of War on Terror in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is widely reflected on media and literature alike. It affected the Pashto Tappa too. In other words, the aspirations of Pashtoon in the wake of 9/11 event, have been abundantly reflected in Tappa. Such as,

سترگې دې نه دي ډرون حمله ده
درته طالب طالب کېدم اودې ويشتمه [34]

Translation: Your Eyes are like Drone attack
I exposed myself as talib and was martyred

دطالبانو مير به يار کړم
تر پېښوره به مې ټول لېورونه وينه [35]

Translation: I will marry the Amir of Taliban
All the Taliban till Peshawar will become my brothers-in-laws

Pashto Tappa is abundant with such epical and warlike elements taken from the society. I would like to conclude my paper with this last Tappasuch as,

دښمن په سروگولو کښې پټ کړه
که کارتوس خلاص شو لونگين به گانه کړمه [36]

Translation: Bombard the enemy with bullets
If the bullets fall short, I will mortgage my jewelry.

مُلاپه زور زيره پرې پرېښوه
لاله شرمېري اوس گودر ته نه رايينه

Translation: The Mullah has made obliged my beloved to keep beard
Due to Shame, he (beloved) is not attending the Guddar

خانمرگي برید راباندې اوکړه
خوداسې مه وایه چې خله نه درکومه [38]

Translation: Attack me as a suicide bomber
But don't refuse to let me a kiss

3 Conclusion

Pashto Tappa, a unique genre in Pashto language and literature, unavailable in other literature and societies, is a fluid tool of expression of Pashtuns' culture and tradition. Pashto Tappa is the most popular form of verse in Pashto. Existing since ages, the Pashtun takes much rejoice in expressing their feelings and emotions in Tappa. The history of Pashtunis full of love, battles, wars, rivalry etc; these feelings of war, hate, and love have been artistically expressed by Pashtun writers in Tappa. Besides, the features of Pashtunwali, such as revenge, asylum, honour, respect of woman, etc are also expressed. Furthermore, the patriotic sentiments, which are dearer to a Pashtun, are articulated. Tappa, in other words, is the true reflection of situational realities forming in Pashtun society. It runs with Pashtun with the passage of time, creating and expressing contemporary feeling and aspirations of people. The Pashtun heroes and notables such as Malala, Haroon, Ramdad Khan, Umra Khan, Ajab Khan, appearing in different ages such as, the Mughals, Sikhs and British, have been replicated along with their societal conditions. Similarly, the recent development of 9/11 and its impact on Pashtun, has also been expressed in Tappa. The draining of feeling and aspiration of Pashtun, reflecting in Tappa, is continuous and unceasing.

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