

STATUS OF WOMEN IN KHUSHAL KHAN KHATTAK'S WORK

*Maria Khan

ABSTRACT

Throughout history, women have endured marginalization, abuse, and direct assaults in various aspects of life. This includes areas such as schooling, medical care, reproductive rights, employment, and even weddings, all within a relentlessly patriarchal society. Women have been severely suppressed and subordinated as a result of these cultural prejudices. This research paper addresses how the status of women in a patriarchal society has been represented in the work of a versatile genius, poet, political theorist, academic intellectual, and educationist of his age, Khushal Khan Khattak. This study is fundamentally based on the Qualitative Content Analysis of desk research of secondary data, utilizing sources such as books, academic papers, and online documents, among others. This paper examines the work of Khushal and finds that Khushal treats women as commodities of men. He humiliates their age, criticizes their free will, and treats them like animals. He compares them with prostitutes and fighting instruments and legitimizes honor killing against them, etc. This study emphasizes the need to undertake further detailed research on the status of women in Pakhtun society. Such research can be used to give voice to voiceless women whose voices have never been heard in Pashtun society before and to elevate their status in society.

Key Words

Pakhtun society, Khushal Khan Khattak, Khushal's patriarchal attitude towards women, status of women in Pakhtun society, Pakhtun feminism, empowerment of Pakhtun women

* M.Phil. scholar at NIPS, Quaid I Azam University Islamabad

INTRODUCTION

The struggle for women's human rights began many centuries ago, but it was only during the last century that it made significant progress. Despite these advances, women are still treated as second-class citizens all over the world (Friedan, 1963). Pakistan is a patriarchal society where local customs, traditions, and tribal law play a role in defining the status of women. Violence against women has reached crisis levels in Pakistan, and domestic violence is considered a private matter. Women are often unaware that violence is a crime (Dr. Rubina Saigol, 2020).

Pakistan's patriarchal system encompasses widely diverse socio-cultural conditions, including urban societies, rural communities, and tribes. In this milieu, women are the most impoverished and oppressed individuals. Most women are dominated and reliant, performing roles as daughters, wives, mothers, and sisters under stringent family restrictions. (Sugata Bose, 1998).

The social and cultural context of Pakistani society has historically been predominantly patriarchal. In Pakistan, the Pashtun culture, language, traditions, and patriarchal values are distinct from those in surrounding Muslim-majority provinces, with male domination being even more prevalent in Pashtun society. In such a patriarchal context, the trivialization of women is not only present in general society but also reflected in the

writings of many famous writers like Khushal Khan Khattak. Violence against women is a common theme in Khushal's poetry, as he permits men to beat their wives and expects honor only from females, not from men.

Statement of the Problem

This study examines the status of women in Khushal Khan's work to understand the status of women in Pakhtun society in general, and in Khushal's work in particular, to demonstrate his anti-feminist stance. This issue is important to highlight because Khushal's work has a significant impact on Pakhtun society, influencing how they view their women through the lens of his writings and sayings.

Purpose of the Study

This paper aims to reveal the patriarchal nature of Khushal Khan and his focus on the physical beauty of women while ignoring their mental beauty. He expects izzat (honor) only from women, not from men, and treats women as commodities of men. The purpose of this study is to highlight his attacks on women and propose solutions to this problem.

Significance of the Study

While much work has been done on Khushal, very little has been focused on the status of women in his writings. Khushal Khan was a great Pakhtun warrior, chief, and poet known for his name and deeds. Various articles, pamphlets, and essays have been written and published on his life, politics, nobility, martial

arts, heroism, sacrifice, imprisonment, art, poetry, and writing. However, Khushal Khan's thoughts on the status of women have not been published. This study is significant as it is the first scholarly work to specifically examine Khushal's views on feminism in his ideas and writings. By utilizing fieldwork, this research seeks to add to the existing body of literature on women/gender studies, significantly enriching the essential discussions on feminism in Pakistan. It aims to foster a comprehensive and nuanced comprehension of women's empowerment in Pakistan overall, with a specific focus on the Pakhtun regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Research Questions

In the male-dominated society of the Pakhtuns, tackling women's issues is challenging. The primary research question of this paper is: What role does Khushal assign to women in his work?

Supplementary Questions

What is the status of women in Pakhtun society?
Why did Khushal view the institution of marriage as more political and as a contract to settle differences between tribes?

Literature Review

Now that the topic under research has been introduced, this portion will deal with the literature available on the topic. Some of the literature available on the topic is discussed as follows.

Status of Women in Pashtun Society

Shams and Hussain state that the culture, language, traditions, and patriarchal values of the NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) are entirely different from the surrounding Muslim-majority provinces. The Pakhtuns are a traditional community where male domination is common. A woman secures her position in her in-laws' house by giving birth to sons; otherwise, polygamy is practiced to have more sons for tribal feuds. They also analyze the participation of women in Indian politics and the Khudai Khidmatghar Movement (Hussain, 2018).

Lindholm presents a comprehensive picture of Pashtun's behavior towards women in his book. He explains that in the Pashtun nuclear family, men and women continuously struggle for power. Weddings are arranged by parents, and females have no right to choose their husbands. They cannot take legal action, despite the Pashtun saying that "a husband is another name for God." He argues that women do not enjoy freedom in a strong patriarchal system (Lindholm, C.1982).

The lives of Pashtun women are restricted by traditions that enforce extreme seclusion and submission to men. Local customs, traditions, and tribal laws determine the status of women. KP is a patriarchal society where socio-cultural traditions define the role of women as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters in relation to men. In Pashtun society, women personify the honor of the tribe. The possession and control of

desirable commodities, especially zan (women), zar (gold), and zamin (land), are closely linked to a man's honor. Ghairat (honor) is closely linked with izzat (respect). Khushal Khan Khattak, the quintessential Pathan and warrior-poet of the Khattak tribe, wrote in the 17th century:

Sweeter to me is death than life

Which is passed day to day without honor

(I despise the man who does not guide his life by honor. The very word honor drives me mad) (Wazir, 2010).

Kamil Mohammad mentions the Swara system, in which most Afghans, particularly the Khattak, settle disputes by marrying a woman from the perpetrator's tribe to a man from the victimized tribe (Kamil, 1951).

Khalil (2021) has analyzed the political struggle and life history of Khushal Khan Khattak in his recent work, "The Genius Khushal." Similarly, the academic scholarship of Amina H. Mobeen and Hanif Khalil discusses the role and position of females in Pakhtun society during the 17th century through the life and works of Khushal Khan Khattak. This scholarship shows that despite some importance given to females in Pakhtun society, there was symbolic annihilation of women in that era. Females were objects for dispute settlement, political power consolidation, or demonstrations of manhood through marriage. Mobeen and Khalil mention that the relationship between husband and wife represents a constant power struggle. Khushal's

numerous marriages were also a reflection of his political strategies against rival Pakhtun tribes, where he took not only second but many other wives. 'Pakhtun marriage is... primarily concerned with politics in the very broadest sense—that is, in the pursuit of power' (Mobeen & Khalil, 2020, p.171)

Saqeb states that feminism is the stimulation of women who defend women's rights. She explores feminist-related ideas in Khushal's work, referencing "Dastar Nama," where Khushal explains the traits of women and advocates for equal education for both girls and boys. He says in "Dastar Nama" that women should eat healthy food during pregnancy and avoid lifting heavy objects (Saqeb, 2022).

Amini (2019) examines Khushal's writings on women's education. She evaluates his contributions to education and links them to the significance of female education. She contends that Khushal opposed ignorance for both men and women, emphasizing that education is vital not only for economic and social status but also for all phases of life for both genders.

Education is an obligation

It is a loan for men and women

If there is no scholar in the village

That village will be annihilated

Its excellence is too much

It is not countable; it is not countable.

To summarize, from the above discussion, we can conclude that Khushal favored female education. Women can

attain a good and respectable position in society by receiving proper education.

Sultan-e-Room analyzed the "Swat Nama" of Khushal Khan. The writer agrees and disagrees with Khushal on various matters and declares him anti-Yousafzai. However, despite his anti-stance, he acknowledges Khushal's critique of the people of Swat for not considering the background of the person they marry their daughters and sisters to. This is exemplified by Khushal's marriage to Malak Malu Khan's daughter, despite his past anti-Yousafzai and pro-Mughal stance. This indicates that marriages among the Pashtuns often represent political power over other tribes, explaining Khushal's numerous marital partners due to his alliances with the Mughal emperor and resulting tribal feuds (Sultan-I-Rome).

Begum criticizes Khushal Khan for portraying himself as a sympathizer of humankind and advocating for freedom for all, including animals, yet humiliating women in his writings. She expresses anger at his focus on the physical beauty of women while neglecting their intellectual capabilities (Feroziuddin, 2007).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Now that the literature available on the topic has been reviewed, there is a gap in theory and practice. To fill this gap, I conducted data collection. As primary data and primary sources

were not available on the topic, I collected data through the desk study method.

Data Collection

I gathered secondary research data through a desk study approach, utilizing sources such as magazines, women's rights reports, books, academic papers, journals, and online documents. Furthermore, I translated Pashto and Urdu literature into English.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, I employed the "Qualitative Content Analysis" approach, which systematically elucidates the essence of a text and detects patterns within it. The text is labeled using codes, which are subsequently organized into categories and subcategories, and ultimately connected with themes (Schreier, 2013). Presenting and interpreting these themes facilitated addressing my research.

Limitations

This research paper may have limitations. For instance, due to time constraints, extensive fieldwork could not be conducted, necessitating reliance on secondary resources. However, this qualitative thematic content analysis was deemed sufficient to answer the main research question.

DATA ANALYSIS

Now that the secondary research data has been collected, the qualitative content method has been used for analysis. This

research has filled the gap in the literature with the collected data as follows:

Khushal's Patriarchal Stance towards Women Commodity of Man

*"A wise man has these things,
the falcon belongs to an expert hunter,
gold to the gold trader, books to the wise,
the woman to the man,
and perfume to the perfumer."*

Explanation:

In this verse, Khushal declares that a woman is the property of a man, akin to other possessions.

Comparison with Prostitute

*"My youth passed away in poverty and misery.
The prostitute takes the rosary in her hand when she is old.
Now my obedience to God is also of this type."*

Explanation:

Here, Khushal compares his obedience to God in old age to the rosary held by a prostitute, implying a negative association with women.

Criticizes Women's Free Will

*"In my opinion, a wise widow is better than a maiden
that she will deal with matters with understanding"*

while the young lady will live her life of her own free will."

Explanation:

This verse criticizes young women for exercising their free will, favoring widows who act with understanding.

Comparison with Fighting Instrument

"This is clearer than daylight that if a man has a sword, do not look for any other perfection.

But a woman who is pure and chaste is more perfect than a man's sword-wielding."

Explanation:

Here, Khushal compares women to swords, emphasizing purity and chastity as virtues.

A Symbol of Honor

"Demand honor from the daughter and fencing from the son.

In which these two virtues are far removed from every evil.

*May death come upon those who do not have these virtues
And soon their mother loses them."*

Explanation:

He associates honor with daughters, expecting it from them, and bravery from sons, with dire consequences for those lacking.

Women as a Complex Being

*"A woman who is free from deceit and every defect
Cannot be found by effort and consultation,
She can be found only by luck."*

Explanation:

Khushal portrays women as complex and elusive beings, suggesting they can only be understood by luck.

Lesser than a Rude Man

*"It is incumbent upon everyone to speak well. I will have
made two requests*

*Obey any of your slanderers but do not follow the advice
of women because women's understanding and experience are
not equal to that of a man.*

Do not flee from death but run away from debt."

Explanation:

Here, Khushal advises against following women's advice, considering them inferior to men in understanding and experience.

Treating Women Like Animals

*"If you have to bring a woman, horse, slave, donkey, and slave
onto the right path even though beating,
you should bring them."*

Explanation:

Khushal suggests that women, along with horses, donkeys, and slaves, can be disciplined through beating. This

comparison reduces women to the status of animals, reflecting a patriarchal mindset.

Humiliating Aged Women

"When there is no youth, wealth, grains, why call him powerful

*If they all are present but the youth is absent,
it is like an old woman wearing ornaments."*

Explanation:

This verse disparages old women, implying that without youth, they are like ornaments on an old woman, useless and irrelevant.

Home as Hell Because of Women

"Whoever has a quarreling woman in his home will spend his life in fire.

A good woman is the source of peace, but a bad woman is the source of trouble and will always suffer evil."

Explanation:

Khushal associates the peace of a home with the behavior of women, suggesting that a quarrelsome wife brings misery and trouble, while a good wife brings peace. This perpetuates the stereotype of women being responsible for the harmony or discord in the household.

Legitimizing Honor Killing

"When she starts to work, dead

So, the woman becomes known as the adulterer

When neither kills him nor divorces her

Then the gates of heaven are closed on her husband."

Explanation:

Here, Khushal appears to justify honor killings, implying that if a woman is suspected of adultery and the husband fails to take action, he will face consequences in the afterlife.

Serving a Man is Above All

"Neither ask for empire nor ask for more wealth.

Ask for chastity and chastity from the woman.

Ask God for help in worship.

Serve your husband and pray for your health."

Explanation:

Khushal advises women to prioritize serving their husbands over seeking wealth or power, reinforcing traditional gender roles and subservience of women to men.

Views of Khushal Khan Khattak about Women of Different Pashtun Tribes

Below are Khushal's views about women from different Pashtun tribes, characterized by negative stereotypes:

Tori's and Jarjiis' virgins are good but are looters.

Jidran, Waziri, and Sarangs are neither men nor women.

Esa Khelvi's are considered Hindus.

Sunbal's maidens have dirty hair.

Daulat Khel and Lohani maidens are good, others are dirty.

Bannu maidens are good but raw in language and dressing.

Abdali maidens are shepherds, Pasheen maidens are commendable.

Khattak maidens are cattle grazers, except for Akora Khel.

Mohmand maidens are red like pomegranates, with wide heads and small eyes.

Khalil born Maleeh is stingy and foolish.

Daudzai maidens are astounding with wide mouths.

Mahman Zai maidens are like donkeys.

Khweshki Lohanis are milk grinders.

Mandori and Barmoti's maidens are silent.

Dalazak maidens become aggressive when angry.

CONCLUSION

Through an analysis of secondary resources including books, articles, journals, and literary debates, it becomes evident that Khushal Khan Khattak's portrayal of women in his work is characterized by contempt, disdain, and disregard. Women, in his depiction, are viewed as symbols of cowardice, dishonesty, and inferiority, perpetuating the patriarchal notion of their subservience to men. Khushal's portrayal reflects a society where men are considered superior and women are reduced to mere commodities.

Khushal's perspective on women is evident in his opposition to their free will, viewing them primarily as instruments for resolving tribal disputes. His preference for a rude, impolite man over a woman underscores his misogynistic attitude. Throughout his poetry, Khushal's stance emerges as distinctly anti-feminist, reinforcing traditional gender roles and perpetuating negative stereotypes about women.

In conclusion, Khushal Khan Khattak's work serves as a reflection of his pessimistic view of women and his intellectual stance on gender dynamics. His portrayal underscores the challenges faced by women in society, emphasizing the need for continued efforts to challenge and overcome entrenched patriarchal attitudes.

References

- Amini, S. (2019, December). Women Education from the Viewpoint of Khushal Khan Khattak. *International Journal for Innovative Research in Multi-Disciplinary Field*, 5(12), 33-35. doi: ISSN: 2455-0620
- Saigol, R., & Chaudhary, N. U. (2020). *Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan*. Islamabad: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- Feroziuddin, D. M. (2007). *Life and Work of the Illustrious Khushal Khan Khattak*. Pashtu Academy Peshawar University. Retrieved June 30, 2022.
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. USA: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Gohar, D. (2017). *Khushal Khan Khattak (First ed.)*. Rawalpindi, Pakistan: BI Printer, Rawalpindi. doi:978-969-37-0987-2
- Hussain, S. S. (2018). *The Role of North West Frontier Women in the Freedom Struggle for Pakistan (1930-47)*. Islamabad, Pakistan: NIHCR Publication No.204. doi:ISBN: 978-969-415-130-4
- Khalil, A. H. (2020). Understanding Gendered Dynamics in Pakhtun Society Through Life History and Works of Khushal Khan Khattak. *Pakistan-Bi-annual Research Journal*, 166-179.
- Khalil, D. H. (2021). *Genius Khushal (Life, works, and Thoughts)*. Peshawar, Pakistan, KP: Pashto Adabi Tolana Regi Seema Peshawar (Pakistan). Retrieved May 21, 2022.
- Khattak, D. (1987). *Kalam-e-Khushal Khan Khattak (Vol. 6th)*. Islamabad, Pakistan: Cristal Printers Blue Area, Islamabad. Retrieved April 27, 2022.
- Kamil, D. M. (1951). *Khushal Khan Khattak: Swaneh Hyat aur Adbi Asaar per Tabsrah. Idara-e-Ishaat-e-Sarhad Peshawar*.
- Lindholm, C. (1982). *Generosity and Jealousy: The Swat Pakhtun of Northern Pakistan*. Columbia University Press.
- Saqeb, B. (2022, April). Feminism of Khushal Khan Khattak. *International Journal of Advanced Academic Studies*, 4(1), 102-104. doi: <https://doi.org/10.33545/27068919.2022.v4.i1b.691>
- Schreier, M. (2013). *Qualitative Content Analysis*. In M. Schreier, *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.170-183.
- Sugata Bose, a. a. (1998). *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*. London: Routledge.
- Sultan-I-Rome. "Khushal Khan Khattak and Swat." Retrieved from: http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/history/PDF-FILES/4v51_No1_14.pdf (Accessed on May 1, 2022).
- Wazir, M. M. (2010, April). Violence Against Women: Violation of Right to Life of Women in FATA. *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*, 2, 1-20. Retrieved July 2, 2022 from <http://www.pjcriminology.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/4-25>