

Reflection of the Spiritual Tradition in Pashtu Folklore: A study of Poetic Genre  
"Kakarai Ghardi"

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**Abstract:**

Traditional societies in all over the world carry a great sum of knowledge and wisdom which is constructed in the course of cultural process which is seldom heard and least understood. Folk forms of poetics and prose expressions are sole repositories of these societies which helps researchers, ethnographers, and cultural anthropologists to reconstruct an image of these societies which primarily rely on oral tradition. The folkloric genre of Pashto accumulates unprecedented texts and contexts to be unearthed. The most pervasive folkloric genres like Tappa, Sandara, Kakarai Ghardi, Char-Baita, Sarwakai, Loba, Da Attan Narey, Balandai, Mathnavis and several others have rich contents to unpack the popular notions of spirituality and people's sense of religion and divinity. In order to study a unit of the Pashto folklore, this paper is taking on the *Kakarai Ghari*, a genre specifically created by the ordinary men and women in Northern Balochsitan predominantly inhabited by Pashtuns. The paper analyzes some selective couplets of *Kakarai Ghari* which carries the themes of people's faith in God, their affiliation and aspiration from the divine omens, metaphors, symbols and particularly their association and love for the Almighty Allah, his prophet Muhammd (P.B.U.H) and Sufi saints of the locale.

**Keywords:** Pashtun Tradition, Spirituality, Pashto Folklore, Kakarai Ghardi, Cultural Repositories

**Introduction:**

The discourse on modernity and tradition has taken several shifts in the last two centuries. Modernization theorists from Karl Marx to Daniel Bell have argued that economic development brings pervasive cultural changes. But others, from Max Weber to Samuel Huntington, have claimed that cultural values are an enduring and autonomous influence on society (Inglehart, R., & Baker, W. E. 2000). With the advent of modern economic developments, Information and communication technologies, modern schooling and the culture of written texts has weakened oral tradition of the traditional and tribal societies

which particularly reside on the margins of modern nation state. Due to the overwhelming cultural imposition of modernity, the organic cultural processes have been either suspended or face existential threats.

Pakistan as multi-cultural and multiethnic country possess a great sum of intangible cultural heritage of cultural ecologies, which carry the patterns of ordinary people's worldviews, beliefs, norms, attitudes, value systems and imagination. These societies evolve particular spiritual practices, notions, prophecies and folk philosophies which are rooted in the collective socio-religious and cultural practices of the people. But the study of oral traditions is still a missing link. The contemporary scholarship on Muslim's humanities, cultures and traditions seldom focuses these lag behind societies to be traced and searched for exploring the meanings people attribute to their spiritual meanings, values and practices which are evolved through the course of history. In this endeavor the authors have strived to explore patterns of Islamic tradition, the sense of ordinary Pashtun's association with divinity, the concept and faith in Allah Almighty and love for the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and saints known and closer to the vicinities.

### **Living Cultures and Folklore Repositories of Zhob Valley:**

According to the 2017 census report, Pashtuns in Pakistan is rated the second-largest ethnic group of the country, forming 15% to 18% of the country's total population, and are considered one of the five major ethno linguistic groups of the Paksitan (Wazir, M. A., & Goujon, A. 2019).

The geography of Pashtuns best described by an orientalist McMohan in his account: "If we imagine the letter V so suspended that its sharp end is up in the north-east and its legs pointing west and south-west... the upper leg of the > would represent the range of Hindu Kush with extremity at Herat, while the lower leg would represent the mountains of the Kunhar River, the Safed Koh, and the Sulaiman range with the extremity at Sibi, at the Indian end of the Bolan Pass ( McMohan, 1934; 3-4).

Anthropologists like Professor Charles Lindholm, Fredrick Barth and Thomas Barfield assert that Pashtuns constitutes the largest segmented tribal structure in the world (Kakar, 2012; Tainter, 2011). In Pakistan Pashtuns share a great sum of land and live in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, the erstwhile FATAs and Northern Balochistan. According to different reliable sources there above 5 million Pashtuns live as diaspora community in different countries of the world.

Northern Balochistan, formerly known as British Balochistan during the colonial era, is predominantly Pashtun area, which consists of several subcultural zones and Zhob valley having agricultural and pastoralist economic characteristics is one of the distinct vicinity that still host a traditional cultural ecologies to be studied. As tribal society, people reside on their ancestral and historical lands, interact and assimilate culturally. Kakar is one of the major tribes of this area therefore the folkloric genre selected for this study is called "*Kakarai Ghardi*" or the chants of Kakars. As above 60% children in the age of school still have no access to education (BEMIS 2018), therefore literacy of the locale has not flourished. In the absence of modern learning and educational tools and institutions, people still rely on oral tradition.

### **Pashtu Folklore and Prospects of Spirituality:**

The folklore of almost all human societies embraces the diverse glimpses of the everyday life of the human society. As traditional societies operate on the oral principals and hence an oral tradition prevails all around, therefore the folklore can be instrumental to retrieve the cultural and social histories of people and communities.

Folklore has been defined and interpreted in diverse ways. While reviewing literature on the theme semantically and pragmatically, varied versions and notions are reported for folklorists, ethnographers and anthropologists. The difficulties experienced in defining are genuine; they result from the nature of folklore itself and are rooted in the historical development of the concept (Amos; 1971). Folklore is usually termed as the great sum of intangible cultural heritage of people sharing the same territory, language and culture. The term folklore was primarily coined by a British anthropologist William John Thomas who replaced the term popular literature with folklore in 1946 (Ban, 2008). Folklore encompasses almost all the aspects of people's thoughts, perspectives, aesthetics, beliefs, biases, codes, values, norms, taboos and all the stuff that gives meaning to the lives of people in a society. In the nutshell folklore is derived from the English term "Folk" and "Lore" which literally means the wisdom of people (Rafi, 1978; 3)

Pashtun tradition embodies a wholesome conduct of individual and collective consciousness, traits, values, norms and beliefs that embodies the divinity, spirituality, aesthetics, and a wholesome code of conduct. Folklore in almost all the Pashtun sub-cultural zones is the creation of oral tradition. The study of oral tradition shows that it prospers, proliferates and propagates in a society where the written script and literacy are at marginal levels. Most of the Pashto folklorists like Habibullah Rafi, Muhammad Nawaz Tahir, Sahibzada Hamidullah, Ghutai Khawri, Dost Muhammad Dost Shinwarai, Salma Shaheen, Dawar Khan Dauood, Syed Khair Muhammad Arif, and other folklorist and ethnographers opined that the illiterate and traditional Pashtun women have added the greater part in the folk poetry of Pashto. Folklore is created in village and pastoralist societies where men and women have limited knowledge of religion, but they have a strong sense of Muslim identity and its wholesome belief system stemmed in Monotheism. Muhammad (P.B.U.H) takes central position in the popular imagination. Muhammad (P.B.U.H) resides in the core hearts.

One of the very prominent poetic genres "Kakarai Ghardi" has been resonated in the public and folk arenas for hundreds of years. This spontaneous couplet of 8-8, 8-7, and 7-8 syllables encapsulate diverse themes stemmed in life. Depiction of Islamic faith, history, praise of Allah Almighty and tributes to Muhammad (P.B.U.H) are cross cutting.

#### **A Glance over historical Pashtun's adherence to Islam:**

Literature on the origin and genesis of Pashtun's ethnicity and genealogy caters to different opinions. The traditional 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century commentaries present a reductionist approach to the origin and these commentaries equate the very beginning of Pashtuns with the emergence of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. The account of Niamtullah Haravi, a 17<sup>th</sup> century courtier of Mughal era traces back the genealogy of Pashtuns to the Jewish origin (Kakakhel, 1999; 16). This notion was challenged in by a German linguist and philologist Juilis Klaproth in 1810 carried out a structural analysis of Pashto language which challenged the predominant notion of Pashtun's origin as an extension of Jewish race. Klaproth proved that Pashtu language belong the family of Indo-European family which reoriented the scholars to

further trace the Aryan relics in the culture, language, archeology and folklore. The discourse on Pashtun's intrigues to Islam has long debate. The depiction of Pashtun's tribes, rivers, valleys and cultural codes in the works of the ancient Greek historian Herodots (485 -425 BC) shows that Pashtuns existed ever before the advent of Christian tradition.

Pelevin in his account on Pashutns and tribal Islam summarized the complicated process of the Pashtun tribes' conversion to Islam is indirectly reflected in tribal genealogies, which bear traces of artificial Islamification (Pelevin, 2021). He further adds:

"The politicized concept of the primordial adherence of Pashtuns to Islam was likely to have been released for wide circulation during the reign of the Lodī sultans in the late 15th century. By the mid-17th century, it became an integral part of Pashtun ethnic identity. ... More sophisticated forms of Pashtuns' tribal Islam emerged with the progress of literature in the native vernacular"(Pelvin,2021).<sup>1</sup>

But the current scenario shows that all known tribes of Pashtuns live with a firm belief in Islam. The Pashtun code of life, Pashtunwali is a complex amalgamation of Islamic aspirations and tribal codes. Pashtunwali is a concept of living or philosophy for the Pashtun people and is regarded as an honor code and a non-written law for the people. In the course of history, Pashtun tradition has evolved and subtle notions of divinity and spirituality have been constructed as superstructures to regulate the social and political structures of the society. The orthodox triangle of God, Man and Universe shapes the very fundamental beliefs, conceptions, behaviors and attitudes of the people. Having a strong religious temptation majority of the prominent Pashtun display outstanding spiritual assertion (Kakar, 2009)

During the colonial era, Pashtuns inflicted the most vibrant and effective resistance against the British Empire. The total extinction of a regiment in the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-1842) attracted orientalist to study their culture and social organization. The accounts of most of orientalist of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century recognize Pashtun as the pure variant of tribal Islam. American Anthropologist Charles Lindholm in his famous account illustrates this phenomenon:

The pride of the Pashtun is actually a characteristic feature of Muslim tribesmen in general. It is partly to be understood in historical terms since, as Gellner (1981) has noted, Muslim tribesmen, even if physically isolated from the great Islamic urban centers, share with them a common religion and ethic, and believe themselves to be the repository of simple, "pure" virtues, as opposed to the corrupting influences of civilization. Tribes are also the traditional spawning ground of kings, and the Pashtun know and value their history as rulers and conquerors of the subcontinent, while in their remote valleys they retain their own freedom from taxation or rule (Lindholms, 1988).

#### **Spiritual relics in of Pashtun Tradition: The study of Folkloric Genre Kakarai Ghardi**

Kakarai Ghardi is a rhymed couplet folkloric, each line of the couplet comprises eight syllables, although there are some exceptions with eight to nine and seven. Guhtai Khawri, a women folklorist describes Kakarai Ghardi as a short poetic genre encapsulating almost all aspects of social, political, religious, economic, cultural and historical facts and occurrences (Ghutai, 1985) This genre is pervasively created in the Pashtun areas of Balochistan, but the sub-cultural zone of Zhob Valley, where Kakar tribe predominantly reside has been the center of this folkloric genre (Arif, 1995; 5, Sadiq & Kakar, 2016). This genre has traveled from the

said sub-cultural zones to other Pashtun and Baloch cultural zones that stretched from the Sullaimanian ranges to Toba-Kakari, Kozak and even till Quetta Valley.

Although there has been extensive literary works on the specific genre, folklorists like Syal Kakar, Syed Khar Muhammad Arif, Dr Sadiq Xarak, Sahibzada Hamidullah, Professor Karim Amir, and several others have published their compilations and documentation of the Kakarai Ghari, but as one of the most prevalent folk genre, it is part of the living culture and memory of the most of the people. The authors of this paper also remember most of the couplets which fall in the category of documented and undocumented couplets from the repository of oral tradition. Therefore, if references of some of the couplets are missing, it means these are an outcome of the spontaneous memory of authors who lived with it in the socio-cultural and historical cultural contexts.

Firm belief in Allah Almighty and overwhelming love and respect for Allah's prophets is one of the core themes of Pashtun's traditional society folk forms of expressions and oral tradition. Although the study of this genre reveal that belief in the existence of Almighty Allah and his power to regulate the universe and daily lives of people is overwhelming. As a short two line genre, Kakarai Ghari does not pursue the patterns of other folk chants. One can find treatment of divinity in diverse narrations. In most of the couplets, the ordinary men and women calls the divine support of Almighty Allah. It persists in several occasions and occurrences that range from triumph over enemies in the warfare, successes in getting ones beloved, to the support from Almighty Allah in hardships of daily life. It is interesting to note that folk imagination calls for support, deliverance and inspirations all the divine and holly symbols including the Prophets, the divine scriptures and the saints locally known to the people.

### **Reflection love Spiritual Experiences:**

A careful study of Pashto proverbs, folk stories, romance narratives and folk poetry equally reflect this notion of overwhelming sanctity, love and respect for the prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). The respective genre of *Kakarai Ghardi* abundantly encapsulated the theme with diverse with diverse context of creative expressions. When it comes to folklore, all the well-known popular and pervasive folkloric genres carry strong messages of firm belief in Allah Almighty and Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). Following are some of the *Kakarai Ghari* which shows the depth of imagination and personification of strong attachment to the prophet of Islam (P.B.U.H).

Zma da zra po mian ki shorti

Da Graan (P.B.U.H) noom pa salor thori (Zarak,2011;vi)

Translation:

Rhythms in the core of my heart

The four letters of the name of my beloved

It is a very interesting couplet which reminds us the spiritual experience of ordinary Pashtuns men and women. Poetically it is elaborative, as the four letters which bring peace to the heart include both the word Almighty "الله" and his prophet "محمد". This couplet also retrospect's one of the most vivid description of the God's and man relationship, which is described as under: "And indeed We have created man, and We know whatever thoughts his inner self develops, and We are closer to him than (his) jugular vein." (Quran 50:16)

Another aspect of this couplet is the theme of Befriending with God which is one of the consistent themes of Islam Mystic tradition. The spiritual experience brings both the divine names closer to the experience of daily life. Almighty Allah and his Prophet are not alien to the people and they use the term "Graan" which literally means someone closer to ones feelings, a candid one who gives strength to one's inner self and bring peace to the heart. This term "Graan" is usually used for male beloved, but when it comes to divinity, sacred figures and saints, both men and women take it as beloved. It shows a great spiritual attachment of the ordinary people who believe that Allah Almighty and his Prophet are the only two names that bring warmth to the hearts. Similarly in other couplets we can find the underlying theme of befriending the Almighty and Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H).

Omid Safi a professor of Islamic Studies at Duke University takes on this theme in the following passage:

"This is precisely one of the great gifts of the Islamic tradition. It is never an either/or approach, but always a both/and, a cosmic and exuberant *yes!* to all the possibilities. God is *both* The Lord, the Creator of all creation, the transcendent King *and*, simultaneously, the intimate friend, the beloved who mingles with us closer than the beating of our own heart". Analysis of the specific folkloric genre shows that it encompasses all the postulates described in the declaration of faith. The concept of Tawakal, or belief in what the God has stored for man is persistent in the belief system of ordinary Pashtun. This theme has been depicted in *Kakarai Ghari* in more than ten times. We can assess its credence in some of the couplets:

*Andeshny ban a kawoo*

*Par twakal pa da Khudai zoo* (Arif,1995; 104)

Translation:

We should not show quandary,

As we have to trust on the will of God

As most of this folkloric expression carries contexts of the romantic love, a girl who intends to meet her beloved in the full moon night has strong belief that even in the moon light she will not be visible to others and the Almighty Allah will not let her down. It shows a great sense of spiritual contention and strong belief and trust in divinity.

*Pa spoxmai wa graan thaw a zam*

*Khudai laram na ba kshe wazam* (Arif, 1995;127)

Such couplets are numerous in which ordinary Pashtuns take risks and strongly believe that God will support their ventures.

The concept that all that all good and bad are from Allah and health and illness are from him, is commonly observed in most of the folkloric genres, in this particular genre, *Kakarai Ghari*, we can count it as one of the most prevalent themes.

A woman whose beloved son, bother or relative has become ill and admitted in hospital, she utters that I know that illness and health are from the Almighty Allah, yet the doctor has to fulfill his duties. What will be end is not the treatment of doctor but the will of Almighty Allah.

*Jora'wi bey Khudai pa khpa'la*

*Par spin was wa'ka doc'ta'ra*

Translation:

But only the God is there to heal my beloved,

O Dr. although you do your level best

The themes of remedy, healing, end of separation from ones homeland, relatives, and beloveds have been treated in this folk genre. Women calls for support of Almighty Allah for the long life of her dears in a couplet:

Stha da sar dar'khwasth ka'wam

Ka wa loi Rab tha da'rey dam

Translation:

Whenever I stand (on prayers) in front of the magnificent God

I pray for the long life of my beloved

Remembering Allah Almighty in difficult times is part and parcel of the lives of ordinary Pahstun men and women. In another couplet, there is an absolute manifestation in the will of Allah Almighty;

Ande'shny ma ka'wa zwa'na

Dear ba chap key la ima'na

Translation:

O' young man don't feel hesitation

Your conduct of hesitation will mislead many others

This couplet is simplest interpretation of the messages of holly Quran which guides the believers not to feel alone in hardships. Surah "Al-Ankaboot" illustrates.

Do people think that they will be left alone because they say: "We believe," and will not be tested. And We indeed tested those who were before them. And Allah will certainly make (it) known (the truth of) those who are true, and will certainly make (it) known (the falsehood of) those who are liars, (although Allah knows all that before putting them to test). Al-Quran (29:2-3)

Generally Pashtu folklore takes on Prayers and malediction as intertwining themes. These feelings in some cases erupt in literal meaning while in other cases it casts an obscure context with hidden meaning and message between the lines.

Ka'di ma wa'hai bey graa'na

Ma sai war thar khura'sana

Don't depart without me beloved, O the Carvan

May not reach to Khurasan without him

Migration and separation is most commonly depicted in Kakarai Ghari. A migrated tribe who has been displaced from its ancestral place "Khaisor" has a strong desire to resume and get re-settle on the historical land forefathers. Although it was chanted by someone, but all the clan usually phrase it as an omen of hope. The couplet runs as under:

Khudai khu sha dai dad ba wa'ki

Muz ba bi'a da Khai'sa'ra ki

Translation:

God, no doubt is the most beneficial and kind,

No doubt one day we will be return to valley of Khaisor

A girl who has a strong bound of love with her husband, she wants him to remain loyal and kind to her. In a couplet this imagery is reproduced with acute simplicity and strong belief in Allah Almighty and the book of Allah.

Zia'tha na zi Khudai ka'boo kai

Har A'yat ma par graan choo kai

I have recited every verse of Quran for his loyalty,

He will not leave me now, as Allah has stemmed his feet here

Calling Almighty Allah for support in hardships is another prevalent theme in this folkloric genre.

Depiction of love and firm belief in the prophet hood of Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is one of core element of the belief system of ordinary Pashtuns. Beside strong belief in Almighty Allah, there are numerous couplets which show love and dedication to the holly Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H).

Visiting the holly cities of Mecca and Madina is one of the greatest desires of all Muslims. There are several couplets which reflect the spiritual experience of the traditional Pashtun men and women. A Kakarai Gharda illustrates:

Da Pesh'wa zia'rat ma wa kai

Bard ma mat Pash'tha'no na kai (Arif,1995; 18)

I saw (visited) the holiest shrine of the (*Peshwa*) great holly man  
but my soul still feels the thirst for seeing it again.

In this couplet the term "Peshwa" is used for the Holly Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). Peshwa literally mean the person who leads, in Pashto folklore it is only used for the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). It is consistent in almost all the couplets of this folk form;

A person at the time of his/her last breaths always instructs his/attendants to turn his/her face towards the holly Ka'ba.

Makh ma kai par ha'gha khwa

Chi ba zia'rat we da Pesh'wa

At my breath, do turn my face towards the holly shrine of *Peshwa*

Pashtuns live a simple and purposeful life. The concept of God has pragmatic manifestation in the ordinary people's lives. Strong belief in hereafter and Day of Judgment is strongly depicted here.

Da si'rat par sar swey na'ari

Pesh'wa khpal utmut'aan ghwa'ri (Arif,1995; 18)

Translation:

A call from the righteous way of "Sirat" echoes

Peshwa! (the Prophet P.B.U.H) calls all his followers of faith

This couplet shows a vivid belief on the Day of Judgment and the strong belief on the love of the prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) for his followers.

Similarly depiction of love and sanctity for Bait-Ullah, and the holiest shrine Ka'bah situated near the center of the great Mosque in Mecca and considered by faithful Muslims the most sacred place on Earth has been frequently mentioned in the folk poetry of Pashto. Popular thoughts about the holy shrines of Islam, particularly Ka'bah and Madina are the most regular omens and metaphors. When it comes to Pashto proverbs or language of the routine life, these two metaphors resonate almost in every aspect of social life. Visiting and touching these holly places are the only desires of the old aged Pashtun men and women. In most of the cases, they even do not know the exact location and distance between the two holy places of Islam.

Da Peh'wa la sna'ga ey



Pa thor ath'las pati ka'aby (Arif,1995; 19)

While residing next to the *Peshwa* (Muhammad P.B.U.H).

O the sacred Ka'bah in black Atlas (clath), you are the most blessed one

Along with the depiction of sanctity, faith and spiritual attachment to the Almighty Allah and Muhammad (P.B.U.H), description of the saints is a regular feature. Nana Abdul Hakeen a reckoned saint in the subcultural zone of Zhob valley got special attention of these unknown folk chanters. People from all over the Zhob division and other parts of the province Balochistan visit his shrine and pray from God to meet their spiritual desires. Following are some of the couplets which show s strong affinity to the noble saint Nana Abdul Hakim. Interestingly popular consciousness has created a close and informal spiritual relationship to the shrine of this Sufi of 18<sup>th</sup> century and recalls him "Nanak" a short form of his name which shows peoples love and friendship.

Zra ma lan'di kai gha'mo

Zam ba Na'nak la pa spedo (Arif,1995; 19)

Translation:

My heart has been subdued by grief

Before the dawn break dawn, I will go to Nanak

The sanctity of saints is established in Pashtun tradition as it is commonly said that "miracles are the right of the friends (awlia) of Almighty Allah". A couplet show this notion in vivid fashion.

Ta ba zar ki ki ran'da

Prot dai na'nak pa alla'ka (Arif,1995; 20)

Translation:

(For your misdeeds) He fore sure will make you blind

Nanak resides close by your vicinity

As discussed earlier, this simple and short rhymed genre encapsulates description of other saints too. In the following couplet, the seeker of spiritual integrity affirms that if Nanak could not fulfill his heart, he will go the shrine of 13<sup>th</sup> century famous saint Hadrat Usman Hajwiri also known as Lal Shahbaz Qalandar.

Ka an'nak na ra'sedai

Bia ka'lan'dar la zoo cho'rai (Arif,1995; 20)

Translation:

If Nanak could no fulfill my desires

O my beloved, then we shall go to Qalandar,

### Conclusion:

Most of traditional societies of Pakistan and other parts of the Muslim world construct its popular notions of spirituality and divinity that are stemmed in the core beliefs of Islam. Pashtuns living in the traditional and tribal setups still borrows great sum of meanings from the traditional notions of spirituality from the ancient tradition rooted in the collective experience based on hundreds of years. Expression of the spiritual experience and belief system is pervasive in the folkloric genres which are least studied in the academic circles. Kakarai Ghardi is one of the examples of the unprecedented repository of spiritual aspirations, which helps us to comprehend the imagination, sense of affiliation, the beauty of

poetic treatment and personification of the collective spiritual experience. It unfolds a chapter of research to understand and articulate the notions of people who are seldom heard and least understood.

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