

The Pukhtun *Tapos*: From Biography to Autobiography

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INTRODUCTION: DOING PUKHTO AND SPEAKING PUKHTO

Pukhto, or Pashto, is an Indo-European language of the Oriental branch, spoken by the Pukhtun people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and divided into a multitude of dialects differing drastically in lexicon, morphology, and phonology. But beyond the linguistic isoglosses, some more recent sociological factors also contribute to the most dramatic divisions among Pukhtuns; namely, ethnic, national, and tribal identity.

As a result of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, almost three million Afghans have settled temporarily in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP) since 1979. A result of this mass arrival over almost six years has been an increase of national, as opposed to a previous ideal, unified cultural identity among Pukhtuns. National sentiment has emerged in cultural and linguistic differences as both Afghans and Pakistanis have come to confront each other, each side defending its own ethnicity.

A second salient point of differentiation is between the tribal and non-tribal Pukhtuns. Pukhto designates not only the language, but a particular code of behaviour and values. In the same way that the Afghan might criticize the Pakistani for having compromised his *pukhto*, so the tribal might accuse the non-tribal of the same.

What we see evolving is the emic criterion for "being Pukhtun." Defining this has been an issue of concern to anthropologists for some time, and there have been structural anthropological studies of male identity as articulated by segmentary lineage ideology. Descent from a common tribal ancestor, language, or lieu of residence no longer carry the weight they once did: the main question is whether one is in a posi-

tion to live up to the pukhtun code, or whether one must compromise this by the choice one makes in moving toward the larger system. The often cited proverb that "One is Pukhtun who does *pukhto*, not who speaks Pukhto" speaks for itself. In this vein, women's perception of their own identity and what it means for them to do *pukhto* has been somewhat neglected.

This paper shows how a narrative particular to women, in its appropriate setting, incorporates a cultural emic aesthetic, that of tragedy, to express and prove a woman's pukhtun identity. The event is the *tapos*,¹ the mandatory visit of women to the mother of someone having undergone a rite of passage. The *tapos* visit is described, as is the formal personal narrative performed by the hostess to her guests, and suggestions are made as to the narrator's role in and influence upon the event. In this narrative, pain and suffering, which are highly valued by the community, are expressed as a statement of Pukhtun identity. Suffering is a sign of doing *pukhto*; it is expected of a Pukhtun woman; and the narrative under discussion allows a woman to express publically the extent of her pukhtunness. I examine the thin boundaries between biography and autobiography, particularly in the narratives told in cases of death and suffering, in which the tragic element allows the narrator to dramatize and stress her behaviour as Pukhtun, and her merit as woman in identifying with and adhering to appropriate and expected norms.

THE TRAGIC AESTHETIC

Tragedy, suffering, pain, and shame in *pukhto* are inherently linked with the women's sphere, and constitute the basic ingredients of feminine honour. In the men's sphere these are not necessarily criteria for honour, but can, in some cases, be cause for shame (*sharam*). What we have is a common notion with a different operating definition according to gender. The same can be said of both honour (*gheirat*) and shame, defined differently for men and women.

Tragedy and complaint play a major role in women's lives. When I first arrived in Peshawar and housing was found for me in a retired army official's house, his wife was in the course of preparing her son's wedding, and was also suffering from migraines. Daily a group of women came to see her and ask about her, and she would lie on the bed, hands to her head, and moan about her aches and pains, her diet, her anxieties. The women would drink tea, listen, and depart, the visit terminated. With the guests gone, she would get up and resume her usual activities, as well as her usual voice. The performance, constituting a near-verbatim narrative, would be repeated as many as five times a day for the guests, while I remained surprised and amused by her theatrical abilities,

and by her husband's lack of concern, and even laughter, as he disappeared at each new arrival of women.

Tragedy and suffering are also prevalent in everyday speech, unrelated to specific events. The conventional reply to 'How are you?' is rarely a simple "Fine, and you?," but an outpouring of woes, without necessarily expecting any solution. Beggars' diatribes on buses are not just pleas for money but a detailed autobiographical account of their sufferings. They are usually long personal narratives, repeated verbatim each time, with a marked focus on how the state of impoverishment was reached and what the present consequences are. The beggar demonstrates his suffering more than he actually asks for alms, and his ability to dramatize his misery is more lucrative than a mere plea.

In popular folk epics and romances also, tragedy is a mark of the Pukhtun tale. A Pukhtun friend and teacher once told me as we were reading chapbook romances: "If it doesn't have a tragic ending, it's not Pukhtun. A happy ending indicates a borrowed tale or version of a tale." Looking at this literature of legends and romances written in verse by folk poets and sold in chapbook form, one is surprised by the melodramatic style and language, which elicits tears and nods of appreciation from sympathizers in a system in which pain and suffering merit credit because they are manifest signs of "doing *pukhto*." We shall see how this ubiquitous aesthetic operates in behavior and in personal narratives.

TAPOS

On the occasion of a man's birth, circumcision, marriage, illness, and death, it is incumbent upon all the subject's relatives and close friends to come and offer his mother or next closest female relative expressions of either joy (*khādi*) or sorrow (*gham*), depending on the situation. The household organizes a large *kheirāt*, or open banquet of thanksgiving, to which everyone is invited, including the village poor. In the case of births and circumcisions, there is just one large event, and entertainment can be provided for the party, such as a rented VCR and films, or a hired musical group, depending on the household's resources.

In the case of illness, we get a first glimpse of the important role a mother plays. She and other women of the victim's family keep an open house, ready at all times to entertain condolence bearers with food and the tear-filled tale of how the person fell ill and how she, as his devoted mother (or closest female relative thereafter) has stood by and been deeply affected. It is her chance to reveal her personality and her social standing by way of recounting her actions in relation to the ailing victim. At some point during each visit, she repeats a performed telling

of the event for every person, or group of people who come for *tapos*, addressing their inquiry to her specifically. After the mother has told her son's woeful story (usually in the first person singular) and the guests have expressed their sympathy and eaten a meal, they can all proceed to a *majles*, *gap-shap*, or *mashghula*, all of which terms essentially mean a group discussion session, including anything from gossip and tale-telling to narrative exchanges of personal experiences.

Sometime during the visit, usually after the telling of the incident, or as they are leaving, the women guests must offer some money to the mother to help finance the doctor's fees as well as entertainment costs. Of course, she must refuse, the donor must insist, she must again refuse, the donor must again insist, and on the third time, the mother either clasps the money in her hand and quickly changes the subject, or again refuses, in which case the donor shoves the bill into the fold of a child's clothing. Donations are very carefully recorded and serve as a later reference for reciprocation.

For men, though I have never personally attended a *tapos*, it is a sprightlier event. They recognize the sorrow and condolence-bearing as a women's affair while, they, I've been told, indulge in exchanging tales, jokes, local gossip, and that most pleasant pastime of life, conversation.

In the event of a wedding, there are either two or three days of formal parties, some for women, others for men, each with their own function. At someone's death, a large *kheirāt* is held in the house of the deceased on the day of his interment. Then, during forty days the household is in mourning,² and friends and relatives come frequently for condolences. The *kheirāt* is repeated on the fifteenth day, and a third time on the fortieth. Again, as with most *tapos* situations, gifts of money are expected.

These *kheirāt*, as well as the simple *tapos* itself, provide occasions for men and women to renew contact, evaluate recently nubile girls, begin plotting potential marriages, and exchange news and stories. The actual protagonist of the occasion participates minimally, if at all. At weddings, for instance, the bride is dressed and made up, covered in garish jewelry, and left to sit and weep under her veils for three days while the party cheers around her. Occasionally, a woman might lift the bride's veil and exclaim wonder at the fine dress and splendid jewelry, but she will find the young bride most appropriately beautiful if she looks utterly destitute and tear-streaked. The tragic aesthetic again comes into play, as we see weddings, the most festive events in a person's life cycle, marked by sorrow and tears. This tradition, respected closely by both affluent, educated urban Pukhtuns as by rural, tribal ones, again

points to the importance of the mother as opposed to the spouse or any other relative. For a girl, marriage is, above all, the separation from her mother and her own circle of women. What lies ahead for a new bride is the tremendous, inevitable hostility of a new mother-in-law and female entourage, among whom it will take years to gain any status. A woman marries not so much a man as she does his female relatives. This again serves to demonstrate the crucial role occupied by the mother figure in Pukhto, and helps us to understand why the narrative of the *tapos* is performed by her rather than by any other woman relative.

Those who did not attend the *kheirāt*, or celebration, however, are still under obligation to make a visit of *tapos*, or enquiry after someone through their mother. The *tapos*, for many women, is the only occasion permitting them out of their own house and exposing them to another group of women. In nine out of ten cases, when I asked women traveling the road where they might be headed, the answer was to a relative's *tapos*. They offer money, and the hostess can reciprocate by offering the material for a dress or full suit, a shawl, or even socks, depending on the relationship between her and the visitor. The women hold a *gap-shap* session, during which, again, at some point, the mother of the person providing the occasion must formally perform her story of the event. The occasions for *tapos*, therefore, are to be seen as linked with rites of passage, and as a women's affair. The narrative in question is addressed by the subject's mother to her female relatives and other women of the community. Formal *tapos* is required for male rites, but in women's cycles, both the rites and their importance are diminished. At a girl's birth, women's *tapos* is not expected, and their congratulations to the mother may be tinged with commiseration or condolence over the fact that it is not a son. In the case of women's illness and death, the obligation of *tapos* rests only with the very near relatives and friends.

The normal use of direct discourse in Pukhto enhances the use of expressive language and allows the narrator to recreate dialog and literally repeat the same exclamations, just as emotionally and tragically charged as when she originally uttered them, stopping to rock, weep, and mop her eyes. The tragic aesthetic, the credit attributed to suffering, are used by the narrator in transforming another's ailment into an autobiographical account of her own reactions. By changing her role from observer to participant, a woman uses narrative to transform a situation into one where she reveals and promotes herself by creating socially sanctioned actions for herself. Hence she publically identifies with and lays claim to being and doing *pukhto*.

It is clear that we are dealing with independent, formal narratives, inserted into discourse situations. The speaker, in each case, appro-

priates the floor and signals her listeners to attention. She is rarely if ever interrupted, and signals the end of her story with a formulaic ending, sighing: "That's the end," or, "And I've endured many such hardships," after which the tears are dried and everyone resumes the discussion with no further thought to the matter.

It is generally considered unsafe to leave a woman alone or in a small group, not only in view of the potential outside threat, but also because of the opportunity offered her to dissociate herself from her group and disparage or dishonor it. What a woman does, she must do in the presence of the women she lives with. By the same token, her non-participation at a women's discussion session is equally detrimental to her reputation. In the case of complaints, she must do this openly, if at all, and then she must be careful not to denigrate or ruin her reputation or that of her immediate family. The type of complaint we see occurring publically in the *tapos*, however, is one that serves to give the woman status; the narrator, in projecting an image of herself as having suffered, is proving to her audience how she has lived up to what is expected of her in the norm of Pukhtun behaviour. Hence, the smiles and nods of approbation on behalf of her audience, who refer to the most tragic accounts as "beautiful stories." Ethic and aesthetic are thus combined in the experience story.

QESSA

It is usually required of a regional folklorist to describe a taxonomy of narrative genres, although this proves a difficult and delicate matter, especially when wishing to define an emic taxonomy. Such factors as solidarity and shared knowledge or experience between teller and listener can affect the genre of a narrative, so that the same narrative can be variously classified by non-textual factors, and can belong in several generic slots.

Consequently, the same word, however, can vary in meaning from context to context. The word *qessa*, for instance (meaning, by standard definition in Pukhto, story or legend), is often used simply to denote gossip or personal experience narratives, and in that sense, constitutes a salient part of any Pukhtun's daily speech. Being an outsider to that inside speech, though, when I entered the field soliciting *qessa*, no one seemed to know what I meant; the first association they made was, like my own, with popular romance legends or fairy tales, and they therefore had nothing to tell me. Or else I was met with evasion of the topic as being something trivial or obsolete. Below are three examples of how the same word takes its meaning from the context in which it is raised.

Shama Babi, an old village woman for whom *qessa* meant gossip and narratives about herself and her family, would come daily to the house where I was staying in one village, and each time, would take and hold the floor with stories defaming other women, or with tear-filled personal narratives, most of which had been heard numerous times before by the community. The first time I reacted to Shama Babi's narrative by expressing interest in her story and a desire to tape it, she delightfully responded: "Oh, that's the kind of *qessa* you wanted. I thought you wanted *qessa* like *Adam Khān* or *Yusuf Khān*,³ or about *perey* (fairies), and I don't know any of those. This kind, I can tell you many of." These were plaintive tales, recounting the painful events of her husband's death, her son's accident as a child, or her daughter's wedding. Her reputation throughout the village was of the best story teller, and the more personal suffering she could express, aided by tears and outcries, the better her tale was esteemed by the small audience of women. But the suffering she was recounting was her own, told mostly in the first person, hardly that of the person she was ostensibly telling about. Not exaggerated melodrama, as it might be perceived from the outside, but the tragic aesthetic was at work here, at the base of an emic criterion which made her tale sad, and thus good.

On another occasion, I was staying in a village a mile from the tribal area, which was a transition spot for criminals and outlaws for whom the villagers often acted as intermediaries and protectors. My host proudly illustrated to me in the form of a *qessa* recounting a local event just how loyal they remained to the Pukhtun sense of honour rather than to the government, when the choice had to be made. And when I responded just as enthusiastically by wanting to tape him, he exclaimed: "So that's the kind of *qessa* you wanted! Why didn't you say so? We're not *dāms*⁴ to go about telling *qessa*. That's a *gheirati qessa* (tale of honour). I can tell you masses of those." And he spent two entire evenings telling tales of local vendettas and killings for the preservation of reputation and honour.

In yet another context, *qessa* can have an altogether different meaning. I had once accompanied a friend on her biennial visit to her mother's house, as she had told me her mother might be able to tell me a few stories. The day went by in cordiality as the mother engaged in the usual rite of hospitality, but when we came to the subject of *qessa*, she became extremely formal, assuming a fixed and unnatural physical position, tone of voice, self-conscious manner, and told a popular child's tale for my benefit, although she was manifestly not at ease. However, later, as she was kneading the dough for bread, and a neighbor entered, she enthusiastically invited her: "Come, sit down, I have a *qessa* to

tell you,” and she proceeded to tell her friend about an experience she’d had the previous night with the visitation of a *perey*. Once again, my status as an outsider without any basis of solidarity or shared knowledge with the woman, prevented her from performing anything spontaneously for me the way she could with a friend. The incident illustrated the arbitrariness of the term *qessa*, which could only be dented by the context of the telling, as well as by the relationship between the teller and the recipient.

TWO QESSA FROM TAPOS

Within the context of the *tapos*, *qessa* refers specifically to the story which endows the visit with a meaning for the participants and, by the same token, provides the ethnographer with a clue into the significance of the event as an entity. The biographical accounts are transformed into autobiographical ones by the narrators for the purpose of the statement they are making. Appended to this paper are translated two narratives, one taped in a *tapos* context, the second told years after the event, upon my request.

During my field work, done in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan in 1982–1983, I once had the occasion of going with an older woman from Peshawar, a close friend, to see her husband’s cousins in the tribal area of the Khyber. Her nephew had been shot three days earlier and it was her obligation to bring and express her condolences. A meal was prepared which we ate alone, and then the discussion was pursued. Everyone already knew me, and I had gone just to accompany my friend, so that she, not I, was the focus of attention, which meant I could observe the speech even without affecting it as much as in some other instances. It was my friend, herself, who had proposed that I tape the event. After the meal, when we were once again assembled in conversation, the victim’s mother, Naranja, was in the midst of expressing her dismay over the dark complexion of her newborn grandson, whom she held on her lap, when she began her narrative, calling to her aunt (Chachi) for attention (see Appendix I).

When Naranja opens her narrative with, “When his father got hurt,” (out of deference, she does not pronounce her son’s name), no one stops talking to listen, and the women’s *majles* continues, forcing her to pick up her voice and single out her visitor’s attention, so she yells, “Auntie!” and begins again, with more detail and a focus on the accident. An interesting transformation to trace in the narrative is that of the story’s protagonist. At first, it is focused on the victim, giving a detailed third person narrative account of the accident. Then the narrator makes a transition and introduces herself, his mother. She is

caught up in the chaos of knowing there is trouble, and showing her general concern and anxiety, culminating in her despair over a daily occurrence (cow getting into the vegetables). There is very little talk of the victim at all in this section, as the narrator builds herself up to where she returns to her initial discovery of the accident, but this time from her own point of view. Right away, she reenacts the tragic scene of her actual discovery with the cries, exclamations, and raised voice of surprise, so that, for a moment, one could believe she were living it through at that moment.

This time, however, we hear a different cause for the shooting. Whereas before, she had explained in detail how her son had inadvertently shot off a loaded gun in his pocket while praying, we now discover that he's been in a fight. But no one interrupts Naranja on this point or seems surprised at the story change, for the fact has been backgrounded, and the focus of the story is no longer the victim or the accident, but the narrator herself in the role of mother. She has transformed herself from observer to participant in the event, and is now the subject or direct object in almost every utterance. Her voice becomes more emotional, and she begins to cry. She also begins to address my friend (her specific audience) with regular interjections of "You hear?," which should be understood as "Do you realize (what I went through)?" In other words, the call for attention to herself is far greater than any to her son.

The narrative further recounts action symbolic of a mother's total consternation at the thought of harm come to her son. This is representative of and must be perceived from the social context which defines mother-son relationships. A mother in Pukhtun society is expected to show herself entirely disposed and prepared to sacrifice her own life for her son. This in turn is repaid when he, an adult male who continues to live at home, supports and cares for her, while his new wife takes on the functional (not emotional) role of carrying out the domestic duties his mother used to perform. A young wife, therefore, has not yet reached the status of being able to, or having to manifest, the same emotional devotion to a man than has his mother. The mother must now show how she lived up to her expected role of Pukhtun. The narrator here tells us she fell ill, began vomiting and manifested total distress.

Doing *pukhto* is proved by actions, and this narrative is moved by verbs of action and direct discourse dialog rather than of feeling, reflexion or intention. Naranja describes herself performing in public the scene of a devastated mother who fell unconscious before all the men: "Whether they were family or not, I mean, they were all around me."

And it is this role which allows her, at least in the self-portrait she presents, to transgress certain rules and find herself on the floor amongst unrelated males, which she makes a point of stressing.

Once the narrator has terminated her drama, she takes hold of the situation with control. Her son is in hospital and she knows what she must do. She becomes the determined mother, for no obstacle can bar her way to him. She takes the household saving, has her husband rent a pick-up truck, leaves the tribal village, and goes to the Peshawar hospital. We see her as if alone answering the guards, arguing, fighting, and bribing her way in. There is no bringing him back to the tribal village; she boasts of having seen Takhta Beg from a Suzuki driven by a stranger, a fact which she emphasizes, for her being with a stranger is again a serious transgression of social expectations.

In all this final action since the moment she realizes what she must do, Naranja presents herself as determined, and capable of crossing all boundaries and breaking all social rules in order to join her son. She seems to place that in the foreground as though it were more important than the fact that he had ever been hurt at all. His accident offered her, on the contrary, the opportunity to demonstrate her Pukhtunness, her ability to act out the behavior of a mother devoted to her son. At least, this is the way she has chosen to relate the experience, and thus draw that portrait of herself.

The second narrative presented here is that of an old woman, uneducated and widowed (See Appendix II). Her age and status allow her to move inside the village without inviting scandal or calumny, and she does, actually, spend her days sitting and entertaining younger busy housewives with the long sorry tales which constitute her repertoire. These tales are for the most part personal narratives, tragic "true stories" concerning a family member, but which touch her as the anguished mother or wife. I have heard, but not recorded, sessions in which women exchange personal narratives of suffering, almost in a form of competition, expressing pride in hardship and pain. The greater the suffering expressed the more appreciated the story.

The narrator, Shama Babi, was not related to my hosts, so I could rarely go see her without offending my hosts, who went so far as to tell me she was a witch. When I asked her the first time if I could tape some of her stories, as she told them in another woman's courtyard one afternoon as *gessa*, she threw a veil over me, grabbed my wrist, and pulled me out through the alleys to her own house, not without two girls from the hosts's house to chaperone me. We were cut off when some girls came to bring me back, sent by the head of my hosts' house, but there is sufficient text to let us see and trace, again, the transition from

biography to autobiography, and thus shed more light on such narratives.

By contrast to the first narrative, this one was specifically performed for me and was thus out of context. The context is substituted by explanation and parenthetical notes addressed to me. The introduction is very elaborate. Before beginning, the narrator had announced, "I shall tell you a true story, a story which happened to me. It's about my own daughter. It's the story of my own daughter." Even here she is ambivalent about the story's subject, but as it develops, we see how the preparation of her daughter's marriage leads up to a crisis which allows her to prove herself, to structure the experience from her own point of view and dramatize it.

The story opens with the formulaic starter for many personal narratives, "The story goes like this" (*khabāra dāse da*). She introduces her daughter in that first line, but the girl never re-enters as an actor in the narrative. The narrator jumps to the complicating action, involving a suitor and the process of a marriage request. The fact that she supplies this detailed explanation of the background to the narrative is anomalous to this type of narrative and is due to my status as an outsider. She begins with an elaborate description of Pukhtun marriage customs and imagery, a deviation which would not necessarily have been called for had she assumed her listener shared the same experience as she did. Her voice is slow and controlled, but she is using this long tedious detail to introduce the time element. All the constituents of the marriage were being seen to, but she, the mother, was not receiving her end of the marriage exchange. Until the point where the in-laws come to claim the girl ("When a year and a half had meanwhile gone by . . ."), there is only limited direct dialog, as the narrator uses the third person narrative form. Only at that point does she begin performing her real story, exploding with the anger she has been building up. The switch is made as abruptly as in the previous narrative, and is visible in stylistic phenomena. We have by now been swept into the crisis she is actually presenting, the picture of herself, fighting for her rights as a mother with a daughter to marry and a right to demand something in exchange. Hereafter, the narrative is moved forward by emotional dialog, and the narrator's voice is raised to a near scream when she portrays herself speaking. Her solution, however, is not a recourse to direct action in which she breaches rules, but to a vent of anger in which she even threatens her opponent, her future son-in-law's parents. And, as in the former narrative, her husband is practically absent, holding no major active role in the affair. Even when he fixes a wedding date with the boy's parents, she persists in demanding her rights.

What we see in these two narratives is a woman's image of herself suffering a crisis alone and using that tragedy to aggrandize her role in the telling and the creating of her reactions to it. Narrative genre and performance style are no accident, but selected according to event and situation. Here, each woman simultaneously upgrades her status in the specific women's sphere and along general cultural lines, and certifies, by the same token, her Pukhtun identity for the listeners.

CONCLUSION

Having looked first at the division of the Pukhtun community, and the social attitudes of these diverse groups toward one another's language and culture, I have isolated a specific speech situation, the *tapos*, and a speech event within it, the *qessa*, and attempted to show its significance as a vehicle for the people involved, both the woman narrating, and the guests who come to hear the story. I propose to conclude with a suggestion rather than a statement.

These narratives, in their appropriate context, can add some important clues to the feminine perspective of Pukhtun society. A comparative analysis of a larger number of such texts might show a repeated pattern used by women to depict themselves, and their perceptions of their relationships with the men around them. This might also modify and expand the largely male perspective of the culture presently found in the literature. By comparing and examining their stylistic characteristics, we may discover their significance for the women who tell and hear them.

I began this paper with a question of identity, and I suggest that these narratives operate largely to uphold a woman's image of Pukhtunness in her community. She is showing herself, through dramatization, to fit perfectly to the norm of expected behaviour. The same image of the devoted, self-sacrificing woman can be observed throughout popular culture (e.g. films, chapbook romances, songs, folk poetry . . .). This conformity may indicate the woman's willingness to be admitted by the community, but also signals on a symbolic level her acceptance of the community's values.⁵ Tragedy and suffering are an emic aesthetic criterion of honour for Pukhtun women. Mothers must suffer over their sons in order to gain status and recognition, the wounded son presents an ideal occasion for a mother to attain this recognition by way of a narrative of the event, which in turn acts as a vehicle through which she can publically display her actions for the benefit of the community. Hence, the narrative within a ritualized situation, performed for a large audience in the *tapos* context, becomes crucial. By making her individual self and her story fit into a conventional cultural mold, the nar-

rator is making a statement of, or renewing and strengthening her membership in her community. Once we understand the role of the tragic aesthetic in the Pukhtun society, it is easy to see why the *tapos*, particularly for death and illness, becomes the ideal setting for this type of statement of identity.

Appendix I

Naranja: story of her son's accident.
Recorded March 14, 1983, in the informant's
own house in Spera, Khyber Agency.

- I When his father got hurt . . .
Auntie!
Now when the accident occurred
and in that . . . uh
in anger.
- Anyway, that nephew came
from the hospital
he was late.
(Said) that, "Moshtaq has been shot," you know?
in the middle of nine o'clock prayers.
Well, he'd thrown on his sheet
to himself,
he was performing his prayer,
Moshtaq.
- Well, he said that, "You come on,
I've left that gun
in Takhta Beg." [Tribal police checkpoint in the Khyber]
Two nights,
Two days and a night he'd been taking that thing around
like that wandering about.
- When he was at his prayers,
he drew the gun out and put it down
and then his hand passed over it
when, Dear! I swear!
- Now, there he was standing in his blanket
in prayer
And when he pulled it,
anyway, meanwhile
it went off.

[*B.J.:* *Oh, no! Didn't he know at all?*]

No, no, they'd loaded it
for him,
someone had.

Well, that son of man,
the safety catch,
that thing,
he'd cocked it back like that.

He figured that, "With the safety catch released like that,
then they could all go off," you know?

Oh, dear God,
pushed the catch back the other way,
he didn't know,
that son of man.

A cartridge had slipped into the barrel,
he thought he'd removed them all, you know;
a single one had come down.

The way he picked it up,
that very gun,
it came,
that finger came.
Anyway there was a bang as it went off.

When he looked,
(said) that, he swore,
"Who's been hit?"
That, "No, YOU've been hit!"
the men told him.

[*Aunt:* *Didn't he realize it, himself?*]

No!
That, "You're the one bleeding,
you've been shot!"
"Is that right?"

Well, anyway,
then his knees got that way, you know?
He said that, "Enough! Silence!"
that, "Don't tell the women.
Just get me there,
to the hospital."
At nine o'clock
they got going,

they brought him to the hospital.
 When they'd brought him,
 he told everyone
 that, "Tell my mother about me."
 They said that . . .
 No one told me,
 everyone knew,
 no one would tell me,
 there was nothing to do.

Now, I went to sleep,
 I dreamed of my aunts
 and of him . . .
 I dreamed of Moshtaq's father.
 Who lulled him to sleep!
 A woman had come.

- II He had filled up a pick-up, like that,
 that, "We're bringing Moshtaq's things,"
 his father said.
 And he had a green pick-up.
 'There was this mound in the entrance threshold;
 he drove the pick-up right over that mound.
 When I told him that, "What are you doing?
 Don't bring that pick-up over the mound,"
 that, "the space is too small."
 'That, "Nah!"
 he drove the pick-up over the entrance mound.
 Now that mound was like
 when over the bone
 the bullet passed by, so.
 Anyway, there was everyone
 all assembled.
 Well, he'd had an accident.
 Meanwhile
 he told him everyone had left.
 It was between late afternoon and evening.
 Well, I told him
 that, "Okay, what's he doing?
 He's going to arrive
 when, to the house!
 He must have taken the suzuki by now."

Meanwhile he brought the suzuki full.
 Anyway, he filled it with them,
 he left.

Meanwhile, when it was full, now
 there were vegetables scattered over on that bed.
 The heater wasn't on here,
 it was outside.
 Well, meanwhile, now
 there was garlic,
 there were onions,
 there was coriander,
 cauliflowers all lying there like that.
 I'd covered them with hay,
 I'd thrown it loosely over.

When I came back in, Auntie,
 a cow was busy on it
 and two goats were busy on it,
 chomping away.
 Now, they stuffed themselves
 on those cauliflowers and that coriander
 going on and on.
 What was that?!
 That!

Well, I tell
 this proverb to Shamina,
 That, "Shamina!"
 This is the proverb I presented to her,
 that, "Is the scavanger of the house better,
 or is the earner of the house better?
 The earner would be nowhere,
 if it weren't for the scavanger, so."
 Anyway,
 meanwhile my nephew came,
 that, "How are you, Auntie?"
 "All's well."
 That, "You're upset,"
 That, "No, boy,
 I'm not upset."
 That, "Nah, you're upset."
 That' "No, I'm not upset."

He's on his way to go see Moshtaq.

He goes and turns around,
he goes and turns around.
God's will made me follow him;
that's how it is with him.

He'll go out
and I go after him.
That, "No, Auntie,
you're upset."
That, "I'm not upset, for pete's sake.
Those cauliflowers and onions
and coriander
and everything I had,
the goats and cows have eaten.
That, "That, for pete's sake,
is nothing at all."

Now he disappears from me,
like that, he turned around from below,
in Nur Jahan's fields,
he turned around from the houses,
there in that mud.

He turned to face them,
that, "Let's bring his mother."
He said that, "Let's inform
his mother,
or else who will tell her,
will carry the bad news, so?"

Now all at once, the men all got prepared;
they took up their guns,
they waited, ready.

Well, I went back to them,
that, "This is no time for you to be going.
You can measure out the fields tomorrow
for the division."

It was division time for the fields.
"So the division can be done in the morning.
Who does that by night?"
That, "Yes, we'll do it by night."

Now they talk among themselves,

I don't hear a thing.
 Anyway,
 meanwhile Jamshera [Naranja's niece] told me hurriedly
 that, "Naranja, you should go, too."
 That, "Where?!"
 That, "It's just that,
 that Moshtaq got into a little fight
 and they're going after him."
 That, "Oh! Oh! When?!"
 That, "No, he got into a fight
 and he's in the hospital."
 That, "He's been shot!"
 That, "He's been hit!"
 That, "I've been hit!
 Oh! They must have really messed him up!
 God forbid!"
 [stops, cries—long pause]

Where was he sitting?
 where was he shot?
 You hear?

Anyway
 I started feeling ill.
 Anyway I began vomiting,
 I was vomiting,
 I was vomiting,
 And I really went through the worst.
 And Khorshid told her
 that, "May God damn your house;
 now what will we do with her?"
 Well, the men were all standing around me,
 Khandad and Mobajar,
 whether they were family or not,
 I mean they were all around me.
 Someone poured me a little water like that,
 I drank the water; then I . . .
 I didn't say anything to them,
 I just sat there in their midst
 drinking the water.

 I just looked at them,
 " What are you doing? "

That, " We're going to the hospital."

That, " Okay, you wait

So I can go home
and go inside a minute."

That, " Don't go inside,"

Khorshid told me.

That, " No, I must go in."

That, " No, don't go in."

So it was;

there were seven thousand rupees lying in the communal
savings

I took them up.

Here was a strange man with him,

he says that, " Blood,
blood is dripping,
blood is dripping."

Oh, Mother!

[cries silently, rocks—long pause]

III I took that money, Auntie,
and hired a special suzuki.

When we arrived everyone said that, " Now we can't go in."

I told them that, " By the Qoran,"
that, " I'm going in."

You hear?

I reminded them of your brother
how I'd gone in to see even him.

No one let me.

You hear?

With a world of policemen and guards standing around,

I went in past them.

How could I get to him?

How could I get to my son?

That, " It's not allowed,"
they stopped Zaher Shah,
Khandaji's son.

That, " Timur must not have come yet, you know?

Firuz Shah is coming with him,
so then I can go in with them.

I can go in! "

I told them,
 " but show me the way
 and which room he's in."
 For pete's sake, they said that, " we don't allow anyone just
 like that,"
 But they sent a child with me,
 that, " He'll bring you."

There was a world of people sitting around,
 a world just milling about, Auntie!
 His room was filled with almonds
 with bananas
 with oranges
 and with so many things his room was filled;
 coconuts,
 apples.

His room was filled for him.
 [*Naranja's older sister: Everyone knew about it, so.
 Only you didn't know.*]

Now, Auntie,
 I pull those rupees from my pocket
 and take it all out
 and stuff it back in,
 pull it out
 and stuff it back in,
 pull it out
 and stuff it back in.
 I don't understand what's going on, you know?

Meanwhile
 when I got in
 a guard was standing there;
 he wouldn't let us through.
 I quickly pulled out some bills,
 I slipped them into his hand,
 I went past him.
 So four hundred and fifty out of all those rupees fell
 from me.
 Now he (Moshtaq) counted it,
 he counted what I had left.

Anyway, when I got in,
 I said, " Oh, oh! My son! "

He cried
and I cried, too,
Anyway, then,
That's how the story went, so,
someone had told him.

You hear?
He's all well
And I'm very happy.
You hear?

Anyway, Auntie,
God forbid that should happen to anyone.
Then nomads left before me saying that,
"Here's my story, God preserve you,
that my son received twelve shots."

[*Sister: When she was leaving the hospital.*]

[*Aunt: Who told you that?*]

Nomads.

[*A girl: Nomads.*]

He received twelve shots.
Then they lay him down in time,
on a trolley they lay him down,
they transferred him to another room.

When he got up,
Auntie! Did I weep or laugh?
When he got up, those fruit and nuts which were left,
I gave it all to my daughter.
Anyway, "Take it all to those people,
distribute it among all those people in the suzuki."

Now I thought that, "I'll go ahead inside after him,
I'll wait for him in another room now."

I was crying.

But he yells after me that, "Out of the way, Naranja!

Out of the way, Naranja!

Your Moshtaq has come!

Moshtaq!"

Moshtaq himself says it;

he's talking to me,

my son was talking to me from his own mouth.

[laughter]

You hear?

He said that, " My mother was upset, so."
 [Aunt: *Yeah! That, " Now she's to be happy!"*"]

So he was saying,
 perhaps to make his mother feel better,

 " Out of the way, Naranja!

 Out of the way, Naranja!

that, " Your Moshtaq has come!

 It's Moshtaq! "

I said, " Oh, my son! "

You hear?

Is this the end to my worries?

You hear!

That yesterday I left Peshawar,

 I saw Takhta Beg;

 I saw it from

 that suzuki which someone else was driving.

IV Well, to me,

 God forbid, nothing at all can happen.

Anyway, many other worries have pelted down on me.

 No other worries rain on me now.

[Aunt: *Death has its own appointments to keep.*]

[Older sister: *Its own appointments, Auntie.*]

Appendix II

Shama Babi: story of her daughter's wedding.

Recorded in the informant's house in Bara Banda, Pakistan

November 17, 1982.

I The story goes like this,

 I had a daughter,

 a virgin.

Now this is in my own family,

 it's my own family,

 it's a very rotten family.

That boy would come and go to our house

 for eggs,

 he would buy eggs.

II One day at home he told his mother,
to his mother,
it was that boy,
that, " First, don't give me a wife at all,
and if you do give me a wife,
then there's one at my aunt's,
there's my (paternal) uncle's daughter.
Well she told him,
his mother,
that, " Which uncle's daughter? "
He said, " Bazmir Kaka's.
He has a daughter."
She said, " Okay."

Several days
times his mother came and went
and his father also came and went,
I didn't put down my neck [*i.e.* didn't accept].

III The story goes like this,
that anyway,
God made it happen that way,
I gave them that daughter.
But the way our people do things, you know?
well, they don't do a proper wedding,
they just feed each other a sweet,
they give each other the ring.

They sent ten, fifteen men;
my husband was in Risalpur,
he sent news to me
and they came.
And they exchanged the sweetmeats,
the rings.
she was engaged.

IV In the morning when we look, well,
in a bowl from them now
there are sweetmeats and candies,
SWEETMEATS AND CANDIES!
And there's a small bowl no bigger than this,
in it one *ser* and five *paw* of milk,
and there's a suit of clothing.

That's what they brought.
 When they brought it,
 well, I threw into that bowl
 twenty rupees,
 into that milk bowl.
 And I put ten rupees
 into that sweetmeat basket.

And she, their daughter,
 both their daughters came.
 I gave them both
 to one I gave a scarf
 and to the other I gave a new shirt.
 The sisters are happy, you know?

They left, so.
 Anyway, that one suit was ample;
 They'd take the material out
 and go put it away at home,
 take it
 and go put it away at home.

V Meanwhile

 one and half years went by,
 one and a half years went by . . .

[*To an entering girl from my hosts' house: What do you want?*]

[*Girl: Baba says she's to come back to the house.*]

[*To the girl: She's okay here. Let us finish.*]

[*B.J., to the girl: Tell him I'll be home shortly.*]

Meanwhile

 one and half years went by;
 They don't bring any clothes,
 and they don't do anything good
 and they don't do anything bad.

There were my two daughters
 and there was my one sister
 and there was me:

Well, we went.

Well, I made a ring for that boy,
 for my son-in-law.

[*B.J.: You went to his house?*]

Yes.

You listen!
 I placed the ring on his finger
 and some paper money garlands
 and some decorations,
 I brought him all that.
 And his aunts each gave him ten rupees.
 When they gave him that—
 but she still didn't bring the suit to my house.
 No!
 She brought none of the other things, like food;
 nothing good,
 nothing bad,
 she doesn't do anything,
 that woman.

VI When a year and a half had meanwhile gone by
 well, they came,
 they said that, " Give her to us in marriage."
 Well, I told them
 that, " This is how it goes,"
 that, " She is your woman,
 naturally, I'll give her to you in marriage.
 But, finally, just you show me,
 just what have you brought for me,
 what have you done? "

His father told me
 that, " We've brought nothing
 and she's still his wife,
 whether he keeps her hungry
 or he keeps her sated.
 The woman is his."

VII I said, " How can that be?
 I told them,
 " Before anything, you must bring me clothes
 for the engagement.
 Beyond that it doesn't matter,
 (but) the engagement
 and the wedding clothes, both:
 you'll bring that much
 in a case.

And I don't even want the jewelry in writing,
 I've lost all confidence in you.
 There are accounts to keep,
 there certainly are!
 And I'll settle a wedding date with you
 once you've given her
 sixty rupees in writing."
 People only settle on a wedding date,
 we Pukhtuns,
 once the written contract has been settled.

Well, they told me
 that, "No, we won't give her a written contract."
 I said, "Well, I won't agree to a date.
 You've got to show me some present in recognition of
 this marriage, you know?
 show me a present, why don't you?
 On what grounds can you elicit a wedding date from me?
 I'll cut your heads off!

VIII My husband was sitting there.
 Well, he said
 that, "I'll fix a wedding date with you for Saturday or
 Sunday."
 He understood what it was about.

IX Meanwhile I tell them
 that, "Here's how it is:
 that you bring me a written deed for sixty rupees in
 the morning;
 he's already given you a date.
 You'll spend money on people,
 you'll send invitations
 and I'll spend, too."

NOTES

1. From the Arabic trilateral root /f-h-s/ in the fifth form verbal noun, *tafahhus* (investigation, search, request). Due to the phonological transformations in Pukhto, it becomes *tapos*, and simply means "question," (*tapos kawol*: to ask), similar to the Persian *porsân*. Here it refers to a specific event.
2. For information on women's funerary laments in Kabul, see Charles Kieffer 1975.
3. Two of the most popular Pukhtun romances.

4. Musicians and entertainers. They also pose as barbers. They are hired to perform at rites and festivals, but no one likes to be socially associated with them. They are not considered Pukhtun.

5. This idea has been elaborated by Carol Edkins (1980).

6. The transcriptions presented here have been broken into verses on the basis of linguistic, stylistic and thematic criteria. The translations are intentionally not in smooth idiomatic English. I have also chosen to render in English the fact that the verb "to say" can be, and is omitted by the first speaker, so that much of the direct quotation in her narrative begins directly with "That."

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