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History of Childhood in Pashtun Society: A Concept of Cultural Labor

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the construction and development of Pashtun's childhood as cultural learning in doing Pashto, which highlights patterns, practices and characteristics of family-based parenting and community-based parenting in form of duty, honor which involved emotional dehumanization and projects Pashtun children as unintelligible and ignorant subject in the past. Pashtun children are the most marginalized portion of society. This study tried to understand concepts and moral understanding of Pashtun society which projected the development of children behaviors and emotions in different stages of childhood. There are historical efforts after the ethnic modernism which deeply affected the culture of learning for children in Pashtun society.

This study adopted the patterns of Pashtun childhood, which reinforces by the burden of historical past through cultural labor of learning in Pashtun society. Thorough history methods this study tried to evaluate Pashtun children's literature from private to public spaces. This study integrates into the history of Pashtun family and doing Pashto as an ancient institutions and social contracts in Pashtunkhwa. This study tried to reenact labor of learning as cultural capital integrated with the historical development of Childhood. It helps historiographic representation of children's labor of leaning in Pashtun society.



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Introduction

History of Pashtun children literature represents multiple strategies of human controlling mechanism by love and fear to make sure a fearful and discipline offsprings. This interpretation has potential oral sources like a Pashtu proverb which says “Che Dab nawi Adab nawi” (If there is no stick, there will be no discipline), زوی د پلار نه زده کوي, “Zoy da plar na zada kaw” (The son learns from the father), زوی لکه نه کر، لکه کر به شي, (If the son is not cultivated (disciplined), he will grow wild), ا اصل له اشماره، او کم اصل له کوتک, *Asel La Ishara aw Kam Asal la Kotak* (Do not count on noble origin; the ignoble one needs the stick). These proverbs are orally uses amongst Pashtun which implements for the control of childhood (Tair & Edwards, 1982).

However, there are literary representation of universal emotional responses from Pashtun public poet Rehmat shah sail which explains children in comparison, “*Mashamaan k da Maghreeb k da Mashriq we’ Da Jarra aw da Khanda andaz y u we’*” which means that weather, children are from west or from the east, the way they cry and laugh are same.

Through understanding the emotional past of Pashtun children, this article helps to ease the perplexity and burden of learned culture in Pashtun geography. Representation of love, hatred and discipline are mediums through which values of culture and emotions transmit and transfer from one generation to another. The labor of learning deals with patterns of human behavior like love, hatred, fear and discipline which are primary value in term of emotional capital. These social responses of love and hatred are the generating dynamics effects deeply Pashtun childhood.

Article 12 of States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being

given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Article 25, 25 (a), 26 (2), of the Pakistani Constitution states that “all citizens are equal before law and entitled to equal protection of law”. Article 37(a) of the Convention states that “no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (Government of Pakistan, 2012, pp. 9–25).

Research Questions

1. How has Pashtun childhood developed and evolved over the course of history?
2. What are the societal implications of doing Pashto as cultural labor of learning, and how has it affected Pashtun childhood in contemporary times?
3. How has childhood been represented through cultural patterns in Pashtun society?
4. How has cultural labor of learning conceptualized as a form of social contract influencing the development of childhood and how has cultural labor of learning shape the construction of gender role and biopolitics in Pashtun childhood?

Pashtun Children’s Agency in History of the Family

There are visible gender subjugations in Pashtun society, however, when it comes to child labor there are equally exploits. Khyber Pashtunkhwa traditionally projected male centric society, conversely preferred female child as domestic labor due to cultural and economic sensibilities (Labour Department, 2022).

Nevertheless, by socialization, an individual learns their gender identity and gender expression from their culture. Here individuals choose the act to comfort suppositions about gender roles by which society drives these individuals to “fit in” their

desire to social influence. 56 From 74 the cognitive perspective, a gendered cue (gender makers) in the social world, young children can cue about gender identity (self-conceptions), and gender stereotypes by gender-related conception and development. For instance, at the age of six months, a baby can make a distinction between male and female voices. By nine months, most can tell the difference between male and female photographs, and at the age of 11 to 14 months, a child can pair a voice with the photograph. 57 This gender-based development is observed from the structure of social patterns and stereotypes. Children not only understand a gender category but also accomplish the characteristics of seemingly gender such as items, metaphors, abstract nature, and activities. All these things are internalized by children when they respond to societal forces (order, rewards, discipline, and punishment) from people (parents, teachers, and peers) who shaped their gender identity, roles, and sexual orientation through socialization. In the very beginning, a child behaves in gender-appropriate ways that have been prescribed by society (Hurara, 2022, pp-59-60).

In the context of harsh and difficult past experiences, Pashtun children demonstrate an active member and agency in the social environment. The current hard and rigid values amongst Pashtun children developed after the political extremism in Pashtun society, which spread in the more than four decades. These all time of crisis transformed children's agency especially female child agency from an open end to a closer and more subversive end. In the near past Pashtun children were integrated into cultural practices without strict gendered subjugations. The presence of *Bragai Attan*ⁱ, *Gandi Sparghee*ⁱⁱ and agricultural participation like *Ghebaal*ⁱⁱⁱ are some of the cultural events in the southern part of Pashtunkhwa where both male and female children and young ones participated to mark the cultural participation and environmental shifts in

regions (Ullah, 2016). Girls were visible and expressed public participation through *Tappa* (A Special Genre of Pashto Female Poetry) where they shared oral tradition of social and emotional culture of labor in doing Pashto. The historical trajectory from near past to the contemporary time have shared ideological reinterpretation and domination of social roles for Pashtun children in the extremist political traditions. This study tried to understand how Pashtun children travel through these challenging situations to become a functional citizen of region and global world.

The segregation of gender in Pashtun society from early childhood shapes the division of labor of learning which in return transform a distance in socialization. In the history of the Pashtun family, boys and girls are introduced into different spaces with different social expectations and social responsibilities. Boys socialized in the presence of more extended public sphere, while girls have restricted spaces to perform emotional freedom in the form of *gham* and *khadi*. Girls are expected to behave modesty, and boys are introduced into aggressive, authoritative and political honor of *qaum* and *qabila*. Thus, division of cultural labor of learning creates and internalized gendered bifurcation which effects the medium of cultural learning of knowledge. The construction of childhood in form of segregated gender condition later neutralized and become the natural and powerful mechanism of cultural production of value in Pashtun society.

Moreover, for Deniz Kandiyoti such process was also called a 'patriarchal bargain' as a form of 'classical patriarchy'. She aptly argued that in this bargain, female was constrained by societies as a 'distinct gender ideology' via patriarchal extended family (Kandiyoti, 1988, pp. 275-279). This bargain was not timeless but easily influenced by historical transformations i.e. re-shaping gender relations as a systematic control. However, in this pattern, females are unprivileged from various

perspectives. Firstly, “extended households not only deprive female of their father’s patrimony but even their claims in their husbands’ patriline can only be possible through the birth of a male child. Secondly, along with men’s interests, in classic patriarchy, senior women (mother-in-law) subordinate every aspect of young girls’ lives through women’s life cycle” (Kandiyoti, 1988, pp. 275-279; Hurara, 2025, pp. 1487–1507). Therefore, among Pashtun, society is structured, and norms are ubiquitous how to behave and express one’s gender (masculinity and femininity) and how to learn gender stereotypes in respective manners (Hurara, 2025, pp. 1487-1507). Gender-segregation discouraged inter-gender participation as the division of labor and social patterns are confined for both sexes (Hurara, 2022, pp. 82; Hussain, Mahmood, & Abbas, 2015, pp. 8–9),

Besides, Pashtun emotions are both gendered and segregated by sex. As with much of the Muslim and Mediterranean societies, “*gham* (grief) is synonymously related to females because females’ lament is expected while for men, grief is nothing more than a taboo,” and “unmarried girls are not expected to perform in *gham* either because they are considered as ignorant or *gham* is only applied to womanhood” (Hurara, 2025, pp. 1501-1502; Hurara, 2022, pp. 83-84). As B. Grima aptly narrated in Pashtun society such “emotion is cultural, controlled, learned and performed” (Grima, 1992, pp. 11-13). Similarly, in theory of psychoanalytical socialization theory, “gender stereotypes are not developed arbitrarily in Pashtun society but organized by socio-cultural factors and it is the institution of family that re-enforce the gender categorization in *Pashtunwali*” (Hurara, 2025, p. 1503). Thereby, a boy is symbolized as *khadi* (happiness), while girls birth is viewed as *gham* (sorrow and sadness), and/or a *sharm* for Pashtun’s house (Hussain et al., 2015, p. 2; Grima, 1992, p. 37). In such gender socialization, a child not only internalized a ‘body image’ and stereotypes but also can learn, act and

perform restrictive norms, and its starts pre-birth, with questions, is it a girl or a boy? (Hussain et al., 2015, p. 2-6). Under patriarch values and gender segregation (or *gham-khadi* network), women internalized the psychological implications of lack of male offspring, especially in-house ceremonies i.e. boy’s birth denotes the emotions of social prestige while the birth of girls is considered as socially negligible (Ahmed, 1992, pp. 34–35).

In segregated zones, Pashtun women lived as portrayed, tanning girls in femininity while internalizing their own cycle of subordination. Unlike the West, in Peshawar valley, genealogies embody Pashtun women’s identity, tradition and bonds of solidarity within and beyond the segregated zones (Ahmed, 2005, pp. 945-952). In the *gham* network, a young girl learns the same emotion and behavior as practiced by older women. Traditionally, young girls are not bound by *gham*, but personal loss teaches them to embody it, which internalized appropriate acts, responses and expectations (Grima, 1992, p. 49; Hurara, 2022, pp. 97-99).

Culture of Pashtun Childhood: A Conflict of Civility in Pashtun Society

Historians and researchers provide a wide range of cultural background for the development of childhood and children’s agency in different societies. This interpretation projects a form of cultural relativism according to which “the recognition that societies differ in their cultural attitudes towards social phenomena and therefore no universal criteria can be applied to compare one cultural view with another. Culture can therefore only be judged through reference to their own standards” (James & James, 2012, p. 35). Historically Pashtun society presented as homogeneous society, however in term of the development of stages of childhood which in Pashto known as *Zalmitoob* have heterogenous in terms of variations and stages dues differences in dialects, geography, class and gender. Doing

Pashto or Pashtunwali also have multiple form of values and virtue in different parts of Pashtun geography like Wazirwali, Kakarwali, yousafzwali and paktiwali etc with overlapping values and virtues.

“The point is that many factors work together to produce the customs of a society. Not only are society’s values important, but so are its religious beliefs, its factual beliefs, and its physical environment. Thus, we cannot conclude that two societies differ in value just because they differ in custom. After all, customs may vary for a number of different reasons. Thus, there may be less moral disagreement than there appears to be” (Rachels & Rachels, 2012, p. 21).

Childhood as an idea evolved in the western intellectual traditions which are primarily inspired by the Romantic Movement of the eighteenth century (Rovee, n.d) (Accessed: 22 May 2025) and psychological intervention into human subjectivity in the twentieth century. The present theories of childhood are deeply inspired by these traditions; however, childhood has multiple cultural representations across the globe. These western traditions of childhood inspired parenting style, institutional policies and educational policies regarding the school-based learning of children.

Pashtun society from medieval to present time have diverse exchange of learning due to repeated cycles of migration organically and inorganically. Pashtun cultural framework has preserved collective memories of its own past regarding childhood and parenting. These concepts found limited area in raising and parenting in Pashtun society which reflect in a proverb “*Che Sanga Plaar hum haghassay zwey vee*” (He is his father’s son). In Pashtun society childhood is a heterogenous category which means it depends on region, dialects, generations and socio-economic factors.

There are different stages in Pashtun childhood in both rural and urban regions with variations in its social expectations, and responsibilities. In the northern Pashtunkhwa, which is more urbanized area, childhood commonly defined through different stage like *Kakay* and *warktoay* (Infant), *Mashoom* (socially conscious child), *Zalmay* (Socially active child) and *Halak* (biological adolescent but young). These childhood stages have its own social distinction and responsibilities in Pashtun society. In the northern Pashtunkhwa childhood projected in proverbs like “*Chy warkotee we gull dy boyawa y*” which means that an infant is like flower, delicate and fragrant, when become “*mashoom ranga ghat she, khargay dy zghalawa y*” as they grow to next stage of *zalmitoob* (childhood) they are expected to work hard (foal, a young donkey) to fulfill cultural labor of learning, and third stage when “*Zalmay chy wadda wakee, tarboor dy, belawa*” and when become able to carried independent household let him free to perform the historical burden of past in the shape of doing Pashto.^{iv}

Nonetheless, in the southern Pashtunkhwa regions, childhood have its own stages which are primarily *Kushnia* (Infant), *Warrekia* (socially active child), *Gawaterigia* (socially responsible child) and *Tankia Zanrre* (adult young nones participates in the community activities). The distinction of rural and tribal childhood is that they are expected to be socially active even before being socially conscious. Tribal ethos and pathos have pushed him at his early stage to function and compete at his/her early stage of life. Their childhood was lost as soon as possible due to cultural needs and social sensitivity. The childhood in the urban north Pakhtunkhwa is more extended and fulfills its natural stages. These stages amongst Pashtun childhood challenges the popular universalist western discourse of childhood as pre-social, innocent and apolitical in terms if function and activities.

The Historical Burden of Pashtun Childhood: Uses of Past

There is a famous Arabic Phrase representing the nature of time which says that “We are more similar to our time, then to our ancestors.” However, Marx believes that the dominant ideology in society is the ideology of the ruling class” which determined both our time and ancestors (Marx & Engels, 1970). The concept of early Pashtun ethnic nationalism reinforced modernism in Pashtunkhwa in the colonial period. Pashto literary history, being a branch of general and theoretical history, in the presence of anthropocentrism where literature performs the functions of interpreting human activities, feelings and emotions, in which writing a history of literature is tantamount to writing human history started its publication in the form of journal and documents like *Pakhtun* journal etc. Pashtun being a romantic ethnic group of born poets deeply effects its youngster with the poetic verses. Literature and history are inextricably linked. Majnoon Gorakhpuri in his book *Nukat-e-Majnoon* has acknowledged connection between literature, history Life has made it clear that literature offers a glimpse of the civilization of a country or society and seeks the history of a nation in it (Gorakhpuri, 1966). Literature is also a history in which the ever-changing nature of a country or a nation is reflected in the continuous picture.

Michael Foucault defines three different kind of state structure^v one was the justice state of medieval period second one was the administrative state which was absolute in nature and national boundaries were define and the third one was the Govt state which was responsible to serve the citizen. About the evolution of the state, Michel Foucault highlights (Poster, 1982) the political schema that during the fifteenth and sixteenth century some very important development occurred in social, economic and political factors which changed the structure of

state in Europe. The capitalist mode of production gives birth to different power relations. In the absent of serfdom and feudal mode production now the new state introduced standing army, permanent bureaucracy, national taxation codified law and unifies market but the nature of state was still Absolut state in structure. In the eighteenth century, that administrative state transform into a nation state and the subject into a citizen. Now when these changes brought up to the colonies it deeply impacts the existing class and status of the people of India. Chatterjee (1993) investigates the construction of postcolonial nationalism in the background of colonial power structures during British Times. For many scholars’ nationalism would be sentimental factor for other it would be ideological for still other if the late nineteenth century colonial politics in which one can find out the emergence of Pashtun ethnic nationalism in the different parts of Pashtun geography. History and uses of pasts became the metaphor of identity which goes back to the origin of Pashtun society.

Pashtun’s culture has an excessive poetic sense of representation. However, this poetic sense of knowledge never compels Pashtun society to rethink about the alternatives of social cosmos of Pashtun history. Pashtun literary genres are almost polyphonic in nature which demands to be understood on its own terms and conditions (Masood, 2024, p.2). The historical past is the expected wishes and desires of the community of historians about the events of the past, while the practical past deals with one’s own personal and psychological aspects of life. Historical narrations are bound by the aesthetics and ethics of historians. (Masood, 2024, p. 16-18)

The emergence of ethnic modernism in Pashtun society happened with the development of *Anjuman-e-Islah-e-Afghan*, which is the reformation movement of Pashtuns in 1921, *Khudai Khidmatgar* Movement in 1929, *Anjuman-i-Watan*, in 1939, *Wror Pashtun*, known

as Pashtun Brotherhood in 1954. These ethnic political movements have deeply affected the political culture of Pashtun geography in colonial and postcolonial times. Bacha Khan a leading political and social reformist from the above political culture addresses Pashtun children in his own established journal title *Pakhtun Journal* in 1946. This address projected moral, national and pedagogical responsibilities for the Pashtun children in the time of crisis. This speech not only present Pashtun children as learners but laborers of anti-colonial project. From the children side in *Sepahnama* it illustrates how they internalize the ethnic political ideology, ideal and loyalty to the historical burden of past by means of non-violence. The dialogue between Bacha Khan and Pashtun Children highlights Pashtun childhood subjectivity in British colonial subjugation. The Pashtun child become the symbol and subject of nationalist system of embodying and reproducing decolonial Pashtun culture and identity (Pakhtun Journal, 1946).

On the other side Mr. Ghani Khan another figure in the literariness of Pashtun past tried to contextualize and domesticate Pashtun childhood with the historical burden of past through his popular poem *Da Bacho Tarana*, (Children's Anthem). This poem زه به ځم په جنگ د قام - زه چې شمه ځوان an illustration of how Pashtun children were being involved in the labor of becoming new Pashtuns. Mr. Ghani Khan being public poet of Pashto literature presents and forced Pashtun children in a formative phase of historical burden by functional resistance in cycles of conflicts. His verses plan Pashtun childhood an honor bound duty *Nang* and refusal to any subjugation. However, there are ideas which embodied masculinity *Nar Sarre*, *Baaz* and *Taude Raghuna* by the concept of courage and rejection of weakness. This poem normalized medieval period militants' identity and glorification warrior ideals through metaphor of ethnic lineage. This poem instructs Pashtun childhood as a performance of

historical past rooted in the liganacy of political suffering, dishonors and traumatic collective memory (Khan, 2021, p. 643).

Pashtun childhood is a cultural battlefield where history is not just remembered but expected to perform to fulfill the domesticated desire of Pashtun being an ethnic community. This traumatic expectation from Pashtun children have extended history from medieval to modern times.

There are historiographic virtues and narrative choices in the representation of historical trauma as public memory. The historical sensation of the past as a substance, in the presence of moral and cognitive intervention, creates a possibility for transcendental communication. The central elements of all these determinations are our own cognitive and moral choices, what post-concepts intellectual culture calls it, the metaphysic of narrativity, which makes a hope for understanding of past and present. Thus, in reflection it builds communication with the possible future.

Modern Pashtun ethnic identity emerged in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which defined the territorial existence and ethnic identity. Before British colonialism socio-political expansion and development of *Indo-Turk-Afghan* civilization in India evolved from last one millennium. Pashtuns have assimilated and integrated with those societies where they ruled historically. They adopted local culture like Urdu in Hindustan and Persian in Iran. These cultural and social transformation also witnessed and projected the greater sense of Pashtun integration and assimilation in the different part of the world in the medieval period. The history of modern Pashtun is the history of political turmoil, repeated political collapses and external invasions which causes violence, displacement and resistance over the course of history. These events also emergence of turbulent and traumatic Pashtun civil society in the modern world.

This trouble history has a series of historical traumatic memories started in the near past from 1979 to present, which encourages war, conflict, political subjugation and gender reinforcement due to the political intervention of USSR and USA. These religious instructions and militant ideology tried to frame early socialization of Pashtun children in tribal area of Pashtunkhwa in the last three decades. This militarized childhood challenged the postcolonial debate of identity which aspires to freedom of education and child protected spaces. Deobandi brand of Islam completely restructured narrative that shapes childhood in Pashtunkhwa. This historical trauma became part of public memory which is reflected in personal and collective responses of civil society. Pashto literature after the incident of 9/11 has embodied it in its poetic narrative of representation (Khalil, 2012). Memorization of religious script, demonization of others and glorification of holy war become indoctrination for Pashtun children. To some scholar this was the new form of Pashtun nationalism, which is however methodologically incorrect due the political and historical background of ethnic Pashtun nationalism which reinforces ethnic modernism in Pashtun geography (Sheikh, 2016).

However, these historical traumas generated by the process of fundamentalism deeply embodied in psychology of human experience. Writing is the one way to represent historical trauma as public narratives. Pashtun have a system and culture of remembrance which practices for hundreds of years in which they preserved the values of identity and ethnicity. This Pashtun culture of remembrance have its social-political elements which represent through Pashtunwali, doing Pashto etc. this culture of remembrance has the capacity to remember the traumatic memories of past which effect collective and personal image of Pashtuns in homeland and abroad. It is easy to locate collective, social and cultural memory which has its material existence through which its

practice. Historical trauma and its location in public memory have its own complications of representation in person and in a group. However, Pashtun children have preserved and embodied pain and trauma through oral and documented literature.

Literature Review: Historiography of Pashtun Children Literature

In the fourth part of *The Global History of Childhood Reader*, edited by Heidi Morrison highlights that historical use of the past can address the challenges faces by children through lesson of history and development of protected places of learning for children. The connotation of labor in classical terms is used for working class participation in the different modes of production. Pashtun child labor is a legitimate working-class phenomenon where children are forced to work to support large families in Pashtunkhwa. There is visible street Pashtun child labor and there nonvisible Pashtun domestic child labore. Researcher explored that the traditional Pashtun *Pardha* involved in the domestic child labor. Female child labor encourages to fulfils the family jobs.

However, the cheap availability and extended working time without permission reinforces domestic child labor (Khan, Ullah, & Khan, 2021, p. 1). There is other another kind of Pashtun children involved in child labor like grazing child. Nomadic communities depend upon this child labor which ensure financial stability and grazing freedom (Ahmed, 1981). While cultural labor of learning is somehow a classless phenomenon that happens both at standard schools and community places of learning. Pashtuns as an ethic community have transformed from medieval world into modern in the last one hundred years. These people have their own way of life called Pashtunwali as community-based learning ethos and pathos. This study primarily deals that cultural values and practices as labor of learning through

which members of the community rear their children.

These communities based labore of learning have it won cultural capital which play a major role in the development of Pashtun cultural capitalism from medieval to modern time. Pashtun children are the primary agents of this cultural history. Historians have disregarded the division of class dynamics in traditional Pashtun society which deflects class consciousness. This class distinction and interpretations of its structure are important for understanding the historical developments happened in Pashtun history and society. Pashtun historiography is primarily dominated by political idealism and highlights broader social stratification which overlook micro history development. Historians avoided class dynamics of Pashtun society which obscure class consciousness and economic division of Pashtun society. the underdeveloped and non-industrial characteristics of Pashtuns society making difficult for objectivist historiography to projects it in the larger image of historical process.

Historically, the intergenerational transformation of memories and history of the family are largely out of modern research due to the isolated nature and hostile nature of Pashtun society and politics towards external world, which in return also discourage the stages of childhood development and mechanism of cultural learning.

This research come across very few documents which deals Pashtun children literature. Amongst these are “*Da Mashamona Sandaree aw Qisaay*” by Kulsum Zeb and “*Pa Pashto K Da Mashmanao Sandaree aw Sotona*” and “*Da Mashamona da Adab Musanifin and Da Hagah Masail*” by Muhammad Nawaz Tahir. *Pashto Journal* from its very beginning have explored Pashto children literature regarding its development and social role in society (Hayat, 2024). Marwat traces the evolution of Pakhtun nationalism, providing context for the ethnic

dimensions of Pashtun experiences (Marwat, 2017). Enayat's exploration of Islam and secularism in post-colonial thought offers a theoretical framework for understanding the ideological backgrounds of Pashtun cultural production (Ullah, 2019).

***Pashtunwali* as Community based Supervision: Biopolitics and Control Mechanism in Pashtun Society**

The history of *Pashtunwali* is the history of interpretations, manifestation and representation of how humanity transforms from savagery into civilization by conflict resolutions and social contract. This historical process later transformed from ‘proto humanism’^{vi} into anti-humanism by the political extremism of Pashtun society. According to Barfield *Pashtunwali* is ‘the cultural code of the Pashtuns’ (Barfield, 2010, p. 261), While Mikhail Pelevin defines Pashtunwali as a system of customary laws and ethics. However, Pashtunwali has also an important social function of community-based supervision of children. This side of Pashtunwali display codes and principle of human behaviors which emphases upon of social control mechanism in Pashtun society. Thus, doing Pashto become articulate moral internalization into Pashtun children from its very beginning. This function as a social contract and fabric of identity amongst Pashtuns in a complex system of cultural materialism. *Jirga, maraca, nanawatay (act of apology), nang, watan or hemad*, (love for homeland) *cheegha*, and *Pashto kawal (do Pashtu)* are the elements which reinforces Pashtun family with differences in practices in rural and urban Pashtun geography about which Benedict argue that “morality differs in every society and is a convenient term for socially approved habits (Benedict, 1934, p. 278).”

However, there are family based regulatory elements in *Pashtunwali* which become obligatory in the Pashtun parenting which deals from birth to adulthood. These elements are

melmestia (hospitality), *tarborwali* (agnatic rivalry), *Chalweshtama* (custom related to celebration of birth after forty days), *Wachmoria* (A condition when mother gives second birth within same calendar year), and *Padleena* (rituals about rearing) (Ansari Urmarr, 2023, p. 211).

Adal (Justice), *melmastia*, *turah* (social act of courage), *Gosh* (ceasefire or agreement), and *Yurbaal/Orbaal* (collective responsibility) provide a structure to *Pashtunwali* where children learned through community engagement as a moral accountability for social discipline. The community-based leaning and social functioning extend the influence of children in public sphere where courage, truthfulness and modesty internalized through doing Pashto. Thus, *Pashtunwali* as moral code of categorical supervision children in society. Therefore, Pashtun children forced to be accountable for the entire deeds of tribe and family. These cycles of cultural subjugation and institutional punishments repeated in the history of Pashtun family from the known past to the present time. The old generation of Pashtun female shapes and structure female child according to restricted honor and dignity of Pashto ethos and pathos.

Pashtun women have never practiced sisterhood or actively resisted the existing Pashtun social status quo. Pashtun female, particularly the 13 percent educated in the Peshawar Valley, have never attempted to organize or mobilize themselves (World Bank, 2021, p. 1-20). The agency of women's subjectivity is at its worst in Pashtunkhwa. The parenting of Pashtun children is some of the factors that have prevented Pashtun girls from forming an organized sisterhood and political solidarity within feminine Pashtun society. The question of women's freedom and liberty is not merely a moral responsibility of Pashtun boys; it is a political stance that will never be resolved unless Pashtun girls themselves take a stand. The *Shaz-waak* (women solidarity),

feminine political world in Pashtunkhwa is restricted to modesty and domestic responsibilities values from childhood to adulthood. The conflict of authority in Pashtun society in term of *Pashtunwali* and Islam and in term of gender division of cultural labor further narrow down the social freedom and liberty to express (Rehman, 2015).

Internalization of Social Hierarchies as Cultural Capital

Pashtun childhood reinforced through the existing militant masculinities like projecting male *Nar sare* which means an ideal Pashtun manhood (Shah & Shah, 2023). This social cultivation and instillation of gender subjugation distance him from his counter narrative of femininity. This manhood later becomes a physical strength which compelled Pashtun society into gender abnormalities.

Pashtunwali, Pashto and 'do Pashto' are the cultural self-reflection of Pashtuns, where all live by the kin or family forms a society of hierarchy, namely, kinship, tradition and egalitarian order. This hierarchical social order pursues equality in which hierarchy of authority or leadership is segmented in terms of localized autonomy as well as where the hierarchy of gender is institutionalized both in terms of gender categories and patriarchy. Hence, 'equality and autonomy' are a basic fundamental principle of *Pashtunwali* for all gender variants, however, gender authority is measured in terms of autonomy and segregation where gender dichotomy is structured as man atomized society (Tainter, 2011) highlights gender and cultural structure, as Kate Millett aptly said that "personality structure in terms of sexual category" (Millett, 2000, p. 29).

Moreover, under women cycle of subordination and classic patriarchy, the power structure of extended households via the internalization of patriarchy by the cyclical nature of women's

power. For instance, wealth and status dictate marriage decisions, culturally, the value judgment is *hasab nasab* (familial affiliations) rather than looking for capabilities. Therefore, to avoid *peghore* (of status), the selection process among the Pashtun woman is status-centric, not solidarity to a girl or female-female alliances. The first expression of such culture maxim honor is ‘*Khalaq ba sa wai*’ (what will the people say?) and ‘*da stargo garawalo na ba woozo*’ (we would not be able to face the people) (Hurara, 2025, pp. 1502-1503, Naz, 2011, pp. 29-30). Therefore, in Peshawar valley, cultural norms subjugated women for community self-expression or kinship, and this has shown that “men’s honor lies in women’s shame and modesty” (Grima, 1992, p. 37).

From an early age Pashtun childhood becomes a part of systematic internalization of different roles regarding social standards and lifestyle. The last two decades have been significant in terms of cultural history, which tried to explore the unheard and untold portions of public history. Pashtun public sphere of history emphasized and encouraged identity, social exclusion and emotional restrain though daily practices, traditions and codes of conducts. However, this tendency also critically engages in the transformation of memory and consciousness from one generation to the next generation. This cultural labor of learning expends a multidimensional cultural heritage which out of archive, museum and public galleries.

The cultural capital of Pashtun childhood simulated in the form of informal curricula as proverbs, stories and poetry into cultural heritage in terms of duty, imitating values and honor which prioritize and internalized respect, obedience and resistance. Duty in doing Pashto is not mere a task but a complete cultural ethos which transform into intergenerational roots of memories and responsibilities. The concepts of *Nang* as courage

and *Sabar* as patience are ingrained in children from its early age. Male Children in the near past were expected to be present in one of the most powerful institutions of Pashtun society *Jirga* or *Maraka* (council of the elders) to observe, listen and internalize in a form of passive socialization and lived experience and to participate in *Chalweshtiaa* (committee of the public safety) public decisions.

In these values system emotional silence is lesser discussed portion of childhood in Pashtun society. The internalization of manhood into Pashtun childhood in the near past under community surveillance expected a hardship without complaint to demonstrate courage. Sadness, vulnerability and fear are discouraged as a threat to self-identity and community weakness. Public display of emotions is considering immoral like the seventeenth century Pashtun poet Khushal Khan instructs young men to be firm as mountain and silent in pain, represents those emotions in Pashtun parenting is not a personal but social and political obligation.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This research uses qualitative approach in which sources are reenacted through historical methodology to understand the historicity of Pashtuns childhood in the presence of cultural labor of learning. This research primarily reflective in nature which tried to rethink Pashtun concepts and ideas about childhood. History of the family plays a more role in the development of childhood. This study tried to shed light on Pashtun history of family, which fundamentally have controlled the biopolitics and pivotal role in shaping the individual childhood.

In the procedure of methodology, a model of hermeneutics in historical theory being implied to understand the dimension of cultural labor integrated and inspired from the concept of child

labor as discussed in the UN convention on the rights of child, mentioned in article 12 (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Pashtunwali as community-based learning sensitized model has also analyzed in its cultural projection, socialization and protection about child rights. Pashtunwali according to Barfield is ‘the integration of moral and cultural values that primarily influences parenting and childhood in the Pashtun landscape of social environment. This study tried functional historiography as method to understand Pashto proverbs, storytelling as a non-punitive methods and cultural rituals from oral sources are uses to understand the nature, narrative of making Pashtun childhood. This chapter tried to highlight Pashtun childhood which is a combination of informal parenting guidance and community based instilled respect, expectations and responsibilities are being approach accordingly. Pashtun traditional values provide an insight into the cultural invention of family-based parenting and community-based tribal parenting of children rearing.

Results and Conclusion

This study highlights that Pashtun childhood is not a fixed category but rather changing and shifting as the historical development in Pashtun society happened. The embodied value of culture as manifested in labor of leaning show the ideological control, internalization of social hierarchies including class, ethnic and tribal prejudice and demarcation of self and other deeply affected Pashtun childhood over the course of history. The narrative of *ghairatmand* (honorable) and *beghairata* (dishonored or coward) construct a binary opposition in Pashtun identity in struggle of existence even at the level of childhood which later radicalized Pashtun society on cultural level.

The historical making of childhood in rural or tribal and urban have a mixed hegemonic response in the form of masculinity, preserving ethnic identity, burden of stereotypes which integrated in

the form of muscular medieval period heroes and battles for one millenniums Indo-Turk-Afghan civilization, which in the larger discourse narrow down the framework of moral understanding of contemporary time for Pashtun children. They are supposed and trained to reinforce a defined form of socio-political landscape. These factors in the presence of social hierarchies preserve hatred and fear as learned phenomenon that shape the moral imagination of Pashtun children.

However, the pedagogy reinforced by folktales, cultural metaphors and hierarchy of social distinction also trained them to function as humanized and ethnic civilized citizen of community as attributed by Rehman Baba “*Chy Kishwar da Afghano Mu’atar She*” (So that the condition of the Pashtuns may improve and prosper) and global world. Ghani Khan in his poem *Mashoom* (The Child) says “I love a child not because he is my son, but because he is free” however, there are series of questions as a results of this study regarding the nature and narrative of Pashtun childhood which highlights a discontent in representation and manifestation of Pashtun child, like how Pashtun girls’ childhood erased first by the colonial discourse of savagery and then by the postcolonial political extremism within Pashtun society. Does Pashtun childhood is a lived subjectivity of traumas, violence and wars in total sum. The entire existing narrative within doing Pashto projects Pashtun child as an unintelligible and ignorant subject which need to train and control through social mechanism. This mechanism function in binary, it controls and reconstruct and shape Pashtun child femininity. What space exists in Pashtun society for gender nonbinary and non-confirming children. The previous four decades of global war for political expansion in Pashtunkhwa marked body of Pashtun child as the contestation of political mobilization. In such a scenario why militant humanitarian discourse of understanding first infantilize and then criminalize them. “Whatever

in the hands of a child contributes to the overall shaping of human intelligence”. The absorbent mind by maria Montessori.

Limitations of the Research

This study has its own limitations in terms of quantitative perspective. This article primarily deals with doing Pashto as cultural labor of learning as reflective analysis which limited its field and regional extensions. In terms of interpretations every research needs to be followed by the proceeding experience which in this case

are drought in term of historians who deals Pashtun childhood and children literature. There are sources, report and documents which deals child labor in term of classic terms however, most of the sources and interpretations in term of cultural labor are undocumented about Pashtun children which make it more problematic for the reason of objectivity. These situations bring the past for the presentist judgements which is a contested debate in the epistemic and functional historiography (Masood, 2025).

Author Contributions

Danyal Masood: Conceptualization (equal), Methodology (equal), Analysis, Writing –original draft, Writing –review & editing

Abu Hurara: Methodology (equal), Analysis, Writing –review& editing

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ⁱ A Pashtun dance, especially performed by Pashtun male and female together.

ⁱⁱ A festival performed and celebrated by the Pashtun young ones to mark the beginning of spring.

ⁱⁱⁱ After the harvest, wheat and corn are separated from the plants in a communal gathering of villagers, where people of all classes and genders participate without segregation.

^{iv} Ali, B. (2025). Lecturer, Government Postgraduate Jahanzeb College Swat. *Personal communication*, 11 May.

^v <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/12/12/from-sovereignty-to-war-foucaults-analytic-of-power/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20state%2C%E2%80%9D%20Foucault%20explains,123>).

The state,” Foucault explains, “is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology, and so forth” (Foucault, 1980, p. 123)

^v Foucault and History MARK POSTER, *Social Research* Vol. 49, No. 1, *Modern Masters* (SPRING 1982), pp. 116-

^{vi} Writings of Khushal khan projects a form of proto humanism, which declared human as the center of all interpretations and obligation, which however, did not liberate Pashtun in premodern time from the socio-political constraint of mental suppression and political subjugation.