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Reframing Gender and Agency in Tribal Histories: Baloch Women's Leadership from Medieval to Modern Times

^{1*} Bashir Ahmed Jatoi

² Inayatullah Chandio

³ Ayaz Hyder Mugheri

Abstract

This paper examines the prevailing academic studies that consider Baloch society as patriarchal and ignore the diverse roles of Baloch women in various fields. This research attempts to examine the historical roles of Baloch women, such as the Bandai Baloch, Bibi Ganjan and Banari, and highlights their contributions in conflict resolution. Women's control over household management is also analyzed to show how they exercised their autonomy by adhering to the norms of honor (*izzat*) and hospitality (*melmastia*). Using postcolonial feminist theory, this research examines the roles of Baloch women through primary and secondary sources, which are considered in the context of their families, tribal chieftaincies, nomadic social structures, urbanization and migration. This paper shows that Baloch women have always strategically positioned themselves within patriarchal systems and expands the dual image of the "oppressed tribal woman" and the "liberated modern woman". This article argues that Baloch women's participation in leadership, warfare, and mediation are forms of gender agency that have reshaped power relations within the tribal system. This research also examines the changes in traditional authority through education, migration, and political activism from the Middle Ages to the present. It is argued that Baloch women are not simply victims of patriarchy, but active participants in history, creating new power structures for themselves. The findings of this research make an important contribution to gender history and postcolonial studies and offer a case study of agency within honor-based tribal societies that also informs a broader regional understanding of the Middle East and Central Asia.

Keywords: Tribal; Baloch; Honour-hospitality; Women; Baloch Sardar.

1. Introduction

The Baloch people live in Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan, and have large immigrant communities in the Middle East and East Africa. Discussions of Baloch society are often framed within a rigid patriarchal framework, which limits the cultural presence and prominent role of women (Ahmed,

2017). Colonial texts, national histories, and the international media often portray Baloch culture as unchanging and male-dominated (Baluch 1977; Harrison 1981). Similar views are found in studies of South Waziristan, where women are often portrayed as custodians of family honor under the Pashtunwali tribal code. At the same time, men exercise strict control over their movements (Wazir 2025). These similarities suggest that such perceptions of male roles are perhaps not unique to Baloch society but are part of a broader pattern present in tribal societies.

Ozair and Rauf (2023) agree that Baloch society has switched its traditional, clan-based roots to a more politically mindful way of life, but this change has rarely been studied in the framework of gender. The study of the role of women is central in the genesis of mass movements and collective identities creation. Gender-based inequality is sustained by the continued marginalization of Balochistan in Pakistan, in terms of political sphere. According to Khetran (2011), despite the plenty of the natural resources in the province, the province does not invest heavily in education, health and welfare hence the low female enrollment of less than twenty percent. These differences in essential services effectively disenfranchise women out of the mainstream life and politics.

The Sardar is center of Baloch tribal governance. He is the leader of the tribe, leads the jirga, enforces the law, and adjudicates disputes (Khan & Kasi, 2015). The authority of Sardar determines much of the social and political system, reinforcing male dominance in leadership. However, historical records and oral traditions reveal a more complex picture, in which Baloch women are also seen playing active roles in warfare, tribal mediation, and social affairs. In poetry and oral narratives, women appear as mediators during tribal conflicts, as leaders in times of crisis, and as hosts whose hospitality is renowned even in the absence of men (Janmahmad, 1982; Spooner, 2004).

Many have ignored this history because colonial scholars have focused on Victorian values when discussing gender. They have viewed public authority as a primarily male-dominated role (Sokefeld, 2001). In contrast, postcolonial feminist perspectives challenge these assumptions. For example, Ramirez writes about Native American women that gender and tribal identity need to be understood together (Ramirez, 2007). This perspective helps to re-imagine the role of Baloch women in oral poetry, storytelling, and the political sphere (Titus, 1996; Dashti, 2012).

This article adopts a postcolonial feminist perspective to examine the status of Baloch women within tribal structures, which are often undervalued or ignored (Mohanty, 2003). It argues that colonial and nationalist narratives have portrayed the “tribal woman” as passive and powerless, denying her real power in the system of family relationships and political life (Spivak, 1988). An intersectional (comparative-class) perspective shows that their experiences are not only linked to gender but also to tribal hierarchies, class, and regional geopolitical conditions (Crenshaw, 1991).

Baloch society underwent major changes during the transition from the medieval to the modern era. These included the establishment of states, modernization, and migration, all of which affected the role of women in public life. Although traditional ways of influencing society, such as mediation and the guardianship of cultural traditions, still exist today, improvements in education and political activity have opened new doors of leadership for Baloch women (Baloch & Kundi, 2018; Shah, 2020).

This study examines the changing role of Baloch women in agency, examining three aspects: (1) their leadership and participation in public life; (2) the impact of these roles in challenging gender stereotypes in tribal societies; (3) the evolution of these roles with modernization and education. This article argues that Baloch women's historical and contemporary participation in leadership, warfare, and mediation are forms of agency that reshape power relations within patriarchal tribal rule and thus challenge the notion of “passivity” presented in colonial and nationalist narratives.

This paper takes a historical and ethnographic view of the fixed assumptions about tribal patriarchy. It attempts to locate Baloch women's roles not within a binary of seclusion versus visibility but within more dynamic structures of power, kinship, and honor. This study improves our understanding of gender and agency in tribal societies. It highlights the importance of moving beyond colonial ideas and nationalist narratives that treat these groups as if they were all the same.

2. Literature Review and Theory

Eastern literature about Baloch culture produced very much during the 1800s, mostly through colonial narratives. For instance, those by Richard Burton in 1877 and the Imperial Gazetteer of India. These works contained descriptions regarding divisions within the Baloch tribe and their geographical distribution across different areas. However, these were colonial narratives deeply influenced by Orientalist visions and Victorian male values instead of any actual truth (Said, 1978; Burton, 1877). Therefore, women were predominantly showed in domestic roles with no recognition of their political and economic contributions (Sokefeld, 2001). The work of Dyer from 1921 presented Sarhad tribes through a militarized lens that emphasized predispositions toward violence thereby reinforcing a gendered order that side-lines the importance of women's roles in society.

British officials often thought that female seclusion, or *purdah*, meant women were completely shut out of public life. This view ignored evidence that women played important roles in tribal mediation and warfare (Harrison, 1981). Relying on male tribal leaders for information reinforced stories told from a male perspective and pushed aside women's oral histories (Janmahmad, 1982). The colonial and male-focused viewpoint created a lasting silence about Baloch women's ability to act. This silence still affects how people view gender relations in the postcolonial state.

Since the partition in 1947, the Baloch nationality's history has been dominated by narratives focused on tribal chieftains-sardars and nawabs—as the main figures resisting state authority (Baluch, 1987; Dashti, 2012). More recent studies have emphasized ethnicity and the state relations, yet gender remains largely absent from this analysis. For example, Hashmi (2015) focuses exclusively on male participation in the Baloch movement and fails to account for women as historical actors.

This discussion considers the role of women in political movements, often ignored but considered important in political movements, such as the role of women in intertribal conflict resolution and armed resistance (Shah, 2020). According to Kandiyoti (1991), this marginalization can be described as a patriarchal bargain; through this aspect, the contributions made by women can only be appreciated to strengthen male-based constructs of nationhood. The core family values of hospitality and loyalty are identified by historical scholarship of Pitt-River (1966) and Peristiany (1965) when it comes to political mobilization. In Baloch culture, honor and hospitality, though attributed to men, have been found to be practiced by both men and women (Lindholm, 1982).

Paul Titus (1998) explains that the concept of “honor” in Baloch society is complex. It is based on social status and loyalty to tribal leaders. In his research on Baloch and Pashtun communities, he finds that Pashtuns value justice and individual autonomy. In contrast, Baloch identity is linked to loyalty and collective tribal honor under the leadership of chiefs. These traditional concepts continue to form Baloch social relations today, especially in matters of gender, where actions of women reflect the importance of honor in this male-dominated society.

A lot of empirical research has explained the moral systems that are in place in the tribal societies. However, dominant literature tends to represent women as inactive guardians of honor and not active participants in its creation and protection. The recent research on oral epics and poetry of the Baloch people proves that women are the direct participants of preserving the tribal honor with

the help of diplomatic, mediational, and aggressive actions (Baloch & Kundi, 2018). Such difference between the generalized anthropological discourses on the one hand and the realities that Baloch women live in on the other hand highlights the need to conduct a gender-based review of honor systems. The need to recognize women as political actors as opposed to being symbolic embodiment is crucial towards a full understanding of the honor code.

Most contemporary political scholarship is consistently devoid of gender as an important category of analysis. Ozair and Rauf (2023) note the transition of Baloch nationalism from a regime of tribal resistance to a broad-based mass movement, but once again, undermine women activism and hence reinforces androcentricity in its interpretations of that history. Khan and Kasi (2015) discuss the dominance of male authority within the entity called Jirga and the construction of political legitimacy in terms of sardar parameters. Related concerns arise within Native feminist scholarship as well: Ramirez (2007) calls for a woman-centered vision of sovereignty. The work also brings to the forefront the issue of challenges in integrating notions of gender within Baloch tribal contexts.

Postcolonial feminist scholars, especially Mohanty (2003) and Spivak (1988), help us to understand how voices of women have been marginalized in colonial and nationalist histories. Mohanty points out that portraying all "Third World women" as the same and equally oppressed is misleading. The concept of Spivak the "subaltern" shows that historical stories often ignore colonized women. Kandiyoti's (1991) concept of "bargaining with patriarchy" examines how women navigate limitations and act within patriarchal systems, particularly in contexts such as those of the Baloch.

A cross-sectional approach (Crenshaw, 1991) reveals how women affiliated with the tribe, classes as well as geopolitical marginalization, results in varied experiences of power and deprivation among the Baloch women. As an example, the ties of relation to chieftain family can help elite women to obtain more political power. Women who do not belong to an elite background have an increased power over their lives through availing of cultural norms and community support. Such a state of affairs puts such categories as traditional and modern roles to the test. It demonstrates the fact that the role of women has evolved with the course of time, yet on the other hand still follows the local and indigenous values.

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon three interconnected lenses: the first is postcolonial feminism, second one is intersectionality, and the third one is honor-hospitality code. These frameworks work to help us understand roles of women in society. Postcolonial feminism shows how colonial rules have silenced indigenous women. Interconnectedness of identities highlights the differences in class and tribe within Baloch society. The honor hospitality code explains how this power dynamics fit into accepted moral systems. This combination allows us to look at agency of women in a way that is both tied to local contexts and relevant globally. Yuval-Davis (1997) says that gender, ethnicity, and nationhood affect each other. Kandiyoti (2005) and Basu (2024) also point out that feminist analysis should consider how family structures and state power are changing. Building on these ideas, this study supports Abu-Lughod's (2015) idea of examining indigenous moral codes as flexible tools that women use to navigate, rather than just oppose, patriarchy.

Postcolonial feminism critiques the idea that Western feminism universally applies to all women and questions the acceptance of local patriarchal systems. Western feminists have often depicted women in the Global South as a homogenous group—oppressed and in need of saving (Mohanty, 2003). This view does not recognize the different historical and cultural backgrounds of their experiences. This view stereotypes Baloch women as "Third World women" (Spivak, 1988). Also, simply praising "authentic" local traditions can lead to gender-based exclusion while pretending to respect cultural differences (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

Postcolonial feminism looks at the histories of Baloch women to challenge colonial stories. It shows that women play important roles in society, often overcoming patriarchal constraints. Baloch oral histories describe women as guardians of honor who also engage in political discussions. This perspective is often missing from colonial narratives (Dashti, 2012). Recognizing this helps position Baloch women not as victims of tradition but as historically situated agents who negotiate between genders, power, and cultural continuity.

Intersectionality, as Crenshaw (1991) explains, that we cannot look at gender in isolation. We must consider other aspects of identity and power. For instance, caste/ethnicity, tribe, class, and people are either nomadic or settled. In Baloch society, these factors largely determine the extent to that women can act autonomously. For example, women belonging to chieftaincy families can be influential in inter-tribal diplomacy because of their family ties. On the contrary, women belonging to Malwand nomadic groups have more freedom and authority to manage livestock and organize economic activities during migration (Baloch & Kundi, 2018). This distinction shows that restraints and opportunities coexist within the same patriarchal system.

Baloch Code of moral is founded on two key moral values which are honor (*izzat*) and hospitality (*melmastia*). Even though the campaign diary by Dyer was written in a colonial register, it records rituals and practices related to hospitality and oath-taking. In the culture of *melmastia*, both men and women are engaged as explained in the diary in the descriptions given therein. Interpersonal relations, conflict resolution and political alliances are influenced by social values (Lindholm, 1982; Peristiani, 1965). On the one hand, these codes seem to be too restrictive, on the other hand, the codes also provide women with an opportunity to become a host, mediator, and guardian of tribal honor.

When male heads of household were absent due to seasonal migration or battle, women could temporarily assume public roles that carried important political weight. The symbolic capital of honor, when linked to the prestige of a household or clan, had a direct political impact on women's behavior in such situations (Janmahmad, 1982). Viewing these relationships through the honor-hospitality framework makes it clear that gender norms simultaneously limited and empowered women. These aspects are also linked to the third question of this research, which examines the changes in agency under modernization, education, and activism.

3. Methodology

This paper takes a historical sociological point of view which involves a synthesis of social history, anthropology and feminist theory to discuss political, social and cultural roles of Baloch women in the medieval to modern periods. It is an appropriate way to analyze long-term changes in the society and explain the position of gender roles in changing political regimes (Skocpol, 1984).

This study is based on a multidisciplinary corpus of primary and secondary sources to answer three research questions. There are two basic methodological principles directing the study. To begin with, contextualization presupposes a thorough analysis of the sociopolitical position of women in the respective social formations of the Baloch society, which will help to reduce the threat of reproducing outdated or excessively simplistic assumptions. Secondly, critical Re-reading is the methodical awareness and dismantling of colonial, nationalist, and anthropological prejudices by the postcolonial feminist and intersectional theories. The principle of contextualization, which is the first, is implemented by placing Baloch women in the complex apparatus of tribal structures, customary law and gendered labor patterns that have been developed since the medieval period to the present-day period. By doing so, it is possible to perceive agency in a more subtle way that would sometimes be lost behind the generalized stories. The second principle, critical Re-reading involves a severe questioning of available literature in order to uncover the hidden power structures. Using postcolonial

feminist and intersectional approaches, the research analyzes the discursive machismo that has historically relegated the Baloch women. The study will ask three fundamental questions: 1) How did Baloch women lead, go to war, and how they were involved in the life of the people in the medieval times to the modern times? 2) What role do codes of honor and hospitality i.e. izzat and melmastia play in helping or hindering agency of women in the tribal structure? 3) In what ways have modernization, educational and political activism changed traditional modes of female power and influence in Baloch society?

Triangulation of data was also utilized through three sources which included oral traditions, poetry and the colonial and post-colonial memoirs and secondary ethnographic and historical research. All the sources presented a different view. Oral history stressed on group memory and gender figuration, as opposed to the colonial memoirs which were an expression of external and biased attitudes. Ethnographic narratives provided descriptions based on situational particularism. The synthesis of these strata created an overall historical view and a moderate interpretation.

The current study makes use of an extensive review of secondary literature that includes recent ethnographic studies of the Baloch people (Spooner 2004; Dashti 2012) which provide both empirical data and theoretical work. Feminist comparative work on the lives of the Pashtun, Kurdish, and Bedouin tribes provides a general interpretive lens through which the life of Baloch women can be placed in the wider context of global discourses of gender representation in tribal settings. Moreover, the Baloch nationalist historiography is criticized to figure out its domestic political discourses, which often recreate gendered silences. An exclusive comparative unit that appeals to other tribal societies - especially Kurds, Pashtuns and Bedouins - focuses on structural continuities, including codes of honor and the governing of kinship, and prefigures the unique cultural formation upon which women agency is determined by the Baloch milieu. Using this comparative approach, the study proves that cross-cultural similarities can be used to strengthen but not hide the specificity of the Baloch women in their historical and political experiences.

4. Findings and Analysis

Historically, Baloch women have played important roles that go beyond visibility. From the medieval period to the present day, they have joined battle, participated in or conducted diplomacy, and shown up in public life. The following elements are thematic in the analysis: the involvement of women in warfare, their leadership and mediation roles, their custodianship of public space, and the interconnections between ideas of honor, hospitality, and social rank.

The Sardar has important legislative, executive, and judicial powers. He can call meetings of the Jirga and issue binding decisions (Khan & Kasi, 2015). Similar issues occur in Native American contexts, where councils led by men often overlook cases of gender-based violence because of colonial patriarchal systems (Ramirez, 2007). This situation reinforces male authority in Baloch tribal institutions. However, evidence shows that women have also played a role in resolving disputes and leading councils, challenging the idea that the Sardar is the only authority in tribal governance.

According to oral traditions and the primary sources, some Baloch women were engaged in military actions. Among them is Bandai, the sister of Amir Chakar Rind, who led a force of the Rind army in the battle of Chausa in 1539, which opposes the Sur dynasty on the side of the Mughal Emperor (Baluch, 1987; Dashti, 2012). This example shows how tribal organization was able to recognize women commanders. The military leadership of Bandai is one such example of the elements proposed by Kandiyoti (1988) on the concept of the patriarchal bargain where women operate within the boundaries of patriarchy to gain the agency and recognition within the male-dominated institutions.

Dyer (1921) gives an ethnographic note that supplements this historical account: These men are splendid skirmishers and will engage in battle with the greatest courage when their leaders are good. They trust their leaders. And in reality, the women of the Sarhad are very much the mistresses of their husbands, and, when this is the case, govern them with the proverbial rod of iron. This quotation indicates how important the functions of women are in the nomadic Baloch society and supports the oral accounts of the involvement of women in the tribal life and emphasizes how gender roles in pastoral communities are flexible. The findings are consistent with the greater academic literature on the agency of women in nomadic societies, where power and *and* are traded between kinship and social cultures. Intersectional feminist approach (Crenshaw, 1991) also indicates visible power in the influential role of elite women like Bandai, but the agency of nonelite is constantly involved in oral traditions and community memory and thus adds to an understanding of the gendered power dynamics within these societies.

The female gender often played the roles of leadership at times when the male counterparts were not present, like in the time of warfare, political negotiations, or even seasonal migration. Among the Jatoti tribe, Mai Jato is remembered because of his ability to maintain continuity of kinship and integrate the tribe (Dashti 1989). Another case study is that of Bibi Ganjan, the political adviser to Khuda Dad Khan, who demonstrated her diplomatic skills in intertribal talks at the end of the nineteenth century (Dashti 2012). These examples demonstrate how women leadership was justified within the framework of the kinship power. Ozair and Rauf (2023) attribute recent political mobilization to the involvement of middle classes. These women are seen through the postcolonial feminist theory (Mohanty 2003; Spivak 1988) as people who do not act independently, but they mobilize their relational power and take advantage of it to affect the political directions.

In these circumstances, women were doing more than serving as placeholders for absent male leaders. They convened and hosted *jirgas* and mobilized collective defense in the face of external dangers. Their authority was based on the honor-hospitality code (*izzat* and *melmastia*), through which they were authorized to represent households and clans in public affairs. Honor plays a dual role here both as constraint and as source of empowerment. As restriction and negotiation coexist within patriarchal structures, moving in line with Kandiyoti's 1991 notion of the "patriarchal bargain."

Dyer (1921) also recounts the case of Gul-Bibi, the wife of Shah Sawar, who publicly reproached her husband and another chief for yielding to British demands, and later received Dyer with diplomatic formality. Though framed through orientalist fascination, this account provided racial colonial evidence of women's participation in tribal diplomacy and their ability to influence male political behaviour. These historical moments show how women turned moral authority into political power. They connected domestic honor with tribal strategy, a distinctly indigenous form of feminist negotiation (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

The Otaq is commonly known as a communal guesthouse. It is important in Baloch socio-political life. It serves as a place for hospitality, diplomacy, and sharing (Lindholm, 1982). When men were away, women managed Otaq, reinforcing kinship alliances and maintained household honor. This authority helps women strengthen tribal alliances and maintain household and tribal *izzat* (honor). This situation challenges the idea that gender segregation leads to political marginalization.

A good example on how moral authority could be applied is that of Mast Tawakali and Sammo of the Marri tribe. The story of a married woman Sammo holding to the Baloch practice of *melmastia* by welcoming Tawakali on her way to a tribal raid is described. Her hospitality was based on a strong feeling of responsibility (Shah, Sultan, and Kaker, 2018). This was a formative experience emotionally that altered the course of Tawakali. He left violence and was a writer and thinker now. The episode shows how female devotion to honor and hospitality preserves the

communal values and makes the man the better. It highlights that Baloch women are in a central position both in the social and moral life, far outside the limits of traditional domestic roles (Huma, 2024).

Women are closely associated with *izzat* in Baloch society. Historically, it has been a tribal norm not to harm women, children and old aged people during war (Peristiany, 1970; Dashti, 2012). These rules protected women but also expected them to behave modestly and preserve family honor. Therefore, women were both symbols and protectors of communal integrity. Postcolonial feminist perspectives show that these moral codes were not just limits on women but also created accepted ways for them to have an influence. This allowed women to be moral protectors and negotiators within a male-dominated society (Abu-Lughod, 2015).

The political activism, urbanization, and education have also transformed the public position of women in the past decades. The development of new modes of gendered activism can be explained by the middle class and student-led movements as represented by the case of missing persons protests in Turbat, Quetta, and Gwadar (Ozair and Rauf, 2023). This recent activism is based on an ancient history of women using their moral powers and family connections to challenge political marginalization. It emphasizes the consistency between the tribal past and the modern life of the masses.

Postcolonial feminist dynamics indicate that there are both challenges and opportunities of women. Patriarchal structures are upheld by the notions of *izzat* (honor) and *melmastia* (hospitality). However, these ideas also give women moral and political agency. Baloch women bargain the patriarchal demands by redefining their roles and opposing the circumstances that occur in unique situations. These practices help them to be in charge, develop team spirit and influence the society. An intersectional approach proves that women in elite position use cultural norms to gain the attention of the people, and women in non-elite positions find the ways to take part in the sanctioned local activities and collective movements. The involvement of women in the Baloch society, therefore, is negotiated, relational, and rooted deeply in the indigenous moral systems, and not imposed on them through imposed feminist paradigms.

5. Discussion

The results of this research essentially question the reductionist dualities that are often forced on women in tribal cultures and especially the simplistic duality that women in tribal cultures are merely oppressed tribal women. On the other hand, the historical experience of Baloch women turns out to be a continuum of gendered agency, both determined by kinship demands and culturally constructed codes of honour (*izzat*) and hospitality. These results lead to the reorganization of theoretical models according to which the position of women is not on the margins of the political life but at the centre of this life attained by negotiations, adjustments and tactic subversion to patriarchal order.

Women have been actively involved in war and mediation in tribal systems and this has made the correlation between codes of honor and hospitality and gendered power relations critical to reexamine. These codes have been interpreted historically in terms of female oppression, with ethnography historically providing these interpretations through its largely functionalist paradigms (Pitt-River, 1966; Peristiany, 1970). Baloch version of these codes though goes beyond restriction and provides symbolic security and a culturally approved space where women can assert social and moral control. This correspondence provides empirical evidence on the concept of the patriarchal bargain of Kandiyoti (1988) that assumes women to be strategic and use structural expectations to achieve power at the same time maintaining their social legitimacy.

As Mohanty (2005) and Abu-Lughod (2015) explain, postcolonial feminist scholarship challenges the belief that all women are oppressed in the same way and shows that women only have the ability to act and make choices depending on the cultural context they live in. It is based on Mohanty theoretical framework that the current research holds the view that the indigenous norms, namely *izzat* and *melmastia* do not reflect the oppressive practices, but the construction, which enables women to seek recognition and become leaders. In the Baloch people, the role of women in conflict resolution and the management of Otaqs (community guesthouses) is visible, which is an expression of situated agency that refutes the fact that the subaltern cannot speak as postulated by Spivak (1988). The recorded historical existence of characters like Bandai and Bibi Ganjan also goes on to show that subaltern women have indeed been able to exercise authority in culturally authorized forms of discourse and action.

As Ramirez (2007) suggests, an alternative conception of sovereignty based on the Indigenous concepts of interdependence can be used to provide a framework which goes beyond the traditional state-based paradigms. Moreover, an in-depth analysis of the tribal Baloch history would compel researchers to recognize the material role and rights of women and correct the patriarchal narratives. Empirical evidence augments the idea of the patriarchal bargain as formulated by Kandiyoti (1988). In the Baloch communities, bargaining is not only about the survival, but it also serves the purpose of maintaining the social balance in the community by kinship bonds and family devotion. Women are more than just the honor in the person, crucial negotiators in intertribal negotiations, and use patriarchal organizations to mediate the social aspect.

Placed in a comparative context with other high-context tribal, honour-based societies, e.g. the Kurds of northern Iraq and Syria, the Pashtuns of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the Bedouin tribes of the Levant and Arabian Peninsula, some parallels can be made out. However, the Baloch experience contributes to the theory of postcolonial feminism by demonstrating that moral economies like *izzat* and *melmastia* can institutionalize the role of women in governance instead of destroying it, thus making the opposition between oppression and liberation with global feminism theory a complex issue.

Modernization and education increase gender gaps in different regions, according to Ghosh and Choudhuri (2011). In Balochistan, urban, educated women use historical memory to support their political involvement. On the other hand, rural women's ability to act is closely tied to family connections. This shows how geography, class, and gender are interconnected (Crenshaw, 1991).

Having been organized by Maha Rang Baloch and Sammi Deen Baloch, the Baloch Missing Persons Movement integrates indigenous practice with global human-rights campaigns, thus relying on postcolonial theory of feminism. This analysis shows that feminist opposition in indigenous contexts may both express domestic ideas and address transnational issues (Ozair & Rauf, 2023). By questioning the assumption of universalizing of the experiences of women, the current study confronts the assumptions of Western feminist paradigms. It states that the indigenous moral economies provide a sturdy ground on which the feminist movements can stand and at the same time respect the cultural norms. Feminist action takes place in this context of relations, not as a rejection of tradition but as a re-definition of its symbols and meanings. Baloch experience is illustrative of how the leadership of women can be in compliance with the values of the community both in the past and present. Reinterpretation of conventional signs by women in this world also contributes to the affirmation of their agency and projects feminist activity as a part of the continuity of society, and not an extraneous feature.

This discussion shows that the roles of women have been conceptually relegated by both colonial and nationalist historiography. Using the conceptualization of the subaltern as theorized by

Spivak (1988), it has been demonstrated that the contribution of the Baloch women in terms of oral narrative representation, poetry, and kin versus written records has remained firmly plotted in terms of their agency even to date. Thus, the research would not only restore women agency but, in addition, challenge the epistemological partiality of postcolonial feminist discourse, thus prompting scholars to start theorizing agency as a group, relational, and historically located phenomenon and not as a purely individualized individual phenomenon.

The modalities of women participation in the public life have been greatly transformed by modernity, education and political activism; however, the infrastructures of negotiation that lie behind the mentioned issues have been left mostly unchanged. In the urban Baloch women who are functioning in the sphere of politics, there exists a strong inclination to refer to the precedence of female leaders of the past as one of the ways to legitimize their present power. Dr Shahida Baloch and Mahnaz Baloch, are among these figures who express the modern problems through the history of the previous faces, especially Banari, showing the path of moral and political leadership which runs smoothly over the previous acts and actions to the present feminist movements.

Structural challenges still exist for rural women by virtue of militarization, resource extraction, and uneven development limit their mobility and participation in decision-making. Indigenous codes are still important for negotiation in Baloch society. This shows that patriarchy is not fixed; instead, it changes constantly. Women reinterpret these codes through their actions and engagement from within the system.

In theoretical terms, the findings of this study extend postcolonial feminism by transforming it from a critique of representation into a framework for understanding culturally grounded agency. They reveal that indigenous moral codes—rather than suppressing women—can serve as alternative grammars of empowerment that demand feminist theorists to rethink agency beyond Western epistemic boundaries.

6. Conclusion

This paper aims at reinventing the Baloch people in terms of their representation in tribal historiography. It is a critical questioning of existing accounts which marginalize them or romanticize them too much. The empirical evidence shows that, since the medieval days, till the modern times, Baloch women have been actively involved in the government matters and held important leadership and military positions. The article argues with the dichotomy of oppressed tribal women and the liberated modern women, because it demonstrates that women have been more or less active in various periods. Such results are more broadly applicable to other South and Central Asian societies, which is a testimony to the fact that tribal women do not traverse patriarchal structures in a discontinuity / disjuncture, but in continuity and transformation processes.

The current research studies the historic and political position of women in a postcolonial feminist context. It challenges the assumption that Western feminist theory is applicable everywhere and critically assesses how, so often, nationalist historiography reproduces patriarchal views. The results show that the principles of *izzat* (honor) and *melmastia* (hospitality) traditionally gave women the strength to affect tribal leadership and interpersonal relationships as opposed to being submissive to them. Using the intersectional approach, the paper has shown how the voice of women differed depending on the tribal membership, socioeconomic status, and marital status. Thus, this culturally situated intersectional readiness gives us a more accurate understanding of Baloch society in comparison to colonial and nationalist accounts.

The Baloch case shares some traits with Kurdish, Pashtun, and Bedouin traditions that honor women, Balochistan stands out due to the significant role women play in leadership and oral memory.

These findings are important for understanding gender history, and postcolonial studies. They suggest we rethink the idea that tribal societies are solely patriarchal and focus on how the authority of women can vary across contexts. This study helps change historical perspectives by recognizing that women play active roles in the political and social life of Balochistan.

The future studies ought to look at the activism of Baloch women during the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. In this study, issues that should be paid attention to include militarization, displacement as well as politics in the diaspora. It is necessary to underline the role of the oral histories transmission through generations in Balochistan and in the Baloch communities in the countries outside the country. The story of the Baloch women, thus, does not only follow a path of the collective memory but it also defines attitudes towards proper female behavior on the social arenas. This kind of comparative analysis would help in showing the cultural and structural effects on female leadership and give some insights on how the gender-equity agendas are contextualized using the indigenous frameworks.

Ultimately, this study affirms that Baloch women's histories are not peripheral annotations but integral chapters in the region's political and cultural evolution, a recognition demanding both scholarly attention and public engagement.

Authors

^{1*} Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan. Email: jatoibashir@usindh.edu.pk

² Assistant Professor, Department of Pakistan Studies, College Education Sindh, Pakistan. Email: inyatchandio80@gmail.com

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan. Email: ayaz.mugheri@usindh.edu.pk

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