Leatherworkers and Love Potions

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Sexual desire both binds and disrupts the human community. Wayward and powerful, it unites couples but can also divide them; it is a precondition for the reproduction of society, yet it is simultaneously a threat to custom and order. Magic, the passionate desire to conquer "the domain of the unaccountable," is often called into play in an effort to control the force of sexuality. The idea in such magic is generally to suffuse the target with an unalterable and complete love for the magician. The target loses all sexual autonomy and the ambiguity of human love relationships is, in theory, negated.

Among the Yusufzai Pukhtun of Swat in Northern Pakistan, the most efficacious love magic is the water that has been used to bathe the body of a dead leatherworker (shah khel). In local legend, this philter is collected by a witch during the new moon. Mounted on a wild pig, an animal which is anathema to the Muslim Pukhtun, the witch makes her way into the village graveyard and exhumes the corpse of a newly dead male leatherworker. She hangs his body from a tree, washes it, and
sells the water to women who will give it to their husbands or lovers in their tea. Sometimes men are also reputed to use this potion, but only to enchant a homosexual lover, never to use on a woman. Modern Pukhtun say they no longer believe in the witch-on-a-pig aspect, but they continue to have faith in the power of the magic water, claiming that it is still actually collected, sold, and used. Rumors of disinterred leatherworkers are pointed to as proof of the continuation of this practice.

**Theoretical Framework**

The stark juxtaposition of love and death in the preparation of love magic (a juxtaposition not uncommon in Islamic societies; cf. Dwyer 1978:95) poses an interesting problem of interpretation since, as Harris (1975), Winch (1958), Evans-Pritchard (1937, 1956) and others have demonstrated, the explanation of seeming anomalies is central to anthropological understanding of symbolic systems. Where theorists differ is in the method of explanation.

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The Pukhtun of Swat, North Pakistan, believe that the water used to wash the corpse of a leatherworker makes an effective love potion. To explain this belief, the Swati social structure is outlined and the symbolic role of the leatherworker, with his complementary opposite, the barber, is elucidated. Through a series of transformations, the love potion is understood within
In this paper, it is assumed that social structure, ordered by a set of "organizational ideas" gives rise to the world of symbols. Therefore, "the symbolic system [must] always be presented with a scrutiny of the social system on which it is generated." Within this analytical method symbols are not related arbitrarily. Rather, they are patterned in what Sahlin (1976, 217) has called "conceptual correspondences [which]...are the true armature of the cultural order, and the anthropologist in arranging them in ways faithful to experience does no more than discover that order." The anthropologist's job, then, is to propose a convincing and coherent set of symbolic "conceptual correspondences" interrelated within a consistent and parsimonious logical construct. This construct must include, and thereby "explain," apparent anomalies. The symbolic construct must also be integrated into an overall structural model of the social organization of the society in question. The oppositions and contradictions implicit within the overall structure will find their analogs in the symbolic realm.

This concept of explanation is, of course, very much in debt to Lévi-Strauss, since the appeal is to homologies and
"differences which resemble each other" rather than to function and causal logic. Instead of resolution, this method seeks opposition and analogy, but the oppositions sought are those that provide the ongoing dialectic of the social structure itself.

One final caveat is in order before proceeding. Ritual is generally understood as a symbolic act par excellence. Geertz (1973:112) has noted that in ritual performance "the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world." In the same essay, Geertz (1973:124-125) calls for investigation of the fact that different societies have ritual lives which are various deep, effective, and encompassing. The ethnographies of Swat have never stressed ritual and, in fact, the only observable ritual activity in the usual sense is the Islamic round of prayers and celebrations.

If the definition of ritual is widened to include all repetitive and symbolically charged acts, then the mundane social life of Swat suddenly becomes much richer, for social roles themselves are heavily laden with symbolic content, while ordinary social discourse is always operating on several levels of metaphor. Following Goffman (1959), social roles and their stereotypes are here taken as the focus of symbolic analysis, rather than the isolation of a segment of social action which is
then labeled "ritual"; a procedure useful in some societies, but not in Swat. This approach implies a point of view, since not all members of a society may see social roles in the same way. My major informants, and the dominant group both numerically and politically, were small landholding Pukhtun, and theirs is the outlook that is expressed in the following pages.

**The Segmentary Lineage System**

Swat is characterized by a Middle Eastern type of acephalous segmentary lineage organization. This organizational model has a long history in anthropology, dating back to Evans-Pritchard's (1940) pioneering work on the Nuer and carried through in a Middle Eastern context by Evans-Pritchard (1949) himself, Montagne (1973), Gellner (1969), Peters (1960), Barth (1953), and others. The basic principles of this system are simple: genealogy and inheritance are reckoned only through the male line, with all sons sharing equally in the father's legacy. As Murphy and Kasdan (1959) note, the Middle Eastern segmentary lineage system, with its unique emphasis on patrilateral parallel cousin marriage, combines atomistic fissioning and a capacity for large-scale unification. Unification occurs only in opposition, following the principle of "I against my brother; my brother and I against my cousins; my cousins, my brother, and I against the world." The cousins, of course, are patrilateral. In Swat, a dense population locked within a land-based farming
economy has exacerbated the tensions between cousins to the extent that *tarbur*, the term of reference for the patrilateral parallel cousin, has also come to mean "enemy."

Many Middle Eastern segmentary societies develop internal hierarchies when they come in contact with a state system. Swat, in its long struggle with British colonialism, also evolved a ruling elite who derive from religious mediators.\textsuperscript{vii} However, in recent years a weakening of the power of the central state has led to a reassertion of underlying segmentary rivalries and a consequent leveling process.\textsuperscript{viii} The resurgence of the segmentary system has gone farthest in Upper Swat, where the data for this paper were collected. This region has always been the most conservative and independent part of the valley.

In the ethnographic present of 1977, the old pattern of constantly shifting political coalitions continues to hold sway in Upper Swat. Party loyalties are secondary to personal rivalries as each householder seeks the advantage over his enemies, who are also his cousins. Hierarchies are shallow, and fully two-thirds of the households in the village in which I worked participated in political manipulation by virtue of their status as petty landlords and members of the Yusufzai patrilineage. Of these, fully one-third considered themselves to have a claim to the title of *Khan* (leader). Differences in resources in the village are relatively minor, with even the
largest landlord controlling only a few acres. Absentee landlordism is rare and unprofitable, and all but the old and infirm participate in or personally oversee manual farm labor. Although the landless are more or less disenfranchised, the system is close to an ideal democracy for the numerous landlords. In fact, the system is perhaps even more democratic than it was in the past, since warfare has been abolished and men need no longer gather around and defer to a fighting leader. Taxation and a central government land survey are unknown in Upper Swat, and the Pukhtun consider themselves free of government control. In truth, local "leaders" and Pakistani officials alike have little power in the region. Freedom, however, is a relative concept, and the constraints of the social structure perhaps exert more authority than any external authority ever could.

With the basic premises of the society being rivalry against one's close patrilineal relatives and neighbors, the prevalent ethos is one of individualism and separation. Each man strives to present himself as proudly self-reliant, for dependence is weakness and weakness is quickly pounced upon by the strong. All brothers are equal in ideology, but simultaneously all seek control of the father's land. Those who are incapable of showing strength in this struggle will find themselves shut out. As a modern Pukhtun writer says, "the
Pathans have not succeeded in being a great nation because there is an autocrat in every home who would rather burn his own house than see his brother rule it."ix Mountstuart Elphinstone (1972 [1815] I:327), the first ethnographer of the Pukhtun, noted the same attitude: The Pukhtun's "highest praise in speaking of a well-governed country is, that 'Every man eats the produce of his own field,' and that 'nobody has any concern with his neighbors.'" The ideal society for the Pukhtun is one in which there is no reciprocity or exchange, in which each man stands aloof and self-sufficient. In Swat, this structurally derived stance reaches an extreme under the pressure of overpopulation and competition for scarce land. Cooperation does not occur unless there is an external threat, as several well-meaning U.N. and AID development programs in the area have discovered to their chagrin. Cooperative schemes which the Yusufzai hatch for themselves, such as group financing of a tractor, generally collapse in a welter of suspicion and mutual accusation.

The patriline is thus an organization for the structuring of rivalry and hostility, as Fortes (1959) has noted in his classic essay. Even within the nuclear family, the sons of one father but different mothers are often on bitterly bad terms due to the father's favoritism. The relationship between the father and his sons is also one of masked aggression, for the father gains his identity and respect from his rights in land. He
strives to retain those rights as long as possible, while his grown sons demand that he abdicate in their favor. As a result of this rivalry, the relations between a man and his father are rigidly formal. A man should always defer to his father, standing when his father enters and never smoking or taking snuff in front of him. But, in spite of the formality, the enmity between the two sometimes erupts into the open, and shoot-outs do occur, occasionally with fatal results.

The implicit hostility of the father-son relationship is indicated by the local belief that fathers are particularly liable to afflict their sons with the evil eye and therefore must avoid praising them. Furthermore, the father does not preside at the circumcision ceremony which marks his son's initiation into Islam. His place is taken by the boy's mother's brother, who represents the nurturant affinal side of the family.

The father's role is not simply negative, however. He is, after all, the role model for his sons. He is the one who trains them in lineage pride, in the proper attributes of manliness, in the etiquette of relationships. It is he who instructs the boys (and the girls as well) to value honor above all, to suffer pain stoically, and to be willing to fight. The authoritarian and remote demeanor of the father exemplifies proper male conduct.
One's male patrilineal rivals are also of a dual nature. They are enemies, but they are also one's reliable allies when a more distant opponent appears. There is thus a continuing dialectic in the lineage and within the patrilineal nuclear family itself as unity and opposition shift into one another according to circumstance. One's bitterest enemy is also, at least potentially, one's indispensable helper; one's father, who withholds the land that signifies the essence of manhood, is himself the image of the ideal man who, though he demands obedience, also trains his children to be aggressively self-assertive.

These ambiguities, which are inherent in the segmentary system as it is found in Swat, are in conflict with the dominant ethos of personal isolation and self-sufficiency. Ambiguity is hated and feared as a threat to the posture of separation and rigid control. Douglas (1966, 1970, 1975) has noted that highly structured societies dominated by public systems of classification and characterized by powerful social pressure will mistrust ambiguity. Swat is a society of this type, and distaste for the equivocal is manifest throughout the culture. Mixing colors is considered ugly. Tadpoles do not become frogs, nor do caterpillars become butterflies, since it is thought impossible for one thing to transform into another. The rainbow, with its blend of colors, reputedly changes people's
sex and is to be feared. The English word "normal" is used disparagingly to designate passive homosexuals because, according to the Swatis, "normal" means "neither one thing nor the other." The structurally generated hatred for any relation or thing which is not clear-cut is strongly expressed against ambiguous roles as well, as will be seen in the next section.

The problem of the alternation between unity and repulsion in the patriline is paralleled by an equal complexity in affinal relations. Given the ideology of independence of ties, marriage has a strongly negative connotation. Far from gaining an ally by marriage, the Pukhtun man is admitting a member of an enemy lineage into his home. As has been mentioned, girls as well as boys are taught that their family is superior to all others and that honor demands family superiority be demonstrated at all occasions. At the very least, relations between lineages should be equal. Yet the husband seeks to display his domination over his wife, and marriage becomes a field of battle.

The simple giving of a woman is itself laden with overtones of shame and humiliation. Given the social ideal of self-sufficiency, the loss of a family member to another lineage is a painful necessity with an implication of defeat and forced tribute. Shame also enters the triumphant household of the wife-takers as the groom absents himself from the scene of the marriage. The pride of his family is validated by the match,
but his own autonomy is compromised by his need for a wife. In the future, he will never refer to his wife in public.

These attitudes toward marriage and women find further expression in the strict seclusion of women in Swat, which goes beyond the norm in other Islamic societies. Furthermore, women are prohibited from inheritance or from acting as legal individuals. The male ideology portrays women as incompetent, undiscriminating, and potentially promiscuous. Men fear that their wives will dishonor them by taking a lover, a fear they attempt to ally by the harsh rules of purdah.

The denigration of women and their isolation and lack of property rights are all efforts to mask a fundamental contradiction in the segmentary patrilineal society. Although genealogies and the organizational model take account only of men, the incontrovertible fact is that the patriline springs from the womb. Women are the real centers of the segmentary, patrilineal kin-based structure in their role as child-bearers and mothers. Furthermore, the proof of motherhood is self-evident, but paternity is not easily proven. Women are thus strictly confined in order to ensure their husbands' possession of their sexuality and denigrated in order to mask their real power, a pattern found in many patrilineal societies. The implicit female threat to the integrity of the patriline is evident in a boy's affection for his mother and her lineage, as
opposed to his rigid respect relation with his father and his
general antipathy for the other men in his own lineage.

The Pukhtun ideology thus rests on a pair of self-
contradictory relations. Among agnates, a man is surrounded by
enemies who are simultaneously his allies. The father is
distant and a rival for land, but he is also a role model. He
teaches his son to submit to his commands, while at the same
time training the boy to be aggressive. Among affines, women
are treated as commodities, kept in isolation, regarded as
inferior, fought with as wives, loved as nurturant mothers,
feared for their capacity to dishonor, and needed for their
reproductive ability. The mother's male relatives, while liked,
cannot be counted upon in a fight.

Although the society is grounded on ambiguities, there is a
marked cultural taste for absolutes and an aversion to any
admission of contradiction, transformation, or paradox.
Security, almost absent in reality, is sought in a vision of a
rigidly ordered system, corresponding exactly to the Pukhtun's
portrait of himself as resolute and unchanging, independent and
free of any restrictions or ties. Nonacceptance of ambiguity,
in this case, seems to derive from the actual presence of
overwhelming conflicts in the actual workings of the social
order.

The Symbolism of the *shah khel*
The basic "organizational ideas" of the Swati system, with their ramifications in the world view of the male Pukhtun, have now been sketched. How can these be related to the problem of the leatherworkers and the love potion? The object must be to delineate the symbolic network which surrounds the shah khel.

Unlike the Pukhtun, the shah khel is not a genealogical member of the Yusufzai. He is therefore not a landowner. In fact, the shah khel are regarded collectively as the second lowest-ranking kam (occupational group) in the village. As Barth (1959) has noted, occupational groups in Swat exhibit some caste-like characteristics, in that they are hierarchically ordered and relatively (though not completely) endogamous. The various kams are also sharply differentiated from one another in local thought by the supposed personality traits of their members.

The likeness to caste should not be taken too far, since Swati social organization is essentially Middle Eastern in character. There is, for example, no notion in Swat of one kam having the power to pollute another (with one notable exception, which will be discussed in its proper place). However, some of the analysis of caste is instructive for the Swati case. Pocock (1962) has made an extremely valuable discrimination between the true jamankamin (patron-client) relationship and peripheral artisans and commodity producers. In Pocock's model, the true
kamin works only for his jajman, with whom he has a ritual relationship. This tie is not essentially economic, and it persists even after the entrance of capitalist marketing, while the peripheral groups, such as weavers, fall away to become pure businessmen.

This model may be applied to Swat, in which case the leatherworkers are seen as true kamin of their Pukhtun jajman, though the terms as such are not used. While other kams such as the fisherman, oil presser, weaver, and goldsmith have either lost their traditional work and become hired labor or have gone into commodity production, the shah khel has continued in his traditional, strongly affective relation to his Pukhtun patrons. This alliance is not particularly useful economically for either side. More money can be made as a casual laborer than in working for one's patron, and mass-produced leather goods can be purchased more cheaply than the long-term upkeep of the leatherworker and his family. Both sides complain, but neither makes a move to break the bond. The hypothesis offered here is that this seemingly irrational tie is cemented, at least on the side of the patron, by the vital symbolic role filled by the shah khel.

A leatherworker does many jobs for the men who employ him. He cures and manufactures leather goods and acts as a general helper and messenger, often acting as guard of the men's house.
He is a kind of doctor as well, specializing in setting bones. He is also needed for all large-scale butchery.

The family of the leatherworkers has another function. Children of his patrons are regularly reared within the *shah khel* households, especially if the patron is a village leader. The leatherworker's wife is also favored as a wet nurse. Children, particularly boys, who are reared by a *shah khel* foster family feel a strong affection for their substitute parents and siblings. Grown Pukhtun men will go to their leatherworker foster father for advice and affection in times of crisis rather than turning to their real father, who is not expected to give any sympathy to his son's problems. A man can also rely on his leatherworker "brothers" to help him when he needs labor, such as during the harvest. The foster family, with its emphasis on cooperation and affection, is the antithesis to the Pukhtun man's relationship to his real father and brothers, and is more like his relation to his affectionate female relatives. The contrast extends further, for the members of the foster family are absolutely inferior to their Khan ("son"), just as are the women of his real family, while the men of his real family are his equals or superiors.

Aside from any duties, the *shah khel* people are regarded as having a certain type of personality. Despite their womanlike role, they are thought to be extremely prone to anger. They are
also considered to be energetic, reticent, and exceptionally hardworking. These are all masculine traits in Swati thought, though the shah khel is said to be too short-tempered and violent and therefore to represent a caricature of male aggressiveness. This hypermasculinity may be seen as a symbolic compensation for the essentially feminine role of the shah khel man.

Finally, the shah khel is thought to be a close relative of the despised ghosul, who are the only kam regarded as being physically polluting. The ghosul, who do not actually exist in Upper Swat, are said to earn their living by washing the bodies of the dead. The Pukhtun say these ghosul, who reputedly are found in the larger cities, are the "sons" of the shah khel, an attribution which the shah khel deny.

Having outlined the leatherworker's position and symbols that surround him, the next step is to find another social role which is in "conceptual correspondence" with his. This role comes readily to hand in the person of the barber (nai) who is regarded by the Pukhtun as the leatherworker's counterpart. These two figures are paired in village ideology as standing in opposition to the rest of the community. As a popular saying attests, "When there is a disturbance in the village, the nai and the shah khel benefit."
Like the shah khel, the nai is not a landowner and is closely linked to his Pukhtun patrons in a ritual clientage which has resisted monetarization. Like the leatherworker, the barber is of low rank, and his, in fact, is the lowest-ranked kam in the village. But where the shah khel’s low rank derives from his work, which puts him in constant contact with the stench and pollution of dead animals, the nai’s inferior rank is said to be caused by the promiscuity of their women who, in the course of their work, go from house to house acting as confidantes and hairdressers for the women of their patrons. Women of most of the poor and landless in Swat are often obliged to work out-of-doors and forsake rigid purdah, but none of them have the bad reputation of the barber’s women. Village men regularly claim the barber’s spouse or daughter as their first heterosexual experience, and the barber himself is sometimes jokingly called "the son of the village."

Just as the leatherworker is considered the "father" of the despised ghosul, the nai are also considered to be the genitors of a detested group. These are the dum musicians and their prostitute women (duma). Indeed, the barber’s wife is known as dum in the village. The dum, who come to the village to perform at weddings and celebrations, deny barber ancestry and more often claim Pukhtun forebears. But this claim is
irrelevant for the argument advanced here since we are looking through the eyes of the Pukhtun.

An interesting parallel is evident between the two kams. The shah khel, low ranked because of his association with dead animals, is "father" to the body-washing ghosul; the nai, low ranked because of the promiscuity of his women, is "father" to the kam of prostitutes.

The nai and the shah khel are linked in several other respects. Like the shah khel, the nai also serves as a ritual butcher, and both men should cooperate in the killing of a large animal. Like the leatherworker, the barber serves his patron as a messenger and watchman. He also doctors, specializing in bloodletting. But most interesting for this paper is their complementary opposition in their relation to the Pukhtun boy. While the leatherworker's family provides milk, nurturance, and a sense of continuity and community, the nai family is associated with life crises which threaten the boy's identity. It is the nai who presides over circumcision, a process that menaces the boy's masculinity as it confirms it. This ceremony is associated with affinity and the boy's future sexual life; and, as mentioned, it is overseen not by the representative of the patriline (the boy's father), but by his mother's brother, who has an affectionate relation with the boy.
Affinity and sexuality are a threat to the integrity of the patriline, and the nai represents that threat. It is noteworthy as well that, while the nai man fashions the boy’s penis, the nai woman is said to be the one who first makes it function properly. Nai people also play central roles in marriage. The men act as drummers to announce weddings and engagements, while the women are the traditional go-betweens in marriage arrangements. Nai women of the groom's house burn special plants to avoid the evil eye during the ceremony, while a nai woman from the bride’s side stays over for the first few fights of the marriage, both to comfort the girl and to report back on the success of the marriage consummation.

The opposition between the nurturant, "foster father" shah khel and the sexually charged, symbolically castrating nai clearly has Oedipal connotations. Discussion of these symbolic figures must take Freud as well as Lévi-Strauss into account, for the Oedipal problem of attraction and repulsion towards the mother/lover figure, and fear and envy of the father/rival, is clear. Beidelman (1966), working with another strongly patrilineal people, the Nuer, has attempted to understand the Nuer ox sacrifice in terms of a reconciliation, in explicitly Freudian terms, of the structural conflict between agnation and affinity. "Nuer women are essential to perpetuating agnatic groups, but the sexual and maternal affection they generate in
men often runs counter to the ideal moral norms of a man's agnatic group."\textsuperscript{xv} In killing the ox, the Nuer man symbolically eliminates the ambiguous ties of sexuality and becomes wholly agnatic. "Sexuality and death are combined in one complex ritual act which attempts to express some lasting meaning to the social inhibition surrounding these forces of transformation."\textsuperscript{xvi}

The Pukhtun man suffers from the same complex conflict of loyalties, but the symbolic escape is quite different from that of the Nuer. Far from castrating and sacrificing the emblem of his sexuality, the Pukhtun appear to split the Oedipal complex into component parts and attach these parts to social roles. The rivalry and envy of the real agnatic bond is eliminated in the relation with the milk-giving and nurturant \textit{shah khel} family. The leatherworker combines the loving aspect of motherhood within a male-to-male bond and symbolically reconciles the sons' hostility toward their father with their affection toward their mother.

The \textit{nai} represent a different kind of reconciliation, one that focuses on the sexual relationship between man and woman rather than on the aspect of nurturance. The \textit{nai} man forms the boy's sexual organ, while the \textit{nai} woman teaches him its use. But sex with a \textit{nai} woman is not binding, since she is free of sexual constraints and chooses sexual partners according to whim. Her actions are no threat to the patriline or to male
identity since she demands no loyalty. She is sexuality liberated from rivalry and jealousy. Brothers often share the favors of the nai woman, and it is possible for both a son and his father to have intercourse with her as well, though in actual fact this rarely happens. But it is the potential that is symbolically important.

The role of the nai woman is seen mostly clearly through looking at the entertainments offered by her "daughter," the dancing girl/prostitute dumá. Dancing girls traditionally perform in the village men's house during gatherings for weddings. In her dance, the dumá represents the antithesis of the orthodox Pukhtun marriage. Unveiled, she parades within the stolid circle of onlooking men, stopping to dance wherever she is offered money. The means of giving money is revealing, as men never offer money on their own behalf. Rather, they place the bills on the head or arm of a companion, usually a brother or close patrilateral cousin. The dumá snatches the money away, often with a resounding slap, and then dances before the man upon whom the money was placed. Men do one another honor by purchasing the dance of the dumá, and huge amounts are collected during these performances, which the men say is compensation "for the dumá's shame." This is the only occasion during which men freely give money to one another, and it is perhaps the most savored, as well as one of the most expensive, of Pukhtun
ceremonies. It is noteworthy that the *duma* are not obliged to grant sexual favors to any of the men at the party. Furthermore, they are extremely demanding of the host's attention, and he must outdo himself by offering the best tea and food throughout the performance. Famous dancing girls are greatly desired by elite men as consorts, and some of these dancers have even married into the most elite families of Swat and the neighboring valley of Dir. Haughty *duma* have ruined some Pukhtun, who have spent their patrimonies in a futile attempt to buy the girls' affections. Simply talking to a well-known *duma* may involve a man in quite a considerable investment in gifts, while the woman herself is not forced to give anything in return except conversation and the momentary pleasure of her company.

The *duma*, then, is the converse of an ordinary wife who must sleep only with her husband, upon demand; who must remain in *purdah*; and who, ideally at least, is the man's slave. The *duma*, on the other hand, is free and shameless, with great power over men. Following the opposition further, it is the wife who is always blamed for the breakup of the patrilineal joint family; a break which is, in fact, largely caused by the enmity and personal ambitions of the brothers themselves. But the *duma*, independent and sexually promiscuous, unites the brothers in a reversal of marriage. They buy her attentions for one
another and thereby overcome, if only temporarily, their own opposition. The contrast becomes even clearer when it is realized that only a few years ago the role of the duma was taken by dancing boys who were passive homosexuals dressed as women. The realm of sexuality is removed not only from marriage, but from the female sex itself.

The symbolic role of the two kams is expressed in the characters attributed to their members. The shah khel, perhaps in compensation for his female nurturing role within the patrilineal framework, is viewed as having many excessively masculine traits. It might then be conjectured that since the nai woman represents a masculine female who acts autonomously in the sexual realm, just as a man does, the nai man would be regarded as having a feminine-type personality. This is indeed the case. Nai men are said to be talkative, untrustworthy, cowardly, greedy for favors, wheedling, and sexually immoral. These traits, which may or may not fit actual persons, are stereotypes of the Pukhtun image of women.

The Structure of the Symbols

The symbols that are attached to the roles of the shah khel and the nai are complementary and seek, in differing ways, to resolve a fundamental social and personal conflict in Pukhtun society: the contradiction between the ties of affinity and those of agnation. These conflicts are viewed from a slightly
altered angle by men and by women. For the Pukhtun man, the basic contrast is between an ideal of patrilineal unity and an absence of sexual and maternal obligations toward women outside of the patrilineage, as against the reality of internal patrilineal rivalry, the necessity of marriage, and the strong affective bond with the mother. But where the male seeks to free himself from the bonds of affinity, the woman finds her only possibility for power to be within marriage. Her ambition is to control her husband, bind her sons to her, and found a lineage with herself as the matriarch—the power behind the throne. Her sons are her natural allies in this struggle, for mother and son share a common enemy: the husband/father. Both combatants in the conjugal battle hope for the early death of the other—as this will mean a triumph—and both fear that the other will "laugh over my grave." It is thought that a man who is kind to his wife will grow old before his time, and both marriage partners are quick to point out any weakness or signs of aging in the other. But a woman exists solely within marriage as a mother and a respected woman. Her heart's desire is to move from a position of dependence to one of dominance, while her husband's desire is to free himself entirely from external ties. She wants to hold him, while he wishes to escape. The dance of the duma offers him his fantasy, while the potion of the shah khel offers her hers.
The fact that women must resort to magic to assert their dream, while men enact their ideal in ritual, is attributable to the social positions of the two sexes. Patrilineal society offers women little role in public ritual, and they are forced to resort to covert rites of magic to attain their ends, as Turner (1974:235) has noted. But the woman's dominated position conceals her real power, power that is evident in the supposed effectiveness of her magic. For the men, the drama of the dance is merely a momentary relief from the inescapable daily reality of marriage ties and agnatic hostility; for the woman, the love potion is a real, though sinful and excessive, way to gain a goal that is quite achievable—domination of her husband and control over her household. Other, less radical, magical tricks are used by women for the same purpose, such as always being sure to speak first when the husband arrives home, arranging it so that husband sleeps with his head pillowed on his wife's arm, and so forth.

Along with these tricks, women can also rely on the help of their growing sons and the increasing weakness of their aging husbands to finally give them their victory. It is a joke among the villagers that many powerful elder men are dominated in their homes by their strong-willed wives. These men, occupied by political maneuvering in the male world of the men's house, simply no longer have the will to assert themselves against
their wives, and a wary truce is called. But women who resort to the love potion go beyond this. A man enchanted no longer can act with honor in public since his wife, confident of her total power, has left the female world of the compound to flaunt herself like a dumā. The roles are reversed: the man hides in shame while the woman becomes a public figure.\textsuperscript{xvii}

Why should the shah khel be the medium for women's fantasies of power and independence? To answer this question, we must again draw upon the conceptual correspondences between the leatherworker and the barber. Both are inferior, landless, despised ritual clients of the Pukhtun. Both act together in all ceremonial butchery. Both are doctors of a sort. Both are employed as messengers and general assistants by their patrons, and they are viewed as a pair by the Pukhtun. Their differences are complementary:

\textit{shah khel} \quad \textit{nai}

- effeminate role for men  
- masculine role for women  
- men hypermasculine  
- men effeminate  
- mediates as foster family  
- mediates in circumcision and marriage  
- polluted by death  
- polluted by sexuality
Both represent possibilities forbidden by the reality of the Pukhtun social structure: the leatherworker and his family provide a noncompetitive, nurturant, and cooperative alternative to the internal hostility of the patrilineage; the barber woman enacts the role of an independent and sexually free woman who negates the ties of marriage. The shah khel is seen as a sort of feminine male, exemplifying the virtues of a boy's female relatives and affines—nurturance, tolerance, generosity, and affection. His hypermasculinity (defined by Pukhtun cultural standards) may be seen as a compensation for his essentially female role. The barber kam, as symbolized by the promiscuous numa, shows the opposite pattern: a free and independent woman with the sexual autonomy of a man. The same compensatory mechanism works in reverse among the nai, as the masculine attributes of the women are balanced by the purported effeminacy of the men.
The complementary relation between death and sexual promiscuity is central to understanding the symbolism of the nai and shah khel figures. This relation is clarified in the following pairings:

- **shah khel dies** provides a love potion wife is powerful
- **real father dies** provides land for son husband is powerful
- **duma is promiscuous** brothers share her patriline strengthened
- **wife is promiscuous** brothers dishonored patriline weakened

The dumā is a transformation of the wife, while the shah khel is a transformation of the father. A man’s control of land, which affirms his identity and autonomy, is equivalent to a woman’s control over her husband. The final expression of female power and autonomy is symbolized by her sexual promiscuity, which humiliates her husband and his lineage. The lineage, on the other hand, shows its solidarity in sharing the sexual favors of the dumā among its members. These dual possibilities are simply
reversals of one another. The wife, by the death of the *shah khel*, enslaves her husband, humiliates his patrilineage, and becomes sexually autonomous, like a *duma*. The husband, through sharing the favors of the *duma*, unites his patrilineage, denies his marriage ties, and approximates the nurturant family of the *shah khel*.

**MALE IDEAL**

**NURTURANT FAMILY**

**SHAH KHEL**

**PROMISCUITY**

MARRIAGE DENIED

MAN ENSLAVED

WOMEN SHARED

WOMEN AUTONOMOUS

PATRILINE UNITED

PATRILINE HUMILIATED

**DEATH**

**DUMA**

INDEPENDENT WOMEN

**FEMALE IDEAL**

Fig. 1. The symbolic cycle of the *shah khel* (leatherworker) and the *duma* (prostitute)

These dreamed-of symbolic solutions to the life problems of the Pukhtun are "only imagined to show that they are untenable."xviii They feed into themselves in a destructive
cycle, each implying the negation of the other (see Figure 1). The image of the nurturant and unencumbered patriline, which is the end point of the male ritual with the *duma*, implies, in turn, sexual enslavement of men and autonomy for women. Women who are free must have husbands who are without honor. Similarly, the power that women seek through the love potion has as its logical consequence the dissolution of marriage and an affirmation of male solidarity. There is no possible resolution. The opposing fantasies end by reflecting the basic oppositions of male and female, autonomy and dependence, unity and division, which provide the underlying dynamic for the segmentary structure.
The various roles can be viewed in contrasting sets:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>shah khel</th>
<th>wife</th>
<th>nai (duma)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feminine male</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>masculine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>superior</th>
<th>inferior</th>
<th>inferior</th>
<th>superior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hostile</td>
<td>loving</td>
<td>hostile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>loving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>independent</td>
<td>dependent</td>
<td>dependent</td>
<td>independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>powerful</td>
<td>weak</td>
<td>weak</td>
<td>powerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>divisive</td>
<td>unifying</td>
<td>divisive</td>
<td>unifying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>productive</td>
<td>sterile</td>
<td>productive</td>
<td>sterile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *shah khel* opposes the real father at every point, just as the *duma* opposes the wife. Both unite men, the *shah khel* in the noncompetitive comfort of the foster family, the *duma* in free sexuality. The father divides his sons in rivalry over land and the wife divides brothers. The *duma*, though despised, enslaves the men who seek her favors, and so is powerful and superior. But sex with the *duma*, especially when her role was played by a homosexual, is sterile. Even should a *duma* woman actually have
children, the father is unknown, and patrilineality is destroyed. the shah khel's love is sterile as well, for it rests on a denial of affinity, a negation of the real relations of agnation and an assertion that the maternal can be subsumed into the paternal, with suggestions of incest and homosexuality implicit.

Each attempt, the masculinizing of women and the feminizing of men, leads to its opposite, and both also lead to the obliteration of the foundations of social life: marriage and patrilineality. The alternatives which the symbolic roles of the shah khel and nai offer prove to be even worse than the harsh reality. These two figures are held in contempt not simply for their ambiguity, but for the destructive role their ambiguous symbolism plays in Pukhtun thought. The myths of the nai and shah khel serve not only as media for fantasies of escape, but also as powerful validations of the system as it stands.

The genesis of the love potion thus becomes fairly evident, taking into account the identification of the shah khel with the ghosul, who washes corpses: The live Pukhtun drinks water from the dead shah khel and is enslaved; the dead Pukhtun is washed by the living ghosul and is buried.

The death of the representative of the nurturant, feminized male family provides the mechanism for the rise of the
autonomous and dominant masculinized woman. Once again, death and promiscuity stand in complementary opposition with the water, which symbolizes the passage from life into death, also utilized to symbolize the analogous passage of a man from autonomy to sexual slavery. The seemingly anomalous correlation of love and death found in the Swati love potion finds its explanation within the context of a rich symbolic order which simultaneously reflects, opposes, and validates the social order. Despite the lack of obvious ritual occasions and the absence of developed myths of culture heroes, totemic animals, enchanted forests, and so forth, the Pukhtun live within a complex world of symbols in which social roles, and the people who fill them, become characters in a myth lived out in daily life.

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I am well aware of questions as to the validity of the segmentary lineage model, as raised by Ahmed (1976), Asad (1972), Black (1972), and others. However, for the purposes of this paper I accept the model as a heuristic device. In a sense, then, this paper is a test of the classical model. If the symbolic analysis given herein is convincing, then the structural model upon which it is based is demonstrated to be a valuable analytic tool.

Ambiguous roles, which for limitations of space are not discussed in this paper, are the roles of the religious mediators, mendicants, and teacher, who are viewed by the Pukhtun with a mixture of fear, contempt, and awe. I hope to explore the complex symbolism surrounding these figures in a later essay.

Father's brother's daughter's marriage, fairly prevalent in Swat, aims to deny this duality and to subsume the mother's lineage into the father's. But this mechanism does not eliminate the differentiation between the mothers' and the father's lineage; it simply focuses at the lowest level. Husbands and wives who are patrilateral cousins still justify themselves by claiming that their ancestor, in this case their father, is better than the other's. It is worth noting that marriages of this type are considered to be the most
violent, a belief which has some statistical validity. For example, if we accept the local notion that taking a second wife is an indication of an unhappy and contentious relationship with the first wife, then there is a very suggestive difference between men who have married real FBD and those who have not. In a five-generation period in which 115 men's marriages were recorded, 4 of the 8 men marrying a real FBD later took second wives, whereas only 19 of the remaining 107 men married a second time. In the present generation, the difference is even more remarkable, though the numbers are not sufficient for a statistical sample. Two of the 3 men in the fifth generation married to a real FBD have taken a second wife, while only 2 of the 39 remaining married men have done so, one by levirate.

xiii e.g., Denich, 1974.

xiv Nathaniel Wander (1980: personal communication) has suggested the following set of pairings relating the main characters in the family drama.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Husband is absent from marriage ceremony.</th>
<th>Father is absent from circumcision ceremony.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Husband avoids referring to wife.</td>
<td>Father distances himself from son.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

xv Beidelman, 1966, 459.


xvii Several women in the village were pointed out as having achieved this end. They took lovers freely and their husbands were passive homosexuals. It was alleged that homosexuality was a consequence of the men's loss of honor and respect.
Bibliography


