



Human Dignity in the Folk Poetic Genre (Landay)

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Article History:

Received: 08. 7.2026

Accepted: 01. 8.2026

Online First: 18.9.2026

Citation:

Akef,S. Rahmani,A.B.& Mumand,F. (2026). Human Dignity in the Folk Poetic Genre (Landay).Kdz Uni Int J Islam Stud and Soc Sci;3(3):398-409

e-ISSN: 3078-3895

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Abstract

The landay is a folkloric poetic genre of the Pashto language, consisting of two hemistiches—one with nine syllables and the other with thirteen. From a thematic perspective, it encompasses a wide range of subjects. The landay also reflects the mythic history and philosophical worldview of the ancient Bactrian Aryans. Among its various themes, many landays embody features of Human Dignity. Human Dignity, originally a philosophical term, is used in literature to express notions of philanthropy, humanity, freedom, honor, kinship bonds, and love. Poetry—and art in general—represents the inner world of human beings, and an essential part of that inner world relates to concepts of humanity and human values; when these appear in poetry, the resulting literature is considered Human Dignity. Due to the broad historical development of Human Dignity, this concept is commonly divided into literary, philosophical, religious, and other branches. Within Pashto literature, the landay stands out as a folkloric genre that exhibits the most vivid and abundant Human Dignity qualities compared to other poetic form. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that Human Dignity is in the priority of Islamic values. The research is bibliographical in nature and employs an analytical-descriptive method. Findings show that the landay may be considered the most Human Dignity poetic form in Pashto literature.

Keywords: Folk poetry, Human Dignity, Landay, Pashto folklore, Pashto literature.

Introduction

The concept of humanitarian values, understood in this study as Human Dignity in its literary and ethical sense, refers to the moral principles that uphold human dignity, compassion, justice, freedom, peace, mutual respect, social responsibility, and concern for the well-being of others. Although the term Humanism has acquired diverse meanings throughout intellectual history, particularly within Western philosophy after the Renaissance, the present study does not employ the concept in its secular philosophical or ideological sense. Instead, it adopts a literary and ethical perspective that examines how universal Human Dignity are expressed through Holy Quran verses and Pashto literary texts. In this study, Human Dignity serves as an analytical concept for interpreting human-

centered moral and cultural values reflected in Pashto folk poetry rather than representing any particular philosophical doctrine.

Literature has long served as a repository of a society's collective memory, ethical ideals, and cultural identity. Folk poetry, in particular, preserves the lived experiences, emotions, aspirations, and moral worldview of ordinary people in forms that remain meaningful across generations. Among the genres of Pashto oral literature, landay occupies a distinctive position because of its brevity, expressive power, and close relationship with the social and cultural life of Pashtun communities. Despite consisting of only two lines, many landays convey profound reflections on human dignity, love, sacrifice, justice, freedom, peace, patience, and resistance to oppression, thereby preserving values that transcend temporal and geographical boundaries.

The central question of this study is how Human Dignity are represented in Pashto landays and how these values are articulated through their linguistic, cultural, and literary structures. The research seeks to demonstrate that landays are not merely poetic expressions of personal emotions; they also function as an important cultural medium through which ethical principles, humanitarian ideals, and collective social experiences have been preserved and transmitted. Through textual analysis, the study explores the ways in which these poems embody concepts that affirm the worth of human life and reflect the moral consciousness of Pashtun society.

The significance of this research lies in highlighting a dimension of Pashto folklore that has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. Previous studies have primarily examined landays from folkloric, linguistic, artistic, or aesthetic perspectives, whereas their humanitarian and ethical dimensions have seldom been investigated in a systematic manner. By focusing on humanitarian values embedded in landays, this study contributes to a broader understanding of Pashto oral literature and enriches discussions concerning the relationship between literature, ethics, and culture.

This research adopts a library-based approach and employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical method. Published collections of Pashto landays and relevant scholarly works on folklore, literary criticism, and humanitarian thought constitute the principal sources of analysis. Selected landays are examined through close textual reading in order to identify the literary representation of humanitarian values and to interpret their cultural significance within the broader context of Pashtun society. The study ultimately aims to demonstrate that Pashto landays preserve a rich tradition of humanitarian thought rooted in indigenous cultural values and ethical ideals, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Pashto literary heritage.

Material and Method

Research Context (Study Area)

This study is situated within the field of Pashto literary and folkloric studies and examines the representation of Human Dignity concepts in landay, one of the oldest and most prominent genres of Pashto oral poetry. The study is confined to Pashto folk literature, particularly the landay genre, and is based on published textual sources. It draws on published collections of landay from different Pashtun communities in Afghanistan, where this poetic tradition has long been preserved through oral transmission and later recorded in written form. Rather than being confined to a single geographical setting, the study

approaches landay as a shared cultural heritage of Pashtun society and explores the ways in which it expresses universal human values within its socio-cultural context.

Materials and Data Sources

This research relies exclusively on documentary and textual materials. The primary data consist of landays selected from authoritative published collections of Pashto folk poetry. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books on Pashto folklore and literature, studies of oral tradition, and academic works on Human Dignity and literary criticism. These materials were obtained from university libraries, recognized academic publishers, and reputable electronic databases. Only published and verifiable sources were included to ensure the credibility and transparency of the research materials.

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical research design, which is widely used in literary and cultural studies. This approach enables the researcher to examine the meanings embedded in literary texts and interpret them within their linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts. Since the aim of the study is to explore how Human Dignity values are represented in landays rather than to measure them statistically, a qualitative method was deemed the most appropriate for achieving the research objectives.

Sample Selection

The corpus of the study was established through purposive sampling. Landays containing explicit or implicit references to Human Dignity concepts—including human dignity, freedom, compassion, love, social responsibility, respect for women, peace, and opposition to violence and war—were intentionally selected from the available collections. Poems that did not address the research objectives were excluded. The selected texts constitute the analytical sample on which the interpretations presented in this study are based.

Data Analysis

The selected landays were analyzed through qualitative textual analysis supported by close reading. Each poem was examined at the semantic, thematic, cultural, and symbolic levels in order to identify the ways in which Human Dignity ideas are expressed. Similar themes were grouped into analytical categories, and the findings were interpreted in relation to the cultural values, social realities, and literary traditions of Pashtun society. The interpretations were also compared with relevant scholarly discussions of Pashto folklore and Human Dignity literary thought in order to enhance analytical reliability.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based solely on the analysis of published literary texts and publicly available academic sources. It does not involve human participants, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures. Consequently, formal ethical approval was not required. All literary texts and scholarly works used in this study have been properly acknowledged and cited in accordance with accepted academic standards.

Statistical Analysis

No statistical methods or statistical software were employed, as the study is qualitative in nature. Data interpretation was conducted through descriptive textual analysis and thematic categorization rather than quantitative measurement.

Landay and Human Dignity

The landay is a prominent and significant form of classical Pashto literature. It is sometimes also referred to as tappa or masra. A landay consists of a single couplet, in which the first line has nine syllables and the second line has thirteen syllables (Wafa, 1392: 36–37).

In many landays, the final words of the second line often include rhythmic particles such as na, ma, la, yana, or wana. The form of the landay is highly suitable for expressing a wide range of themes. Within this concise and compact framework, a landay is capable of conveying vivid meanings and aesthetic beauty. In terms of its artistic and thematic richness, the landay occupies a unique and unparalleled place in Pashto poetry on a global scale.

Within Pashto folkloric poetry, landays represent an essential component of the broader human heritage of folkloric songs and poetry. One of the most significant aspects of landays is their musicality and rhythmic nature, which distinguishes them from folkloric poetry and songs worldwide. Landays provide an exceptionally refined and precise depiction of human emotions, feelings, pains, sufferings, and thoughts, presenting them in a sweet and subtle musical expression (Various Authors, 1364: 1–2).

Landays serve as the authentic expression of the poet's conscience and inner sentiments. In the corpus of Pashto poetry, there is no other poetic genre that rivals the landay in terms of meaning, depth, aesthetic pleasure, variety of expression, and thematic diversity.

Linguistic and Terminological Analysis of Human Dignity

The term "Human Dignity" is derived from Latin and comprises two elements: the word human, meaning "man" or "human being," and the suffix -ism, which denotes a doctrine or ideology. This term has been widely utilized in anthropology and philosophy to embody notions of human benevolence and the investigation of human nature (Azmoon, 1399: 189).

The scope of Human Dignity includes human-centeredness, the doctrine of the primacy of human beings, benevolence, and philanthropy, and is associated with qualities such as humanity, goodwill, and altruism (Jafari, 1382: 313).

In contemporary literary thought, the concept of Human Dignity spread across Europe after the Renaissance and subsequently permeated the literatures of many nations. It is believed that this intellectual movement also influenced Pashto written literature, resulting in the emergence of outstanding poets and authors who composed valuable poems and literary works.

A review of Pashto folk literature, particularly landays, shows that these brief couplets frequently reflect themes of human benevolence, altruism, and Human Dignity values. The artistic realization of these ideas is both profound and historically significant, with origins traceable to a period predating the Renaissance.

In summary, landays can be regarded as among the earliest examples in world literature of a blend between artistic refinement and authentic love, sincerity, and human-centered values.

Islam and Human Dignity

From the moment of human creation, the concept of benevolence toward humans has existed as a universal philosophical perspective meant for all humanity. Islam, as a sacred religion, assigns the highest value to human dignity. As stated in the Holy Qur'an (Surah Isra, verse 70):

{ وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ }

Humans are considered the most honored among Allah's creations due to their distinctive qualities, especially reason, speech, expression, and will, the most significant being their capacity for goodness.

Numerous verses in the Holy Qur'an and the prophetic traditions highlight the importance of Human Dignity. In Surah Al-Kahf, verse 110, Allah (SWT) declares:

{ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ... }

This underscores that, apart from divine revelation, the Prophet shares the same human attributes as others, without any inherent superiority.

Similarly, Surah An-Nisa, verse 58, states:

{ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ }

The Prophet (PBUH), in the absence of revelation, would seek consensus, demonstrating the value of collective judgment over individual opinions. The term 'nas' (people) in these traditions typically refers to all humanity, not just believers or Muslims.

Many hadiths further reinforce human benevolence and welfare. One such hadith is:

{ خَيْرُ النَّاسِ أَنْفَعُهُم لِلنَّاسِ } (Al-Ṭabarānī, n.d., Hadith No. 5787)

A central principle in Islam is equality: Arabs and non-Arabs, black and white, are all regarded as equals. Human dignity is inherent to every individual. Islam strongly condemns oppression, whether against oneself, another person, or even animals. Standing against injustice is seen as a highly meritorious act. As Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) says:

{ الْخَلْقُ كُلُّهُمْ عِيَالُ اللَّهِ فَاحْبَبْ الْخَلْقَ إِلَى اللَّهِ أَنْفَعُهُمْ لِعِيَالِهِ } (Al-Ṭabarānī, 1415 AH, Hadith No. 10033)

In the Islamic framework, the individual is recognized as a bearer of rights, free will, and dignity. These include the rights to life, dignity, property, and lawful work, freedom of choice and thought, and participation in governance. An individual's opinion is valued in societal affairs.

Islamic law grants equal rights to Muslim men and women—including the right to grant protection (Aman) to non-Muslims under prescribed conditions. Such guarantees are binding unless they jeopardize the Muslim community, reiterating the sanctity of individual rights in Islamic society, which is emphasized to a degree rarely matched in secular legal systems.

Testimonial and inheritance rights further illustrate Islam's commitment to individual dignity, while both material and spiritual dimensions of human rights are protected. Property rights are fundamental and essential for individual autonomy and merit special attention (Ulfat 1384: 78-79).

Professor Ulfat work thoroughly discusses these aspects, emphasizing that Islam grants the highest recognition and protection to human beings. In essence, Islam is a religion of Human Dignity, humanity, and compassion, with a history of Human Dignity philosophy that is both ancient and comprehensive, parallel to and sometimes predating other Human Dignity traditions worldwide.

The Role of Human Dignity in Literature

Literature represents the artistic philosophy of human and humane values, reflecting human existence and humanity through creative imagery while portraying personal and collective life. Literature functions as an artistic record of human knowledge and awareness. In the works of writers and poets, the features, desires, aspirations, goals, and expressive modes of peoples are revealed (Azmoon, 1399: 190).

For research clarity, Human Dignity themes in Pashto landays are categorized under several sub-headings: Human Freedom Pashto landays reflect the emotional experiences, social realities, and literary values of the people. References to "freedom" or "liberty" in landays serve as a literary reflection of the human condition – experienced in daily life, relationships, and emotions. Pashto landays present human dignity and freedom (Wazir, 2012: 270).

For example, in the following landays:

صورت زما واک یې د نورو
خاونده واخلي دا بې واکه صورتونه

The poet says that the speaker's body and physical existence are under the control of others. Therefore, the speaker appeals to God, saying: "O Lord, take these powerless bodies away from those who control them."

Interpretation

This Landay expresses a strong desire for freedom, human dignity, and liberation from oppression and external control. The poet portrays a person who has lost control over their own body and life and wishes to regain personal autonomy. The reference to God also gives the expression a religious and spiritual dimension. Thus, the Landay can be understood as a poetic protest against oppression, domination, and the denial of human dignity.

Or

ازاد پیدا یم ازاد خوښ یم
په ازادی به سر او مال تالا کومه

The poet declares: "I was born free, and I am happy to be free. I am willing to sacrifice both my life and my possessions for the sake of freedom."

Interpretation

This Landay strongly expresses the values of freedom, independence, courage, and self-sacrifice. The poet considers freedom an essential part of human existence and is prepared to sacrifice everything—even life and material possessions—to preserve it. The Landay therefore reflects a deep cultural aspiration for liberty and resistance to subjugation.

Turning Humans toward Their Origin

Overall, Human Dignity ideas convey the message that individuals must recognize and comprehend their own existence, thoughts, and actions. This theme also appears in Pashto literature, especially within its folk genres and particularly in Pashto landays. When a person strays from the value and purpose of creation, commits wrongful deeds, and undermines human virtues, Pashto landays frequently underscore the need to understand the intrinsic worth of human existence.

If you wish, I can continue this section by translating specific examples of landays that address this theme, maintaining a scholarly tone.

For instance, in the following landay:

عاقله فکر ورته وکړه
څه له پیدا بې کوي څه رنگه کارونه

This landay not only advocates the use of reason, but also urges individuals to reflect on their origin, purpose, and moral obligations. It conveys a deeply Human Dignity message: life transcends mere physical existence, representing a conscious, ethical, and intellectual journey. Human Dignity esteems this kind of awareness, granting importance to the individual's responsibility for self-understanding, accountability, and ethical self-improvement.

Effort and Endeavor

Effort and persistence are central tenets of Human Dignity philosophy. A person should always be diligent, dynamic, and industrious, since societal advancement is intrinsically linked to human effort. Pashto landays consistently inspire people to uphold these virtues (Wazir, 2012: 271).

خوب چې کوي خاورې به یوسي
شاه د هغو چې شوکېرې ورته کوينه

Compassion

Showing compassion to all created beings, and especially demonstrating kindness, affection, and ethical conduct toward fellow humans, forms the core of Islamic teachings (Akif, 1447: 78). Similarly, compassion stands as a central value in Pashtun culture, unparalleled globally. To share in another's pain is considered one of the highest human virtues. Historically, Pashto landays have captured and preserved such themes in poetic language, providing exemplary illustrations of empathy and Human Dignity care throughout human history.

For example, in the following landay:

ناجوړه ياره خداى دې جوړ کړه
ناروغه ته يې زړه زما کوي دردونه

Feeling another's pain is a core Human Dignity value and is vital for the survival and harmony of any society. Where such values are upheld, they signify the depth and ethical strength of that community. In Pashto literature, especially within the landay tradition, there are numerous examples that powerfully embody themes of compassion and empathy (Zubair, 2012: 274).

Respect for the Vulnerable

Valuing and showing respect to the poor and powerless is another foundational principle of Human Dignity. Pashto landays often reflect this ethos, portraying love and concern for the marginalized and thus providing psychological support and strengthening social unity.

For example, in the following landay:

ناچاره مه شي زه دې جار شم
د ناچارۍ پېغور به ولې درکومه
(Various Poets, 1364: 457)

Valuing Life and Human Relationships

Human Dignity, as an intellectual tradition founded on human dignity, reason, emotion, and autonomy, addresses fundamental human needs through love and empathy. Through this lens, life is understood as more than mere existence—it is constituted by human relationships, friendship, compassion, and mutual understanding.

Because humans are inherently social, they achieve wholeness only through connection with others. The bonds established with friends, family, and community members create the foundation for beauty and depth in our lives. These relationships offer reassurance that we are not alone, affirming that our existence holds importance for others as well.

Pashto landays eloquently mirror these Human Dignity values, presenting vibrant spiritual depictions of life, interpersonal bonds, and ethical ideals.

For example, in the following landay:

ملگرو يو تر بل څارېږئ
ما د مجلس ياران ليدل چې خاورې شونه

or

ځمکې قلنگ دې زورور دى
ځوانان ستانه کړې را لېږې تش پالنگونه
(Various Poets, 1364: 188)

or

لحده سوال به درته وکړم
چې خاورې نه کړې تورې زلفې سپين مخونه

The presence of Human Dignity ideas in the above poems conveys the message that humans should view one another not merely as means to an end, but as ends in themselves. Relationships ought to be founded upon love, respect, and understanding, rather than personal gain—since life has no meaning without people, and an individual remains incomplete in society without genuine human connections.

Respect for Religions

Pashtun society has, over time, interacted with various religions. Pashto folk couplets have not overlooked this important aspect, depicting it in ways that present a progressive view of respecting the sacred sites of other faiths. Today, despite numerous accusations sometimes directed at Pashtun people, these longstanding traditions and literary expressions refute such claims. Historically, Pashtuns have demonstrated social interaction, hospitality, communal gatherings, and cultural exchanges with followers of all religions. While Pashto couplets may romanticize these interfaith connections, they nevertheless reflect the essential, tolerant, and pluralistic character of Pashtun society (Wazir, 2012: 275).

For example, in the following landay:

یار مې هندو زه مسلمان یم
د یار د پاره درمسال جارو کومه

Respect for Laws

In accordance with contemporary human rights norms, Pashtun society has long expressed sorrow over the deaths of young people and the marriages of underage girls, often articulating this grief and heartfelt concern in poetic couplets. Such themes and emotions found in Pashto landays offer clear evidence of the community's deep respect for human values and its commitment to principles of human rights.

For example, in the following landay:

په دنیا دوه کارونه نه وای
د ژنیو مرگ بل د کمکې پیغلو ودونه

Respect for Women and the Right to Speak

Within Pashto landays, the articulation of women's feelings constitutes a significant chapter, presented in a unique tone and rhythmic structure. This demonstrates that the community places importance on women's dignity and grants them the right to voice their emotions. Such rights are regarded as fundamental to any human society.

For instance, when a woman calls out to her beloved, seeking recognition of her existence, it serves as a representation of cultural values. It illustrates the broader human principle that everyone's rights should be respected and safeguarded within social life.

لالیه چهرته یې غږ وکړه
د دنیاګۍ خلک دې مې حسابونه

or

مومن خان راغلو هندوستان ته
شیرینو پاتې شوه د غم ژړا کوینه
(Various Poets, 1364: 452)

or

منګۍ چې اخلم زړه مې ریردې
په زړه غمجن وړکي به لار نیولي وینه
(Various Poets, 1364: 447)

Hatred of War

An examination of the Pashtun philosophy of life reveals a people oriented toward living, humanity, and love. Their intrinsic affinity for poetry, beauty, national songs, and melodies is deeply rooted – they find joy in every rhythm and harmony nature offers. This natural inclination is mirrored in their poetry and literature. Poetry stands as a mirror to human nature, serving as a distinguishing mark of any society. Through poetry, a community's thoughts, traditions, political beliefs, and values are artistically represented. If we focus on Pashto landays, it becomes clear that they serve as artistic tableaux of Human Dignity ideals. Notably, among these ideals, a profound aversion to war emerges as a central theme in their poetic tradition.

For example, in the following landay:

توپکو بیا غاړې اوږدې کړې
ګوليو یوړه د ځوانانو لږ مونونه
(Various Poets, 1364: 146)

له موره یو وړکۍ یې مړ کړ
د جنازې بازو یې خویندې په مټ وپړنه

The Pashtun people convey a message of peace to the world through Pashto landai (short poems). They express aversion to weapons of war and place responsibility on those individuals and nations who manufacture instruments of conflict and create a warlike atmosphere. Such people are regarded as the killers of human beings on both sides of any conflict. These and similar themes are reflected in the following landay.

د تور توپکو استاکاره!
د ښو ځوانانو خون به ستا تر غاړې وینه

or

تورو توپکو کاریګره
که مې یار مړ شو خون یې ستا په غاړه وینه
(Various Poets, 1364: 146)

or

اسمان کې غبرگې پرکې وشوې
د تورو خاورو ياره څه در شوي دينه

or

نارې مې ډېرې يار ته وکړې
د خاورو زور و غړيې نه راته کاؤنه

If one examines the life and social values of the Pashtun tribe with impartiality, one ultimately arrives at the genuine philosophy of love for creation.

A particular focus on the oral literature of the Pashto language substantiates this assertion. Even a study that concentrates solely on the landay reveals that these folk poems encapsulate the Pashtun people's core cultural values—love of knowledge, aversion to war, particular respect for women, acceptance of the followers of all religions, Human Dignity, faith in true freedom, justice, equity, compassion, and related ideals. In short, Pashto landay represent a mirror reflecting the philosophy of human life among the Central Eastern Aryans.

Conclusion

Pashto landay, beyond their rhythmic harmony, romanticism, aesthetic appeal, and thematic diversity, also clearly embody a Human Dignity dimension. Human Dignity is a concept shared by both philosophy and literature, and this study has shown that the Human Dignity aspect of Pashto landai is both powerful and significant. Several contributing factors to these Human Dignity qualities in landai have also been explored.

The relationship between literature, the arts, and the human sciences is deep and enduring. The creation of poetry is influenced by memories, instincts, emotions, and feelings. Alongside conscious thought, the subconscious also plays a significant role in artistic expression. Much of Pashto poetry draws upon the subconscious desires and aspirations of its people—landai, as the spontaneous outcry of Pashtun men and women, demonstrate Human Dignity characteristics more strongly than any other literary genre.

This study has examined the Human Dignity dimension of landai through illustrative examples. One possible reason for the strength of these Human Dignity aspects is that literature reflects a society's beliefs, collective psychology, traditions, customs, successes, failures, and social relations. Therefore, the potency of the Human Dignity element in landai is anchored in the Pashtun community's cultural and religious values, as well as its dedication to peace-oriented ideals.

Acknowledgment

The authors also thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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