

Women Performers and Cultural Life in Peshawar during Maharaja Ranjit Singh Era

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study, Peshawar is an important city of cultural interaction of various nations and groups, having variety of languages, religion, ethnicity and literature. Despite the fact that this city had gained much importance under Mughals but, contrary to Lahore, Delhi and Agra, it lacked in the activities of performing arts. The development of arts and crafts depends upon the growth of civilization which this district lacked in past times.

Methodology: This is qualitative research and comparative-historical has been adapted to conduct it. The document analysis is also applied to verify the contents of documents. The information contained in data of one nature is compared and analyzed with the information available in data of other nature.

Findings: The performing female community of Peshawar valley was set up during Sikh era. It was the strict attitude of Sikh rulers, especially the Governor Abitabile who helped these female performers to settle their despite opposition from local side. The British maintained their settlement during their rule for social and cultural purposes as courtesans.

Conclusion: Most of such female performers of Peshawar were brought from Lahore or Punjab. In this sense, the origin of these courtesans of both cities was same. Maharaja and his courtiers invited, bought and sold thousands of females as performing courtesans.

Keywords: Performing Courtesans, Peshawar, Ranjeet Singh, Khalsa.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Peshawar is an important city of cultural interaction of various nations and groups, having variety of languages, religion, ethnicity and literature (Fazal, 1058). Despite the fact that this city had gained much importance under Mughals but, contrary to Lahore, Delhi and Agra, it lacked in the activities of performing arts. The literature of Mughals, the great patrons of arts and crafts, shows hardly any sign of singing and dancing of courtesans here. The reason was probably being a less populous city than Lahore and Delhi. The development of arts and crafts depends upon the growth of civilization (Khaldoon 1958) which this district lacked in past times. The Census Report of 1868 shows a sharp difference of population of three major cities of North-East India as shown in table 1:

Table 1: Population of three major cities of North-East India

Year	Delhi	Lahore	Peshawar
1855	Not available due to war 1857	94143	53295
1868	154417	98924	58555

However, this was not the sole reason of unavailability of women performers in Peshawar. Being an active trade center of medieval and early modern times, it must fulfill the requirement of traders and other sections of society for the purpose of amusement and sensual needs. There might be another reason, probably the rigid attitude of Muslim society of that area towards cultural activities, believing singing and dancing as un-Islamic and contrary to *Shariah* activities. The contemporary religious literature of that area supports the presumption of this reason (Makhzan, 1838). Moreover, the male dominated culture of this hilly country, especially *Pukhtunwali* (the social conduct of Pukhtuns), forced the women of this area not to participate in open public amusement ceremonies or gatherings. They disliked dancing of women for general public as taboo (Das, 1874), despite the fact that male singing and dancing was always appreciated there. This situation still prevails today. After it, the fourth reason may be the homosexual attitude of many, not all, of the inhabitants of this valley, which is verified by several documents (Akhbarat, 1876). Even eunuch-male marriage was allowed socially. These circumstances did not allow the encouragement of female performing art activities in this area. However, there were some original Pushtun tribes in Afghanistan who adapted singing and dancing as their profession since the origin of this nation. Author of *Makhzin-e-Afghani* (1618) mentions them in his work (Hirvi, 1986). So, it was the establishment of a non-Muslim or Sikh rule that initiated step to establish women performers culture in Peshawar, first and foremost.

1.1 Data of Research

The contemporary literature of Sikh rule at Peshawar is very huge in quantity but unfortunately it contains not a single word about the settlement of *women performers* in Peshawar. The only work of 19th century which gives slight references of *women performers* in Peshawar is *Tawarikh Peshawar* of Munshi Gopal Das, which was started to be written in 1869 and completed in 1874, about a quarter of century after the end of Sikh rule in this area. So, the original documents preserved in Punjab Archives, Lahore are consulted and may be classified as under:

- A. Contemporary documents of Sikh rule in Peshawar (1834-1849) especially case files (quoted as F 3 or so on).
- B. The documents of Women Performers, very close to that era, approximately within 30 years after annexation of Punjab in 1849.
- C. The books which were compiled after the annexation of Punjab under British official umbrella. The most important is the above-mentioned work of Gopal Das.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is qualitative research and comparative-historical has been adapted to conduct it. The document analysis is also applied to verify the contents of documents. The internal and external criticism of artifacts, documents and contents available in books is made. The information contained in data of one nature is compared and analyzed with the information available in data of other nature. In the same way, the visual art monographs are utilized for this purpose.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 History of Sikhs in Peshawar

Assuming the title of Maharaja for himself in 1799, Ranjeet Singh first extended his area by whipping out local chiefs of opposition and then put his attention on the conquest of areas beyond Punjab. His eastward advancement was checked by British in 1805, resulting in the Treaty of Amritsar, 1806. After that, he

advanced on the other sides of his empire. He captured Multan in 1818 and Kashmir in 1819. Next was Peshawar, of course, on the west, beyond Indus River. Maharaja Ranjeet Singh was not interested in affiliating Peshawar permanently to his empire that is why that he let the valley in possession of its old rulers in lieu of annual levies imposed upon them, in 1823 and again in 1827.

But the circumstances changed in 1834, when Amir Dost Muhammad Khan of Kabul raised a force against Ranjeet Singh. Maharaja captured valley for the third time and annexed it with Lahore Sarkar. A strong and strict Sikh chief, Hari Singh Nalwa was appointed as governor of Peshawar. Being the conqueror and ruler of the area, he used strict means to control the Pathans of valley but the resistance was very strong and all the revenue that was collected from this province was spent on the military activities of Sikh government in this area. Having died in a campaign in 1837, Hari Singh Nalwa was succeeded by Sardar Tej Singh. He was replaced by Paolo Avitabile (1790-1850), an Italian officer of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh. Avitabile served as Governor of Peshawar from 1837 to 1843 and then retired to his hometown in Italy. Sardar Tej Singh resumed his office at the resignation of Avitabile and served till 1845. He was succeeded by Sardar Sher Singh Attariwala who served till 1849, till the annexation of Punjab (Das,1874).

It is portrayed that Sikhs were opposed by all local residents and tribes of the valley but it is not true. Majority of them opposed new rulers but a good number of local elite classes also supported them with their full strength. Many tribal leaders joined hands with Sikh governors and got benefits in turn. These were such local and tribal supporters who facilitated Sikhs to rule over the valley and extend the limits of Khalsa Sarkar. The detail of these supporters is given by Gopal Das in his work.

In Peshawar, Sikhs had their inhabitation long before its conquest by Maharaja Ranjeet Singh. Unfortunately, the record of colonial era personifies Sikhs as Hindus so the population record does not contain any numerical indication about former. A spy report of 1844 also counted Sikhs as Hindus, *yk kanchani way k nafir Hindu ke az taifa Singhan bood* (one women performers and one person Hindu, who was from Sikh group)

According to Akhbar (1844) a document proves that Hindus and Sikhs were living in Peshawar since the times of Mughal government. Hargobind, a resident of Muhalla Lahoriyan, Peshawar in 1859, makes such claim that he is owner of this property long before the year 1155 A.H/ 1742 A.D (Case49,1859). There was also a famous 'Muhalla Lahoriyan' in Peshawar where settled the inhabitants migrated from Lahore in pre-Sikh times. A roznamcha of 1229 A.H/ June 1814 also states the confinement and then release of an influential Sikh personality in Peshawar, named Sham Singh (Roznamcha,1814). He had been the vice-governor of Peshawar under Sardar Yar Muhammad Khan in 1814-16 (Roznamcha,1816). Another document refers to Bhai Khuda Singh as native of Peshawar from some generations. He was granted jageer during Sikh era (Case77, 1864). His name also points out the influences of local culture on Sikh immigrants from Punjab as the word Khuda is Persian-Muslim term (Rampuri, 1877). Gopal Das mentions that during the rule of Sardar Yar Muhammad Khan and his brothers (1810-1834), there was an ijaradar namely Kanhaiya Singh who was local resident of this city. His brother Theh Singh was a wealthy mahajan of Peshawar (Akhbarat, 1843). However, these Sikhs were very few in number before the conquest by Maharaja Ranjeet Singh.

After the conquest, Sikhs inhabited region in large number, but they were mostly soldiers. Their permanent settlement did not take place till the annexation of Punjab in 1849. They resided in forts, posts and other places of note for war purposes. Their rule lasted after 16 years of permanent annexation of Peshawar with Lahore Sarkar in 1834. These years were spent in war, resistance, attack and defense from both sides. As already mentioned, whole revenue of conquered territory was spent on interior military expeditions (Ali,Shahamat,1986). After annexation of Punjab in 1849, many Sikhs opted to settle in Peshawar valley. They choose to live in Hindu majority localities as the Muslim had much hatred towards them due to recent oppression of Sikh government. During 16 years of rule, Sikh constructed many Gurdwaras but they did not construct any residential and secular buildings for dwellings. They used old

havelis of Hindus and Muslims which they captured after conquest of the city. The evacuee properties, which were left by locals in 1834 and after, were utilized by them. The old property record shows that they hold considerable properties (Register of Mutation, 1870) till the partition of India in 1947, when they migrated beyond Redcliff line. The population of Sikh settlers in Peshawar is shown in table 2:

Table 2: *The population of Sikh settlers in Peshawar*

Year1868	Total population	Percentage
Muslims	49095 (male: 26471, female: 22354)	83.84%
Hindus	8747 (male: 5093, female: 3654)	14.93%
Sikhs	584 (male: 341, female: 69)	0.99%
Others	129	0.22%
Total	58555	

3.2 Women Trafficking under Sikh Rule

Human trafficking, especially of women and children, has been a universal phenomenon since very remote and unknown times. Peshawar also witnessed it during all courses of history. Till the abolition of slavery in India by British, it was considered as a legal right to sale and purchases the slaves and the legal documents denote that the owner was entitled for the possession of a slave or his/her due amount(Malcolm,1832). Males were enslaved for laborious works; especially military purposes while the females for domestic purposes, especially intimate desires (Hopkins,2008). During Maharaja Ranjeet Singh's era (1799-1839), the female slave trade was encouraged and women were brought to Sikh capital Lahore for different purposes (Sarwar, Ghulam, 2006). The main purpose was to make the young girls *women performers*. They were trained in dancing and singing since the age of 5 years and it took about 9 years to become an expert *women performers*. There was much demand of *women performers* in Sikh government and nearly all the leading and influential personalities, either male or female, had *women performers* attached with them. *women performers* had much influence in court and palace (Lal, Kanhaiya,2006). They were very wealthy and prosperous.

Most of the slave girls were of very young age, about 8 or 10 years (Ruswa, Mirza 1899). It was very convenient to modify a girl of tender age in accordance with *requisite performance*. For Punjab, they were abducted or purchased from hill areas of Kashmir, Ladakh, Swat, Chitral and northern areas of Afghanistan, as they had white skin and beautiful faces. A report of 1843 reads as under:

“The representatives of Gul Badshah (of Kashghar) had gone towards Qashqar and Swat and Bajur and Buner to collect beautiful girls and shikari baaz for the Maharaja of Punjab. The people of Khasa Kot took away one of them, who had come from Lahore with Khilaats for him (Gul Badshah), to the elders/leaders of Swat and Buner and Qashqar, and on returning back, the people of Swat killed him and his friends were deserted”.

They had much attraction for dull colored Punjabi males. However, the case of *women performers* of Peshawar was much different from their sisters in Punjab. Most of the *women performers* had come from Punjab with Sikh soldiers who invaded this area. A good number was from Kashmir and other hilly states (Akhbar,1860). The abducted male/female persons (*burda ha*) were brought to Lahore first and then sent to Peshawar. A letter reveals that a payment of fifty rupees and one *aana* and *chahar pai*, the price of unknown number of abductees who were transported from Peshawar to Lahore, was ensured through a *hundwi/pro-note* by Diyalo Mal Sahokar at Lahore. At the same time, five thousand soldiers were also sent to Peshawar to give assistance to British occupation of Afghanistan during First Afghan War. An application is also attached with this document which states that a person, probably Naiko, purchased a girl of three years from Rasul Jo Kashmiri during famine of 1835. After five years, the father regained her daughter and hides her somewhere. This application is addressed to Colonel Wade on 29th March 1840.

These documents strengthen this presumption that *women performers* and slaves were kept aside by British for the entertainment and amusement of their officers and soldiers. The visual art of East India Company also proves the interest of British in performing art activities (Darlaymple, William, 2020). Gopal Das states that before British government, the inhabitants of Kafiristan had brought their girls and women and sold them at the Mela of Mian Gullo, at Toor Dher Tappa, in district Peshawar. British prohibited this practice but it continued under the covering of *nikah*/marriage.

Moreover, girls and women were also brought from Kohistan-e-Shimla, Haryana and rural areas of Delhi. Many cases show the abduction and sale of young girls and women from different quarters of North West India. Anyhow, at that time the woman trafficking was a profitable business in Punjab like that in Oudh.

3.3 Foundation of Performing Courtesans Community in Peshawar

During the early phase of Sikh rule, it was very hard for Sikhs to establish any brothel house in Peshawar valley. Their all attention was focused upon the resistance from local people. Hari Singh Nalwa, the first governor, had been much busy in wars with Pathan tribes. He destroyed old defensive structures of Peshawar and constructed new at the points which were convenient for establishment of Sikh rule. His successor, Avitabile, was very notorious in available literature for his tyranny and cruelties, as his contemporary Sir Henry Lawrance states that ‘he acts like a savage among savage men, instead of showing them that a Christian can wield the iron scepter without staining it by needless cruelty’. However, the documents show that his justice and discipline was termed as cruelty by his opponents. He developed Peshawar city on new lines and restored its prosperity to some extent. His improvements in and new constructions of buildings, bazars and security posts as highly appreciated even by his opponents like Prince Safdar Jang of Kabul during his visit to the city in 1843. The present day cityscape of Peshawar is gift of this governor for its inhabitants. Avitabile also established new bazars and get settled women performers in these new bazars and localities during his times (Lawrance, 1846).

Avitabile had arranged his court by sitting upon the deorhi/entrance, near newly fixed cannons, at Gor Khatri from where he was able to watch the whole city. He was fond of music and once he heard some specific tune of Bansuri (name of a music instrument), he ordered all *bansuri nawazan*/pipe-tuners to practice that.

In 1844, about 700-1000 *women performers* were residing in Peshawar who came mostly from Punjab. Some came from Kashmir and other areas too. Their *bala khanas* (dancing centers) were established in the new bazars and other buildings which were constructed by Avitabile *sahib bahadur*. There were also many wine shops/centers there. This information supports the idea that Avitabile planned for an entertainment system for Khalsa Sarkar in Peshawar. He encouraged development of music and performing art in this area to support cultural activities. He strictly prohibited wine drinking and *qamar bazi*/gambling in city for law and order reasons. The introduction of female public dancing and singing, credit goes to him. The population of *performing courtesans* in Peshawar city in 1868’s census report is shown below with a comparison with Lahore and Delhi, two other major cities of Punjab with Peshawar is shown in table 3:

Table 3: 1868’s census report with a comparison with Lahore and Delhi

District	Male Musicians	Female Musicians	Male Dancers	Female Dancers	Male Matrab/Mirasi	Female Matrab/Mirasi	Male Intimate Workers	Female Intimate Workers
Delhi	830	856	603	661	213	255	Nil	524
Lahore	3738	3375	1086	1097	92	79	Nil	964
Peshawar	1212	1201	169	147	38	34	Nil	307

The prominent locality of *women performers* of Peshawar was Muhalla Shiekh Bahauddin. It is also named as Muhalla Bahauddin and Bazar Bahauddin in government records (death Record, 1873). A document of 1834 reveals that this person, Shiekh Bahauddin, was a learned vakil or attorney of Sultan

Muhammad Khan, a very influential sardar and sometime Amir of Afghanistan from Barakzai family. Resultantly, Shiekh Bahauddin was also very important personality of bureaucracy at that time. He was a local Peshawari of Awan tribe. His son Muhammad Hassan was alive in 1871 and witnessed a sale deed in favor of a performing courtesan Amir-un-Nusa.

Gopal Das gives the information that in his times (1870s), *women performers* were settled in Thatti Bazar, adjutant to Qissa Khawani Bazar. This information is testified by records of birth and death, started from 1871 and 1867 respectively, of Peshawar region. Mohalla Thatti was residence of Tabi women performers, Sahib Jan women performers and others. But, at the same time, the same record also reveals that large number of women performers was still living in the locality of Shiekh Bahauddin, like Noor Begum Women performers, Begum Jan women performers and others (British Record, 1871). The *matrabs/singers* were residing in large number in Muhalla Doman Gali, adjutant to Muhalla Shiekh Bahauddin. Their women were not called women performers as record does contain no such word regarding them. No *women performers* are proved to be resident of Doman Gali. It will be interesting to add here that the ancestral home of legend Indian actor Dilip Kumar is also in Doman Gali which is now preserved by Archeology Department of Government of Khyber Pukhtunkhawa. Moreover, the *women performers* were also residing in some other localities of the city, though in very short number, like Muhalla Shah Burhan, Muhalla Kakar, Muhalla Noor Baba Khan. A *women performer* from Afghanistan was also living near the bank of city stream (lab-e-jui).

At the time of partition of India in 1947, large number of *women performers* had their *bala khanas* or *kothas* in Dabgari Bazar or Darwaza (the market or gate of box makers; out of 13 gates of the city one is attributed to them). Probably, they shifted there in large number by the passage of time. However, a sale deed of 1868 proves that many *women performers* had settled there during Sikh era. This document contains the transaction of some *bala khanas*, surrounded by the houses of two *women performers* and one eunuch, from three sides. The area which is pointed out as *bala khanas* of *Women Performers*, is beyond the modern day Dabgari Gate.

Such discussion helps to understand that in which areas Sikhs and Avitabile encouraged the settlement of *Women Performers*. As the women performers had much public dealing like men, and the Sikh soldiers far living from their families, had their demand for intimate purposes, so the penetration of *women performers* in the heart as well as surrounding of the city made the officials convenient to visit and control the city by one way or other. It may be said that women performers fulfilled their political purposes too.

3.4 The Life of Women Performers under Sikh Rule

The *women performers* of Peshawar were called *kanchani* during Sikh era. This term was introduced by Mughal Emperor Akbar (Sale Deed, 1868). No document of this region is still found that called them as *women performers* during Sikh period. However, the records and documents called them women performers since the start of British era. Only Gopal Das called them with old term. The other word used for them was *nochi*. The term *nochi* had meant being a *women performer* not by birth but by training in this business after her entry while *kanchani* was a *women performer* by birth (Ranj, 1868). The word *women performers* was adapted under the influence of Urdu language that was adapted by British as official language of Punjab, of which Peshawar was a part then. The other terms used for them were *doom* and *matrab*, which were more respectable than *kanchani* and *nochi*, in the society of colonial era.

All *women performers* of Peshawar were Muslim by religion (Chishti & Ahmad, 1975). The registration record contains not a single name of any *women performers* of any other non-Muslim faith, either Hindu or Sikh or Christian. Same is the case of *women performers* of Punjab. Hindus and Sikh were also residing in their localities but no women of their caste or religion is mentioned in any document of that time or after. The birth record of 1871-1873 of Peshawar gives the names of mother *women performers* but their age cannot be determined by this (Chand, 1898). The death record of 1867-1871 gives the details about residence and age of the *women performers* of that time which is very helpful in searching Sikh era *Women Performers*.

All the *women performers* had Muslim names. Their ethnical classification can easily be made by the words and pronunciation of their names. The names like Begum Jan, Noor Begum, Piyari and Sahib Jan indicate their North Indian (present day Delhi and UP) origin as such names were common there. Gopal Das also confirms the presence of Hindustani *women performers* in Peshawar. Names like Jawai, Jewani, Samdani and Jano were very common in Punjab. Names like Gulai, Neamat, Marwari, Dur Jan, Tabi are names of Afghan/Pathan/Pushtun women. The *women performers* from these ethnic groups were also residing in the city. But the names like Atroo, Aashoo, Jamiat, Aziz, Peeroo etc. do not help to trace their origin. Name of one *women performer*, Shakroo is narrated in a document. Another is named Dolaan. Both were residents of Peshawar. Another *kanchani* named Luli is stated to be very wealthy, possessing heavy golden jewelry.

The *women performers* of Peshawar had the good knowledge of Urdu, Persian and Pushto as these were the three major languages of communication between citizens and officials. *Women Performers* who came from North India and Punjab were highly trained in learning, singing and dancing. They were well versed in Persian, Urdu and Pushto poetry. The mother tongue of each *women performer* such as Punjabi, Hindko, Potohari and so on were also their additional abilities for their business. They were one of the best sources for the publication of verses of poets before (but even during early) printing press invention. They were source of inspiration for creative activities of general masses.

Women Performers had to pay taxes and duties too. The *marshalchi*/torch bearer was paid 3 rupees during their professional days, collectively. It was his duty to arrange light during night in their area, and even in their ceremonies. Some had paramours in the city and had to live with them like wives. Such *women performers* were barred from relationship with any other person except that paramour. The names of the following *women performers* are traced from documents and records of Sikh era and early British period as shown in table 4:

Table 4: List of names of the following women performers traced from documents and records of Sikh era and early British period

Sr. No	Name of women performers	Locality of residence	Document and its description	Age at the close of Sikh era
1	Shakroo <i>kanchani</i>	Peshawar city	<i>Akhbar Peshawar</i> , 1834	Mature and young in 1834
2	Doolan <i>kanchani</i>	Peshawar city	<i>Akhbar Peshawar</i> , 1834	Mature and young in 1834, Teacher of <i>Women Performers</i>
3	Luli <i>kanchani</i>	Peshawar city	<i>Akhbar Peshawar</i> , 1844	Young in 1844
4	Gulzaro <i>tawaif</i>	Dabgari Darwaza	A sale deed of 1851	Mature in 1851
5	Sardaro <i>tawaif</i>	Dabgari Darwaza	A sale deed of 1851	Mature in 1851
6	Noor Begum	Shiekh Bahauddin	Death Record, 1869, aged 80 years	60 years in 1849
7	Begum Jan	Shiekh Bahauddin	Death Record, 1867, aged 60 years	43 years in 1849
8	Sahib Jan	Thatti Bazar	Death Record 1867, aged 60 years	43 years in 1849
9	Jawai <i>tawaif</i>	Peshawar city	Death Record 1869, aged 50 years	30 years in 1849
10	Marwari <i>tawaif</i>	Peshawar city	Death Record 1869, aged 35 years	15 years in 1849
11	Begum <i>tawaif</i>	Peshawar city	Death Record 1869, aged 66 years	46 years in 1849
12	Aashoo <i>tawaif</i>	Peshawar city	Death Record 1869, aged 30 years	10 years in 1849

13	Tabi <i>tawaif</i>	Thatti Bazar	Death Record 1869, aged 40 years	20 years in 1849
14	Jiwani <i>tawaif</i>	Died in hospital in Peshawar	Death Record 1869, aged 40 years	20 years in 1849
15	Begum Jan	Muhalla Noor Baba Khan	Death Record 1869, aged 52 years	32 years in 1849
16	Atroo <i>tawaif</i>	Muhalla Kamaj Buzan	Death Record 1869, aged 40 years	20 years in 1849
17	Begum <i>tawaif</i>	Sheikh Bahauddin	Death Record 1869, aged 53 years	33 years in 1849

It is notable that some entries of death record do not contain the residential locality of *women performers* and just 'Peshawar city' is mentioned. It is also noteworthy that only a very few *women performers* are registered with their father's name while mostly are entered only with the caste name of *women performers*.

It is still unknown that which *women performers* were very popular in singing and dancing during Sikh era. No such record is found yet now.

The first obligation of *women performers* was dancing and singing. Intimate working was not compulsory for them, though many, not all, were involved in it. The high class *women performers* were used to take *purdah*/veil on their full body including face. They used *doli*/hand carrier for transportation anywhere. Especially for the purpose of performance in a marriage (for dance and song) or for garden visitation or attending some festival, they used *doli*. *Doli* was common thing that was used by all women of all types, either *women performers* or housewife, either wealthy or poor. During marriage ceremonies, an additional veil was done permanently on *dolis* of common woman, but the veil of a *women performer* was kept on upper side of *doli* so that people could see and recognize her. She was to make dance after each four steps, commonly in such ceremonies.

The cheaters used this system of *purdah* for their benefits. They started a scheme that by putting a *women performer* in *doli* and covering her by veil, they had brought them before British military officers for intimate working and deceived them that this woman is from a pious and influential family. In this way they had collected large sum from officers. After a long time, this cheating was revealed. Then, to differentiate a pious or household woman from a *women performer*, Gopal Das suggested that the *doli* of *women performers* should not be veiled at all. However, this suggestion was hardly followed by people. Whatever is the case, this statement of a government servant shows that the British government machinery kept this system continued for their intimate desires.

During Sikh era, *women performers* were not allowed to leave their native city without prior permission from officials. When Doolan *women performers*, along with her *nochi*/student *women performers*, left Peshawar for Hazroo, Uttam Singh *thanedar*/police officer was summoned and threatened of dire consequences. Governor said that you, the concerned *chawkidar*/peon and *muhalladar*/co-resident of locality, all are responsible of her escape. He was ordered to pay fine by himself or caused to pay from said *kanchani*.

Though *women performers* were settled in city under state patronage but under the rule of Avitabile, the *women performers bazi*/entertainment from women performers was strictly prohibited in cantonments and military areas. It was ordered that there will be no wine drinking, no gambling and no *kanchan*/ *women performers* among the barracks and military offices or areas. Sikh sardars continued such activities but Avitabile took strict action against them. One Sardar Bela Singh filed a petition before him for the removal of such restrictions but in vain. He threatened him that if orders are not comply with, the matter will be placed before Maharaja Ranjeet Singh. The counsel of Sardar Bela Singh sought compromise deed of previous fault of intimate working in his *dera*/camp but the governor did not agree to remit the fine of

two thousands rupees imposed upon him. Further conditions were to get arrest the seller of the wine and remove casino and *kanjarkhana/tawaifkhana* from his dera.

It is interesting to know that during Sikh period, there were two cantonments in Peshawar. The first was set up by Avitabile in Bagh/Garden of Ali Mardan Khan. It had the space of three battalions. It exists there even today. The other was set up by his successor Sardar Tej Singh, the governor, at the downward areas of Gor Khatri. It was in Bazar Kalan of today. It had the space of six battalions. But the situation changed after the departure of Avitabile. A spy report states that gambling and wine drinking that was strictly prohibited during his rule was resumed and allowed under his successor, Sardar Tej Singh.

An *Akhbar* states that in the morning of 28th Har, 1834, General Allard was going back to his home that he saw a *kanchani/tawaif* standing in bazar. She was arrested and inquired that where she lived. She stated her residence in the *dera of sahib* (Avitabile). He ordered her to count all *kanchanis* residing in official dera. She requested for an assistant for this person. Governor provided her four *ardalis*/peons that captured five more *kanchanis*. Their hands were tightened on their backs and punished to stand under hot sun. They cried bitterly. On inquiry one of them said that Nabi Bakhsh Faiq is my paramour while others claimed to be professional *women performers* having no previous paramour. Nabi Bakhsh was summoned who stated that he kept the said *women performers* for the last three years as her concubine along with my family. He admitted that he spent money on her from state treasury. It was ordered that he be blacked faced and surrounded through all tents so that is a lesson for others. However, on the request and surety bonds of two high officials, Shiekh Dasawan Colonel and Amir Chand Komindan, his was pardoned. But the *women performers* were left in punished in that condition for unlimited time.

The same document also states another event of same day. Writer states that the number of *women performers* agreeably approached Avitabile and stood under his pavilion. Governor asked his *adalti*/judge, Bahadur Singh, of the city about their gathering. He replied that they earned money during their professional days and paid nothing to *Mashalchi*/torch bearer as bribe. He approached Mr. Court who accompanied some soldiers with him to get some token of money as per old days. Upon acting these orders, a fight took place between soldiers and *Women Performers*. Now they are approaching being aggrieved that at the instigation of one Shakroo *tawaif*, soldiers have tortured us. Governor was further informed that Shakroo *tawaif* has been confined by us at her house. Listening this he became angry that why Shakroo is detained without any fault or crime and without his orders. She was released at once and the *women performers* were sent before Mr. Court along with soldiers for just decision. Court arrested the soldiers for wrong action and all the *women performers* were released. The *mashalchi* was paid 3 rupees for his services.

Women Performers were very friendly with Sikhs. A report of 1250/1835 states that some Sikhs were celebrating at the house of a *kanchani*. Dance party was going on. Some Khaibris got this information and attacked that house. In fighting, Sikhs killed about 11 Khaibris and decided to run away. On the request of two (or four) very beautiful *kanchanis*, they also took away them. This accident shows the confidence of *women performers* in Sikh community. It also indicates the early reaction of Pathans towards establishment of *Women performers* in their area. Their opposition can clearly be seen in this accident. Sikhs could also sleep with *Women performers* by night. A report states that a *women performers* and a Sikh, soldier of Sardar Fateh Singh Man's battalion, were sleeping together by night that suddenly the *baraq aasmani*/thunderclap felt upon the house and both were flamed and died. The *kanchani* was buried being Muslim while Sikh's body was put to fire as ritual, near her grave. The *qazi* of the city imposed blood retaliation of both of them upon the owner of the house but it was redeemed by the efforts of Muhammad Rafi Khan, attorney of Sardar Akbar Khan.

Sometime *Women performers* were also cheated by Sikh soldiers. A wealthy *kanchani*, Luli was killed by a Sikh Punjabi soldier in greed of heavy gold and jewelry. He made a good escape with his fellows Punjabis with wealth.

Women Performers also had proprietary rights. They purchased houses and buildings for their livelihood. As already mentioned, they had ownership of many houses in Dabgari Bazar. In Muhalla Shiekh Bahauddin and Muhalla Thatti, their ownership of properties is also proved. Unfortunately, the old houses have been demolished in large number in Peshawar and the new constructions replaced them, so it is very hard to understand the architectural plan and aesthetic sense of *Women performers* of that time. Even after Sikh era, the *Women performers* purchased houses, especially in Muhalla Shiekh Bahauddin.

Women Performers were model girls for women of the valley. The garments they used were source of advertisement. They had much variety in dresses and garments under the influence and demand of cultural activities. Punjabi *kanchanis* were used to wear *pishwaz*. It impacted the common women of Afridis, and of Mardan who began to use *pishwaz* style in their neck draperies when outside their homes. They called it *gadai*. The price of a women dress was about six rupees in 1874. Punjabi *Women performers* had wear *kortah* that was sometime tight at *aasteen* and its length was above the knees. They had used short *dopatta* and very tight *pajama*/trouser that was called *ghutna*. They had used male shoes, tight at toes. This was the especial dress of Punjabi *Women Performers*. The local *Women performers* of Peshawar, Pathans and Awans and others, had used dresses of common Muslim women which was mostly *qizalbashi* dress as shown in table 5:

Table 5: List of Qizalbashi Dresses

Arqcheen	Dastmaal	Kulahghi
Kurtah	Pajamah Zardar	Dopatta Meni Chaddar
Burqah	Justah (A type of shoe)	Kafash (a type of shoe)

This was a common dress of all Muslim women living in Peshawar city, either Afghani/Pushtun or Qizalbash or Hindko speaking. The *Women performers* of all ethnic groups also used these dresses. For performance in ceremonies like marriage, circumcision and others, the *Women performers* had used numberless colorful and high price dresses like all other Muslim women. The local *Women performers* of Peshawar had used colorful dresses in their homes and in bazars too. However, most of the Punjabi *Women performers* preferred white dresses to wear.

Women Performers were very fond of jewelry and it was also their necessity to keep and use heavy jewelry of various kinds, designs and fashion. Local *Women performers* had 10-12 holes in their ears while Punjabi/*Hindustani* women performers had 22-24 holes. Like all Muslim women, they were fond to wear golden ornaments in these holes of the ears. They had three holes in nose also decorated with ornaments. The following ornaments were specific with *women performers* of Peshawar as shown in table 6:

Table 6: List of Ornaments of Women Performers in Peshawar

Sr.	Ornaments
1	Jhoomar
2	Walah
3	Gajrah
4	Lachh
5	Pabool tootiryan
6	Lohal
7	Wing
8	Marki/Walai
9	Nathpashi
10	Bank

Among these specific *women performers* jewelries, walah was introduced by Sikh conquerors. Gopal Das states that Sikh rule, followed by British, highly impacted the dresses, ornaments and the jewelries of this region. All types of gender among them adapted ways of Sikh fashion and designs. Afghans/Pathans

who had used less jewelry items than Qizalbash and Hindus, changed their ways and competition started among them in fashion of all sorts. The women of valley also acquired many fashions from new comers. In this line, the *women performers* played a role of present day model girl as the veil was not compulsory for them.

The settlement of *women performers* also impacted the rulers of Afghanistan. A spy reports that Amir dost Muhammad khan of Afghanistan was true follower of traditional Islam but in 1843, he also started drinking wine and listening music. He also liked the dances of *Women Performers* (Akhbar, 1843). Another newspaper of 28th January 1843 states that a female singer and dancer, who had attached with Raja Ali Bahadur before this, had been sent to Khulam (in North Afghanistan) with her dancing group. She came to Lughman (Afghanistan) and started her dancing and singing activities there. At that time, the drinking wine and gambling was banned by Governor of Kabul, Muhammad Usman Khan with the imposition of fine upon violation. However, dance and music is stated to be banned by him. But the *women performers* had more freedom in Peshawar than any part of Afghanistan as we see Durr Jan *women performers* of Kabul inhabiting in Peshawar in 1869.

3.5 The survival of Women Performers after Sikhs

The *women performers* and associated performance also survived after the collapse of Khalsa Empire. Though English purity movement opposed them but the people accepted them for their amusement and entertainment. The British officers also let them continue their business for their own intimate satisfaction.

During early British era, names and description of following *women performers* is traced in records as shown in table 7:

Table 7: List of Names and Description of Women Performers in Peshawar

Sr. No.	Names of women performers	Document and its description
1	Mother of Jamiat Bakhsh	Her girl Jamiat Bakhsh died at the age of 13 months in 1867. She was resident of Bazar Thatti, Peshawar. The original name of mother is still unknown
2	Durr Jan	She was from Kabul and now settled near the stream in Peshawar. Her daughter Khursheed died in 1869 at the age of one year
3	Qadar	She bore girl on 21 st January, 1871. She was resident of Muhalla Shiekh Bahaiddin. She is termed as <i>matrab</i>
4	Piyari tawaif	She bore a boy named Ramzan on 3 rd December, 1871. She is called <i>tawaif</i> of Muhalla Shiekh Bahaiddin
5	Gullai	She bore a girl on 13 th December 1871. She was termed as <i>matrab</i> and resident of Muhalla Shah Burhan
6	Aziz tawaif	She was resident of Muhalla Kakar. She bore twin girls on 25 th December 1871
7	Shorni tawaif	She was resident of Muhalla Shiekh Bahaiddin and bore a girl on 11 th March 1872
8	Sathro tawaif	She was resident of Mandi Jadeed or New Mandi, Peshawar in 1872
9	Amir-un-Nisa	She purchased a house in Muhalla Shiekh Bahaiddin in 1872. She was Awan by caste.

There is still a vast space to conduct further research on this topic especially *women performers* of British era.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the *female performer's* community of Peshawar valley was set up during Sikh era. This started the female singing and dancing in a society which was male dominated and religiously fundamentalist, prima facie against female performance in public gatherings. It was the strict attitude of Sikh rulers, especially the Governor Abitabile who helped the *Women Performers* to settle their despite opposition from local side. The British maintained their settlement there during their rule for social, cultural and intimate purposes. Most of the *women performers* of Peshawar were brought from Lahore or Punjab. In this sense, the origin of *women performers* of both cities was same. In Punjab, especially Lahore, *associated female performance* was established since very old times. During Mughal period, they became very wealthy but during early Sikh era political and economic upheaval forced them to migrate to other parts of North India. The establishment of Ranjeet Singh's empire at Lahore again encouraged them to come here. Maharaja and his courtiers invited, bought and sold thousands of females for *associated requisite performance*. As there had already exist a system of performing art training, so *women performers* well established then here. In Peshawar, no such system existed before due to cultural and religious barriers. So, the system of Punjab or Lahore was shifted to Peshawar. The Punjabi *women performers* maintained themselves in Peshawar. The *women performers* of Kashmir and other areas were also migrated in Peshawar through Punjab route. The females of hilly areas were brought to Lahore first then sent to Peshawar as a document shows. Gopal Das tries to make a difference between Punjabi and non-Punjabi *women performers* of Peshawar with focusing on former. It may be said that the performing art industry of Peshawar was imported from Lahore or Punjab. However, the importers were not Pathans or local inhabitants of the city. These were the Sikhs who introduced this culture in Peshawar. The most valuable personality among them was their Italian Governor Avitabile, appointed by Maharaja in 1838. The first response of local inhabitants was to oppose this advancement in culture as reveals from the attack of Khaibari Pathans upon a dancing party within a house of a kanchani in 1835. But soon they accepted this entertainment that is why that this system continued even after the partition of India in 1947. This system is basic foundation of Pushto film industry like that of Bollywood and Lollywood, where mostly the *women performers* participated in acting and adapted scientific inventions as their new source of income. However, there is much space for further research in this area of art, in Khyber Pukhtunkhawa.

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