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Sonia Ahsan-Tirmizi. 2021. *Pious Peripheries: Runaway Women in Post-Taliban Afghanistan*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 239 pp. (ISBN: 9781503614710).

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Pious Peripheries opens with the question of what happened to the runaway Muslim women living in Khana-yi-aman (“home of safety”) after the second fall of Afghanistan back to the rule of the Taliban regime in 2021. The work of Ahsan-Tirmizi is a deeply anthropological endeavor in both thought and content. It unveils the underexplored narratives behind a shelter built to host Afghan women who have run away from their homes for different reasons (including abuse, rape, and violence). The shelter was established by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) in 2001 to handle women's rights issues in Afghanistan. Now, the MoWA has been replaced with the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in September 2021.

Ahsan-Tirmizi's ethnographic articulations as both a participant observer and an empathized activist, and her autoethnographic insights as an insider woman who can speak Pashto through seventeen years of growing up in Peshawar, provide unparalleled richness to the text. At the backdrop of wider scholarship on Islam and feminism, particularly related to the Taliban and Afghanistan, Ahsan-Tirmizi takes the promiscuous self of the runaway Muslim woman as a central aspect of the project, looking beyond the binary understanding of tradition and modernity and affirming the idea that the everyday struggles of Afghan women are not limited to the consolidation of norms and their subversion.

The study consists of six chapters, which are painstakingly written with first-hand accounts of Khana-yi-aman in Kabul. The first three chapters are ethnographic illustrations of Khana-yi-aman and the diverse modes of struggles taking place there. The following three chapters speak about three power structures: Taliban, Pashtwali, and Islam, and the configuring meanings of piety, chastity, and promiscuity in both Taliban and non-Taliban (feminist and modernist) literature. Additionally, the introductory part highlights major theoretical and methodological inputs that make this text unique, such as dismantling the binary between tradition and modernity and proposing the notion of the *promiscuous modern*, connecting how running away is interwoven with sexual transgression through the views of the Taliban and the state. The conclusion reveals the intellectual goal behind the project which is not to give voice to the women, but to talk about the ambivalent everyday struggles of the runaway women within the context of gendered piety in Afghanistan.

The first chapter, *Shelter*, delves into the structure of Khana-yi-aman and its ordinary operations in governing the everyday lives of the runaway women. The home was essentially viewed as a house for women who were categorized as adulterous or promiscuous and acted as a halfway house between prison and community reintegration. Ahsan-Tirmizi conveys a

paradox regarding this institution: on one hand, Taliban supporters believe that women's rights organizations protected promiscuous women and encouraged noncompliant sexual attitudes among them. Simultaneously, the Khana-yi-aman management was concerned about increasing Islamization in the shelter when “the inhabitants fully practiced the rituals of Islam through prayer, fasting, reciting the Quran and veiling” (22). Here, at Khana-yi-aman, the paradoxical ideas of piety and promiscuity come together to create a complex social environment women were forced to navigate.

Chapter two, *Portraits of Pain*, unfolds the heartwrenching stories, memories, and traumas of the inhabitants of Khana-yi-aman and the insecurities and pressures faced by those who run the shelter. The chapter conveys an emotional touch while conveying the narratives of each of the inhabitants in the shelter. The author argues that the vulnerable and complex histories of the runaway women are the result of long battles with families, the state, and the courts. Moreover, they take the risk of being called promiscuous along with inhabiting pious womanhood, and they try to redefine morality, love, marriage, and religious rights in unexpected ways.

The third chapter, *Poetic Risk*, is a closer look at everyday *landays* (short verses of Pashto poetry), which are sung by the Pashtun women in the shelter. Interestingly, anonymity (singing under a burqa), collective orality, and communitarian ownership behind the *landay* singing enable women to create alternative voices and freedom and to escape the patriarchal constraints as well as invoking themes of love, desire, departure, death, and abandonment. Furthermore, it can tell about the possibilities of multiple subject relationships, which are beyond the consolidation and destabilization of the normative structure, standing along with Bakhtin's idea of the dialogical self (1983). Theoretically, this oral culture among the shelter women interrogates the normative assumption on the illiterate Afghan women in the ways the poetry belongs to tradition, modernity and literature figures.

While there is a dominant assumption that the post-Taliban state affords new potentialities of selfhood to women, the fourth chapter, *Taliban's Women*, unveils the micro-histories of Taliban women. The chapter dwells upon two questions: how does the Taliban play a key role in shaping the life worlds of Afghan women, and what changed in their lives after the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and the installation of a secular democratic government? She argues that the Taliban have succeeded in universalizing a certain type of public piety aimed primarily at Afghan women rather than Afghan men, as well as in articulating women's citizenship through historical models of chastity, motherhood, and wifely devotion.

The fifth chapter, *Pedagogies of Womanhood*, explores the cultural paradox in the history of modern Afghan womanhood in which modern and secular notions of wilful independence and freedom, and Islamic and Pashtun conceptions of family, honor, gender, and sexuality come to the fore. It alludes to the fact that the modern Afghan woman of the 20th and 21st centuries is shaped by both gendered disciplinary and emancipatory mechanisms of the Taliban and the state, respectively. The main mechanisms were pedagogical Islamic texts, political and ethical ideas of the pan-Islamic movement, and literacy and secularism campaigns in which *vatan* (homeland) is perceived as a female and *millath* (nation) as a male. What makes this section different is the attempt by Ahsan-Tirmizi to link a wide array of Pashtun-based advice manuals

(*Adab* treatises) with its local understanding of Afghan Muslims. Finally, the author's response to her question, "what does the intellectual tradition of pious womanhood have to do with the self-conception of Afghan women today?" is that the relationships of Khana-yi-aman women and their daily negotiations are bounded with these didactic moral texts and the ideas they espoused.

The sixth chapter, *Subject of Honour*, attempts to understand honor discourses on Afghan women and its historical complexity with Islam and Pashtunwali, situated in the Foucauldian understanding of subjecthood. Ahsan-Tirmizi reads promiscuity as "the capacity for action" or risk as "an emancipatory potential." She investigates how Afghan women manipulate honor codes through various strategic means, rather than reducing honor studies to ideals of honor-modesty and honor-shame. Given local notions of promiscuity, Afghan women contest Pashtunwali honorable subjectivity by pushing themselves into a marginal space, the Khana-yi-aman.

In sum, the book is a contribution to scholarship on women who shape their own selfhoods differently and adds a new analytical category of promiscuity to the recent academic debates on piety, freedom, and subjecthood. Commenting on previous studies of Islam and the Taliban in Afghanistan, Nile Green observed that, "they lacked any firm footing in written or otherwise published sources by Taliban actors, a problem compounded by the fact very few scholars have ever studied Pashto" (Green 2017: 25). Ahsan-Tirmizi's work marks a break from this history. Last but not least, *Pious Peripheries* can be seen as a theoretical extension of the discourse of piety and agency with which Saba Mahmood engaged. Repeatedly, Ahsan-Tirmizi insists that "running away was not always an abandonment of tradition but rather an embrace of tradition but towards a different end" (5).

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