

Language, Legacy and *Landey*

I'll make a tattoo from my lover's blood / and shame every rose in the green garden

Introduction:

These are the words of Malalai, the Afghan woman hero who led a band of men against the British in the battle of Maiwand in 1880. The expressive force of her sentiments are captured in the Pashto *landey*, a haiku-like poetic genre as alive today as it was in the 19th century. Although once banned by the Taliban, these poems are crafted, memorized and sung widely in Afghanistan where oral poetry has long been an effective tool to address the public. Among Afghans in the diaspora oral culture remains a potent means of communication, and for some women the only way to express themselves. *Landey* poetry is widely recognized as a conduit for freedom of expression in Afghanistan.

In Afghan culture where women's voices command little public attention, the *landey* is one of the few channels available for women to confront social norms and address taboos. This subtle yet incisive poetic form is celebrated for its historical as well as contemporary challenges to injustice, in Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora. Language, Legacy and *Landey* (LLL) brings together contemporary *landeys* with historical ones recently uncovered in the National Library of Norway, through public events, digital media and multiple partnerships around Norway. The goal of this project is to encourage public conversation and civic engagement with Norwegians of all origins, recognizing the contribution of minority immigrants to the public debate, in particular youth and women.

Background:

Norwegians and Afghans have enjoyed a long history of mutual engagement. The eminent scholar Georg Morgenstierne first visited Afghanistan in 1924, initiating a lifelong study of the languages and cultures of the region. Among his unpublished materials is a collection of more than 150 Afghan *landeys*, recently uncovered in the National Library of Norway. These may be some of the oldest collected poems of this genre. This treasury of cultural heritage is a rich legacy for all Norwegians, and serves as a launching point for promoting freedom of expression for Norwegians from a Muslim minority community.

Poetry has formed the heart and soul of Afghan oral culture for centuries and the *landey* genre holds a distinctive position in this heritage. *Landeys* are anonymous, unrhymed couplets of limited syllable count, customarily recited and composed by women. *Landeys* continue to evolve by incorporating current social, political, and cultural themes. This popular genre is participative; poems are composed as well as delivered spontaneously. *Landeys* circulate widely in conversation, in print, and digitally. The format of the *musha'ira* – a poetry exchange event – gathers participants across social classes to stimulate public discourse on social inequities, mobility, migration, alienation, local and international politics.

While *landeys* are traditionally attributed anonymously to women, they may be written by anyone, often through the vehicle of women's voices. This perspective promotes broadening outlooks and greater social acceptability of women's role in the public sphere. Recognizing and giving voice to diverse viewpoints within communities is essential to breaking down social

barriers. The *musha'ira* poetry exchange is the ideal structure for civic conversations on gender, race, social justice, migration, economics and integration.

Language, Legacy and *Landey* envisions working with the Afghan community in Norway to stimulate public discourse through a series of inter-related activities: community events, digital platforms, and poster campaigns.

Project goals:

- To foster civic engagement in minority and immigrant communities
- To create public dialogue among Norwegians of all origins
- To recognize the value and contribution of minority populations to Norwegian society
- To give voice to women and youth through public expression

Activities:

There are two specific sets of activities that will achieve these goals: 1) Public poetry exchange events in Trondheim and Oslo, and 2) Translation, dissemination and public exhibition of *landey* poetry.

1) Public poetry exchange events in Oslo and Trondheim.

Musha'ira is the Afghan tradition of gathering poets to exchange composed and extemporaneous poems. It is an oral folk activity in which Afghan poets traditionally came together to compete for patronage of a given landowner, *khan*. Over time these events became a forum for engaging across social class, promoting an interface between previously unrelated groups of people. *Musha'iras* have become known as a 'poetic free-speech zone' where circles of poetic gatherings have been used to address socio-political inequalities. *Landey* poems in particular have been used to express social subversion, speaking out in poetic terms against gender conservatism, social injustice, and political problems. The format of the *musha'ira* poetry exchange is an ideal method to engage Afghans in free speech and social/political discussions. Poems recited are circulated face to face, through social media and at other gatherings.

The poetry exchange events in Oslo and Trondheim will be held at the Literaturhuset. The publicity for these events will be circulated through local media, social media (LLL), and networks of Afghans including the Afghanistan Embassy, student organizations, local mosques, the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee. The programs will include:

- Welcome by Afghan ambassador Mrs. Shukria Barakzai
- Address by Afghan community leaders
- Poems from Morgenstjerne's collection recited by Afghan and Norwegian Pashto speakers
- Attendees share composed and impromptu poems with translation into Norwegian and English / open mic style with audience participation
- Afghan members of LLL team supporting event as hosts and participants
- Refreshments
- Local Afghan musical performance
- Printed pamphlet handout describing the events, social media, calendar, and activities of LLL

- Audio and video recording in order to preserve all *landeys* which will be translated, transliterated and digitized on Bibliotheca Polyglotta

2) Translation, dissemination, and public display of *landey* poetry. In order to reach the widest possible audience and engage with Norwegians across the social spectrum LLL will make the *landeys* available to the public in multiple platforms. These activities include:

- Translation of *landey* poems collected by Morgenstjerne in the early 20th century along with a contemporary *landeys* collected from the Norwegian Afghan diaspora through *musha'ira* events and social media. The poems will be presented in Pashto, with translations in Norwegian and English. This will be the first time a collection of *landeys* are translated and published in Norwegian or any Scandinavian language.
- Digitization in Pashto, Norwegian and English, in transliteration and original script, added to the Bibliotheca Polyglotta digital humanities database on an ongoing basis throughout the project. All contributors will be credited.
- Afghanistan Week in March 2018, organized by the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC), brings Afghanistan to the top of the Norwegian agenda by organizing numerous public events with multiple strategic partners. LLL will participate in activities organized by NAC, organize a *musha'ira* poetry exchange event, display *landey* posters and publish articles about *landey* during Afghanistan Week.
- Public libraries poster campaign – creating posters with selected *landeys* in cooperation with the National Library. These posters will be distributed to public libraries throughout Norway for exhibition and displayed at Afghanistan Week.
- LLL website (www.landey.org) will be used along with the social media tools of Facebook, Twitter, Viber and other networking formats to mobilize poetry contributions, participation and events. Digital collection through social media will be used to gather *landeys* from contributors, with audio and text files. These formats will encourage those who attend events to share their ideas and widen the scope of contributors to include those who could not attend.
- Poetry in Public Spaces. Selected *landeys* will be displayed in original and translation on posters on the trikk, for one month.
- Public reading seminar in Pashto. A public reading of *landeys* to be held in the Krohg Room at the Town Hall (Rådhuset) in Oslo. Pashto speakers (with a focus on women and youth) will recite and translate poems to the general public including journalists, political figures, public intellectuals and scholars. This public opportunity provides Afghans a platform in which to showcase their political poetry to the Norwegian audience. We expect to work with NRK to publicize, document and broadcast this cross-cultural event.
- Publicity will be sought in the form of social media, broadcast and print journalism, press releases, interviews and articles in multiple media sources.
- Cooperation with TV and radio broadcasters (NRK). We consider an active engagement with the media crucial for this project. In addition to making press releases and making the project known to hosts of well-known radio and TV-programs in Norway, we will suggest that NRK document the *landey* project's activities and events in audio and video format, including interviews with contributing researchers, poets, partners, participants, and Norwegian policy makers.