

Instructors' Guide to Incorporating Landay in the Classroom

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INSTRUCTOR:

1)Familiarize yourself with the basics of the Landay below (instructor Primer). Since this is for a one-shot, one primary source is used*. Build your own or find other Landays on the internet or through suggested sources.

2)Create your own activity as relates, intersects, or connects to your primary subject matter or activity, with entry through theme, tone or trope (for example: for a writing activity during Women's Month, introduce a group/students to the Landay, its context, and have participants make their own on some issue related to Women's rights. For example: For a class on writing of the oppressed, arrange into a module and have them do group presentations/readings.)

3) 10 plug-and-play ACTIVITY TOOLBOX:

A)Go to the table of 34 sample Landays below. Sort by Trope if desired, and curate based on your class or activity, or choose one for group example or have students/participants pick their favorites.

B)Have them read the context section from the Poetry Foundation article relevant to that Landay / Trope (if a course with sufficient time, consider having students read the entire article/and or supplemental sources).

C) 10 Activities: Have participants (as groups or individuals):

C1)Read, discuss, and interpret the Landay(s) assigned.

C2)Have them reflect on why they chose a particular one.

C3)Have them present on how it fits the spirit of Landays, the common tone, the 5 Typical tropes and why it impacted them.

C4)Have them read the Landay of choice and then create their own Landay on that trope or idea that relates or resonates personally to them.

C5)Have them connect their choice to some social issue/condition/personal situation in their lives or in American society.

C6)Have them relate the Landay to a quote, a movie scene, portion of a song, another poem they feel 'is in family' to the poem's sentiment.

C7)Have them riff, male to female roles, in Landays from table in the call and response style.

C8)Have students google for poems on similar topics.

C9)Have students explore the context of the poem versus that poetry of another country's poetry in wartime, occupation, etc.

C10)Have students explore the trope or theme or tone in the poetry of a different occupied or oppressed group by searching for proper google terms to mine existing writing from the occupied or oppressed group (eg search terms such as: poetry of African refugees, poetry of immigration, poetry of illegal immigrants, gay poetry in

modern Russia, queer muslim poetry, poetry of arranged marriage, domestic violence poetry, men's liberation poetry, poetry of prisoners, poetry of abused children, poetry of drug addicted, etc) and report back on compare/contrast, similarities, themes, reflection.

INSTRUCTOR PRIMER: WOMEN'S RESISTANCE POETRY OF AFGHANISTAN: A PRIMER for use in your activities

"One day in the spring of 2010, Rahila Muska [her PEN name, not real name] phoned her fellow [hidden] [women] poets from a hospital bed in the southeastern city of Kandahar to say that she'd set herself on fire. She'd burned herself in protest. Her brothers had beaten her badly after discovering her writing poems. Poetry — especially love poetry — is forbidden to many of Afghanistan's women: it implies dishonor and free will. Both are unsavory [and punishable] for women in traditional Afghan culture. Soon after, Muska died."

A landay — 22 SYLLABLES: an oral and often anonymous scrap of song created by and for mostly illiterate [and/or rural] people ('in contrast to the high literary forms that derive from Persian or Arabic') : the more than twenty million Pashtun women who span the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan

'it's what rap or poetry slam language or punk or rebel country is to hallmark card or literary poetry'—MF

--"a kind of two-line lullaby that belies the sharpness of their content"

-- "distinctive for its beauty, wit and bawdiness",

--common TONE:

- 1)"express a collective fury,
- 2)a lament, [in love but married off]
- 3)an earthy joke, [in 'heat' but the men are cowards]
- 4)a love of home,
- 5)a longing for the end of separation, [my love off to war or pious education]
- 6)a call to arms" [fight the Americans bravely / fight the Taliban bravely]

Usually on one of the 5 common tropes

COMMON TROPES/COMMON TOPICS or THEMES: "Articulates a common truth about":

- 1)war,
- 2)separation,
- 3)homeland,
- 4)grief,
- 5)love.

Within these five main tropes, the couplets express a collective fury, a lament, an earthy joke, a love of home, a longing for the end of separation, a call to arms, all of which frustrate any facile image of a Pashtun woman as nothing but a mute ghost beneath a blue burqa

Call and Response: the call and response nature of landays has morphed into teasing and sparring love poems between men and women; a kind of stichomythia that rivals that of ancient Greece. Then, in friendly competition around a fire in the evening — or on a couch in a sitting room in Kabul over after-dinner tea — a spirited rivalry will spring up between singers who try to outdo one another with poems

In Afghan culture, poetry is revered, particularly the high literary forms that derive from Persian or Arabic. But the poem above is a folk couplet — a landay — an oral and often anonymous scrap of song created by and for mostly illiterate people: the more than twenty million Pashtun women who span the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Traditionally, landays are sung aloud, often to the beat of a hand drum, which, along with other kinds of music, was banned by the Taliban from 1996 to 2001, and in some places, still is.

A Landay has only a few formal properties. Each has twenty-two syllables: nine in the first line, thirteen in the second. The poem ends with the sound “ma” or “na.” Sometimes they rhyme, but more often not. In Pashto, they lilt internally from word to word in a kind of two-line lullaby that belies the sharpness of their content, which is distinctive not only for its beauty, bawdiness, and wit, but also for the piercing ability to articulate a common truth about war, separation, homeland, grief, or love. Within these five main tropes, the couplets express a collective fury, a lament, an earthy joke, a love of home, a longing for the end of separation, a call to arms, all of which frustrate any facile image of a Pashtun woman as nothing but a mute ghost beneath a blue burqa.

LANDAY*	*Relevant narrative section from Poetry Foundation source	*TROPE
<p>What have you done to me, my God?</p> <p>1 Others have blossomed. I stay tight as a bud.</p>	<p>This is a lament of an unmarried girl who is growing older and fearful of becoming unchosen, unmarried, and therefore anathema and valueless in Pashtun society</p>	
<p>2 Bush, don't be so proud of your armored car.</p> <p>My remoti bomb will blow it to bits from afar.</p>	<p>they reflect a fed-upness with foreign occupation and a deepening terror of living under the threat of drone strikes. What I found, especially among women who'd had to flee bombing raids, or lost family members, whether Taliban fighters or farmers, is that they were singing about their hatred of Americans and support</p>	WAR

the Taliban merely in reaction to all they'd endured in our twelve-year war.

Remoti, which means remote control, applies to both remote control bombs and to unmanned aircraft, or drones. The second landay, scrawled on a metal fragment, was posted on Facebook with a comment saying that this was a piece of an mrap, a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle used by the U.S. military, a modern-day tank. According to the Facebook post, the Afghan Taliban left this landay on the torn-off door of an mrap that they'd blown up in Tangi Valley in 2009 for U.S. forces to find.

3 May God destroy the Taliban and end their wars.

They've made Afghan women widows and whores.

WAR

4 Hamid Karzai came to Kabul to teach our girls to dress in Dollars.

Hamid Karzai, the President of Afghanistan since 2001, is a hugely unpopular figure among Afghans. He's widely seen as corrupt, even among his fellow ethnic Pashtuns, who also believe that he has sold the country out to American interests while promoting only his own. Here dollars are both a brand of clothing and a form of corruption. "Dollar," like "Hillary Clinton," "Bush," and even "Titanic," is a popular clothing label that Kabul tailors sew into suits.

CORRUPTION / WAR-MONGERING

I call. You're stone.
5 One day you'll look and find I'm gone

The teenage poet who uttered this folk poem called herself Rahila Muska. She lived in Helmand, a Taliban stronghold and one of the most restive of Afghanistan's thirty-four provinces since the U.S. invasion began on October 7, 2001. Muska, like many young and rural Afghan women, wasn't allowed to leave her home. Fearing that she'd be kidnapped or raped by warlords, her father pulled her out of school after the fifth grade. Poetry, which she learned from other women and on the radio, became her only form of education.

You sold me to an old man,
6 father.
May God destroy your home, I was your daughter.

Rahila Muska often recited landays over the phone to the women of Mirman Baheer. This is common: of the tens of thousands of landays in circulation, the handful a woman remembers relate to her life. Landays survive because they belong to no one. Unlike her notebooks, the little poem couldn't be ripped up and destroyed by Muska's father.

Making love to an old man
7 is like fucking a shriveled cornstalk blackened by mold.

It wasn't until later when Asma's uncle drew us a picture of a healthy, young cornstalk next to a decaying, blighted one that we — or rather, I — understood what the landay meant

8 When sisters sit together, they always praise their brothers.
When brothers sit together, they sell their sisters to others.

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

Its themes: war — jang; a woman's pride in her lover's courage and in his willingness to sacrifice himself for homeland — watan; love — meena; separation — biltoon; grief — gham, are the five most common currents that run through these poems. In addition, this landay mentions a tattoo — khal — which women used to receive at birth to ward off the evil eye. These days, baby girls are much less likely to be tattooed, as the practice is considered superstitious and un-Islamic. The faces of older Pashtun women, however, are dotted with these rough-hewn circles, moons, and flowers: living reminders of another time

10 Unlucky you who didn't come last night,
I took the bed's hard wood post for a man.

Many landays use sex and war to tease men about their cowardice in bed and in battle. This is one of the ways in which Pashtun women undermine the social code through these folk poems: simultaneously seducing men and mocking their weakness at the very skills with which they're supposed to display the greatest strength

11 Girl:
Slide your hand inside my bra.
Stroke a red and ripening pomegranate of Kandahar.

Boy:
I'd slide my hand inside your bra,

This a very old landay that has been remixed: the word "sleeve" here has been replaced by "bra strap" in Pashto... the birthplace of the Taliban. Despite the rigidity on the surface, women's rebellion simmers underneath. Landays are its foremost form of expression. Since they are collective and anonymous, a woman can't be held responsible for repeating them.... In the

but who will drop coins in the attendant's jar?

second couplet, the man responds by saying that he can't afford to touch the woman's bra, since that would require that he perform ablutions afterward to purify himself. Who, he asks, will pay the fee for him to use the bathroom? It's a clever ripost to a bold woman's dare

I call. You're stone.

12 One day you'll look and find I'm gone.

For God's sake, I'll give you a kiss.

13 Stop shaking my pitcher and wetting my dress!

14 Come, let's lie thigh against thigh.

If you climb on top, I won't cry.

15 Your eyes aren't eyes. They're bees.

I can find no cure for their sting

16 How much simpler can love be?
Let's get engaged now. Text me.

Traditionally in landays and in Pashtun society the riverbank, or godar, where women gather water is the place of romance. Men are forbidden from going to the godar, but they frequently sneak looks at their crushes coming and going from the riverbank. Many rural Pashtun women believe that the internet's sole purpose is for matchmaking. The second landay here refers to another burgeoning technology: an estimated seventeen million

Afghans — out of twenty-five million total — have mobile phones

17 I could have tasted death for a taste of your tongue, watching you eat ice cream when we were young.

18 Of water I can't even have a taste. My lover's name, written on my heart, will be erased.

Girl:

When you kissed me, you bit me,

What will my mother say?

Boy:

Give your mother this answer:

I went to fetch water and fell by the river.

19

Girl:

Your jug isn't broken, my mother will say,

so why is your bottom lip bleeding that way?

Boy:

Tell your mother this one:

My jug fell on clay, I fell on stone.

The call and response nature of landays has morphed into teasing and sparring love poems between men and women; a kind of stichomythia that rivals that of ancient Greece. Although it's possible that a woman might sing one part and a man another, they're not really antiphonal. It's more likely that one singer will recite the entire series to the beat of a drum. Then, in friendly competition around a fire in the evening — or on a couch in a sitting room in Kabul over after-dinner tea — a spirited rivalry will spring up between singers who try to outdo one another with poems

Girl:

You have all my mother's
answers, sweet.

Now take my raw mouth — bon
appétit!

20 Make a hole [portal] in
Facebook and plant me one
[kiss].

Tell your mother, "I've been
bitten by a scorpion."

One of the most often repeated words in landays is musafir — traveler — which essentially describes anyone far from home, including Afghans who leave the country for education, to make a living, or to escape war. On Facebook the landays are frequently wistful both for the country itself and for a time before war when men and women were free to interact openly.

21 Send my salams to my lover.
If he's a farter, I fart louder.

Among Afghans, farting is far more embarrassing and shameful than it is in the West. There's a folktale about a man who farts by mistake in front of his family and out of shame leaves home for twenty years. When he returns, he stands outside the door and hears his wife exhorting his children never to be farters like their father. He leaves home for another twenty years.

22 I tried to kiss you in secret but
you're bald!
Your bare skull thumped against
the wall.

Marhabo, mother of eleven children, made up the second landay on the spot to tease the photographer, Seamus Murphy. Pashtun women aren't shy about teasing men — as long as they're not going to get caught doing it.

- 23 You'll never be a mullah, Talib,
no matter what you do.
Studying your book, you see my
green tattoo
- 24 I'm in love! I won't deny it, even
if
you gouge out my green tattoos
with a knife.
- 25 My lover is fair as an American
soldier can be.
To him I looked dark as a Talib,
so he martyred me.
- 26 O darling, you're American in
my eyes.
You are guilty; I apologize
- 27 Because my love's American,
blisters blossom on my heart.
- 28 I dream I am the president.
- A Talib simply means a religious student. In this story, a Talib falls in love with a beautiful woman who distracts him from his studies. Almost every woman I interviewed knew this landay, but not where it came from. Since the rise of the Taliban regime and their religious edicts against women, this poem is associated with Taliban hypocrisy: they pose as pious while raping women and boys.
- For Pashtun women, romantic love is verboten. Even at her wedding a good Pashtun girl scowls to show she has no interest in the man she's about to marry. If she's discovered to be in love, she can be killed or wind up killing herself,
- The word Angrez, or English, is still shorthand for any foreigner. Slowly the word American is taking its place. The second is popular on the radio and Facebook now. All soldiers, be they Spanish, British, Italian, are called American.
- Ashaba, an elderly woman in Samar Khel Tagaw, a refugee camp about ten miles east of

When I awake, I am the beggar
of the world

Jalalabad, repeated this landay to me. Her husband lay dying in the next room and she was terrified of what would happen to her after his death. Without him she feared she would lose her place in the world.

29 Be black with gunpowder or
blood-red
but don't come home whole and
disgrace my bed

30 My body is fresh as henna leaf:
green outside; inside, raw meat

A bride, her hand woven with henna designs, shared this landay with me as we waited for her husband's family to fetch her on her wedding night. We sat in a small room with all of her sisters on the second floor of her father's home and listened for the husband's family to come up the stairs. Although it was a happy occasion, the poem's ambivalence speaks to her anxiety at leaving her childhood home. In her husband's house, she will serve her mother-in-law.

31 My body belongs to me;
to others its mastery.

32 I'm tired of praising exotic
flowers.
I miss Sangin's gardens; they
were poor but ours.

33 The drones have come to the
Afghan sky.

The mouths of our rockets will
sound in reply.

Separation, you set fire

34 in the heart and home of every
lover.