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Licit magic in Pashto: artistry and ethnicity in the verses of two classical Pashtun poets

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Abstract

Regular remarks of early modern Pashtun authors about the language of their literary works and their ethnicity may be read as an attempt to confirm a distinct place for Pashto writings in the Persophone cultural space and also as an echo of the then-ongoing discourse on Pashtun identity. This article examines the verses of Ashraf Khān Khaṭāk (d. 1694) and Kāzīm Khān Khaṭāk (d. 1780), who sporadically pondered on artistry and ethnicity as intertwined issues within the framework of the classical genre of self-praise (*fakhriyya*) and left critical essays on Pashto poetry in the forms of *qaṣīda* and *maṣnawī*. By drawing on Persian poetic traditions, these authors contributed much to the emerging literary criticism in Pashto by sophisticating the discussion of poetic art in their native language. While Ashraf elaborated on the idea of poetry as ‘licit magic’, Kāzīm tried to explain the advantages of the ‘new manner’, which is now commonly known as the ‘Indian style’, for the intellectual progress of both Pashtun litterateurs and their readers. The available details from the poets’ biographies and their occasional statements also indicate that the declarative ethnic self-identification of Pashtun men of letters was intrinsically linked to tribalist ideologies.

Keywords: early modernity; Indo-Persian literature; literary criticism; Mughal empire; Pashto poetry; Pashtun identity; tribalism

Throughout the early modern period in the history of Pashto literature, many Pashtun authors tended to accentuate the fact that they were writing their works in their native language. Emphasised mentions of Pashto as a means of creative writing and various remarks on Pashto verse constituted a noticeable motif in poetical texts that can be formally attributed to the classical genre of authorial self-reflections and self-praises (*fakhriyya*). The main reasons for addressing these and similar topics, which are essentially pertaining to literary criticism, lay in the initially subordinate, peripheral status of written Pashto compared with Persian—the dominant literary idiom of the vast Persophone space. To assure themselves and their educated though fairly small readership that Pashto deserved the reputation of an acknowledged regional language with distinctive literary traditions, Pashtun authors felt it necessary to articulate this idea regularly and more pronouncedly.

From a broader socio-historical perspective, the persistent mentioning of the Pashto language by early modern Pashtun authors may also be understood as being evidence of the then-ongoing discourse on Pashtun identity and its fundamental criteria. It is very likely that casual discussions of these matters came to be more meaningful and

politically motivated during the reign of the Lodī Dynasty (1451–1526) in the Delhi Sultanate. However, it was not until the beginning of the seventeenth century that the first work on the ethnohistory of Pashtuns appeared in the large Indo-Afghan diaspora. Written in Persian by the court secretary Ni‘matallāh Harawī (d. after 1615) on the initiative of the Indo-Afghan noble Haybat Khān Kākar, the book *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī wa Makhzan-i Afghānī* (1613) offered detailed and in many ways unique data—although partly mythohistorical and hagiographical—that concerned the genealogical and confessional aspects of Pashtun identity.¹ Its linguistic criterion, commonly known under the emic notion of ‘speaking Pashto’ (*pašto wayəl*), manifested itself, first, in the very rise of Pashto literature in the following decades of the seventeenth century and, second, in Pashtun poets’ occasional notes on their contribution to the progress of the Pashto language and writings. At present, it is evidently the linguistic criterion that is perceived by the Pashtuns themselves as being the strongest pillar of their identity.² According to Raj Wali Shah Khattak (1952–2015), the former director of Pashto Academy of Peshawar University: ‘The existence of the Pakhtun nation is due to its language Pashto [...] Pashto is like a qualification and those who qualify deserve the title of “Pakhtun”’.³

Many of the seventeenth-century Pashtun poets who associated themselves with the Roshāniyya religious community were sporadically reminiscent about the language of their spiritual homilies, above all to affirm the role of written Pashto as a legitimate medium through which to discuss and disseminate Islamic tenets, which, for centuries, had been verbalised in Arabic and Persian. Their unconcealed ethnic sentiments, as well as the natural excitement of creative individuals who embarked on discovering the literary potential of their native vernacular and pioneered the art of using it when composing sophisticated verses, should not be ignored either.⁴ The references to Pashto by early litterateurs also prove that, in the first half of the seventeenth century, the written form of Pashto was still regarded as relatively novel. The Roshānīs’ tentative attempts to legitimise spiritual—philosophical and didactical—poetry in Pashto within the Persophone intellectual culture were immediately followed by the prolific creative activity

¹ These aspects are expounded in the opening mythohistorical parts and in the genealogical and hagiographical sections of the book (Ni‘matallāh Ibn Ḥabīballāh al-Harawī, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī wa Makhzan-i Afghānī*, (ed.) S. M. Imāmuddin, 2 vols (Dacca, 1960–1962), pp. 10–125, 548–650, 707–831); for an English translation of the book’s abridged version, see B. Dorn, *History of the Afghans: Translated from the Persian of Neamet Ullah*, 2 parts (London, 1836).

² Focused discussions of self-identity issues have become a recurring matter in didactic and scholarly works by Pashtun intellectuals since the mid-twentieth century. An indigenous perception of two basic components of Pashtun identity is formulated in ‘Abdallāh Bakhtānāy’s (1925–2017) essay with a hint at Islamic legal norms of evidence as follows: ‘Speaking Pashto (*pašto wayəl*) and doing Pashto (*pašto kawəl*) are two righteous witnesses (*ādil shāhidān*) who can confirm the claim of Pashtuns to Pashtun-ness (*paštunwali*). The one is called Pashtun who does Pashto like he speaks Pashto’ (‘Abdallah Bakhtanay, *Paštani khoyūna* (Kabul, 1955), p. 1). A little later, this emic principle was introduced into scholarship by F. Barth (1928–2016), who, nevertheless, combined doing and speaking Pashto under the single heading of ‘Pathan custom’, admitting that the Pashto language is a ‘necessary and diacritical feature’ of Pashtun identity (F. Barth, ‘Pathan identity and its maintenance’, in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, (ed.) F. Barth (Boston, 1969), p. 119).

³ Raj Wali Shah Khattak, *An Introduction to Pakhtun Culture: A Collection of Essays* (Peshawar, 2010), pp. 29–30. For a brief summary of the discourse on Pashto as a subject of ‘politics of language and identity’, see e.g. L. N. Bartlotti, ‘Modern written Pashto literature’, in *Oral Literature of Iranian Languages: Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic, Persian and Tajik. Companion Volume II to A History of Persian Literature (A History of Persian Literature, vol. 18, (ed.) E. Yarshater)*, (eds.) Ph. G. Kreyenbroek and U. Marzolph (London and New York, 2010), pp. 130–132.

⁴ For an alternative interpretation of the Roshānī poets’ attitude towards Pashto as ‘a divine and revelatory language’, see W. E. B. Sherman, ‘In the garden of language: religion, vernacularization, and the Pashto poetry of Arzānī in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’, *Afghanistan* 5 (2022), pp. 122–147; and also chapter 4 in W. E. B. Sherman, *Singing with the Mountains: The Language of God in the Afghan Highlands* (New York, 2024), pp. 118–150.

of Khushhāl Khān Khatak (1613–1689), who explicitly declared the emergence of Pashto literature as both an established practice of writing multifunctional works that were intended for Pashto-speaking readership and a vivid manifestation of literacy and learning among his fellow countrymen. In the lyrics and notes on the art of poetry (*hunar dā shi' r dā nazm*) in his didactical essay *Dastār-nāma* (1665), Khushhāl Khān considered some basic aspects that were related to poetics in general and Pashto writings in particular, and, thus, outlined key topics for further discussions in this field.⁵

Later Pashtun authors continued to touch upon the same subjects, though mostly in passing and briefly. By employing exaggerated *fakhriyya* rhetoric, they routinely exalted their personal contribution to the development of Pashto poetry and at times condescendingly remarked about other celebrated litterateurs as if taking part in an imaginary poetical contest (*mushā'ara*). For example, the contemplative lyricist 'Abd al-Raḥmān Momand (Raḥmān Bābā, d. after 1711), who gained the widest popularity among Pashtuns for his humanistic pacifying philosophies, did not hesitate to resort to the haughty *fakhriyya* diction when comparing himself to the renowned Pashto poets: 'Khushhāl [Khatak] and Dawlat [Lohāñay] are the slaves of mine; / I, Raḥmān, am a world conqueror in [the realm] of the Pashto language.'⁶ In another poem, he asserted: 'To fill the country of the Afghans with aroma, / I made each line of my verses a ringlet of beauties.'⁷ Disputing in absentia with Raḥmān, Khushhāl's son and gifted poet 'Abd al-Qādir Khān Khatak (1653–d. after 1713) counterposed himself against the prominent Momand poet in a verse that also underscored their different tribal affiliations: 'I, Khatak, am turning fresh and vigorous in longing for the Beloved / while Raḥmān of the Ghoryakhels has become exhausted of it.'⁸ 'Abd al-Qādir argued for his father when he stated that the latter had 'made the Pashto language sweeter than Persian though it had been bitter before' and challenged other poets by using a standard rhetorical question: 'Who will ever respond in Pashto / to this *ghazal* sung by 'Abd al-Qādir?''⁹

Unlike most other Pashtun litterateurs of the period, two notable authors, both also of Khatak descent, demonstrated a more profound interest and scholarly approach to the debate that had been initiated by Khushhāl Khān on the art of poetry and writing in Pashto. The first of them was Khushhāl's eldest son Ashraf Khān (1635–1694), who left, alongside many *fakhriyya* verses that were distinguished by a strong personal touch, a poem (*qaṣida*) of 41 distiches that was entirely focused on the critical assessment of Pashto poetry. Several decades later, Kāzim Khān Shaydā (d. 1780) reanimated this discussion in his much longer poetical essay of 158 distiches. Composed in the *maṣnawī* form, this work bears the telling title 'The state of Pashto poetry' (*dā pašto dā shi' r ḥasb-i ḥāl*) and appears to be an indirect response to Ashraf Khān's earlier poem.

This article examines Ashraf's and Kāzim's contributions to the discourse on literary criticism in early modern Pashto literature by scrutinising their verses in the *fakhriyya* genre and the above-mentioned essays. It surveys the authors' reflections on various aspects of poetic art, their critical judgements about the progress of creative writing in Pashto, their self-appraisals, as well as the biographical facts that shaped their artistic vision. Despite the abundance of the traditional *fakhriyya* rhetoric, the verses of both poets reveal their concern with the ethnicity issues that are considered in the article

⁵ See M. Pelevin, 'The inception of literary criticism in early modern Pashto writings', *Iranian Studies* 54 (2021), pp. 955–971.

⁶ 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Dīwān*, (ed.) M. 'Abd al-Qādir (Peshawar, 1963), p. 73.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁸ 'Abd al-Qādir Khatak, *Dīwān: Ḥadiqa-yi Khatak*, (ed.) S. Anwār al-Ḥaqq (Peshawar, 1969), p. 175. The Khataks belong to the Karlāñay branch of the Pashtun genealogical tree, while the Momands are a division of the Ghoryakhel group, which is a part of the Saibanay branch.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 105.

as a corollary of their tribalist ideologies and natural search for self-identity in the multi-ethnic Mughal empire.

Ashraf Khān Hijrī and his prison lyrics

As both an experienced tribal leader and a creative poet, Ashraf Khān Khaṭak was one of the most remarkable personalities in Pashtuns' history and culture of the seventeenth century. However, he still remains in the shadow of Khushḥāl Khān, largely because the vicissitudes of his military-administrative career and many features of his literary work strongly resemble those of Khushḥāl.¹⁰ A decisive difference between their life stories is that Khushḥāl succeeded his father Shahbāz Khān in the chieftainship after the latter died of a combat wound in early 1641 when there were no other overt contenders for power in the tribe, whereas Ashraf began to govern the Khaṭak territories as a temporary ruler in 1664 after Khushḥāl Khān was arrested by the Mughal imperial authorities and dispatched to India (Delhi and then Ranthambhore Fort to the south-east of Jaipur), where he spent five years until his return to the homeland in 1668/1669. On account of a lingering contest for political leadership in the tribe, which was provoked by Khushḥāl's arrest and only intensified after his coming back, Ashraf Khān always exercised tribal authority in an extremely competitive environment.

From the available sources—Khushḥāl Khān's verses and narratives in 'The Khaṭaks' Chronicle'—it is not very clear exactly how Khushḥāl and Ashraf shared administrative power in the tribe from 1669 to 1672, when the former officially announced his break with the Mughals and reneged on his vassal obligations by relinquishing his titles of the Mughal officer (*manṣabdār*) and the holder of a fief (*jāgīrdār*) in favour of Ashraf.¹¹ Khushḥāl's decision appears to have been caused not so much by the beginning of the large-scale Mughal–Afghan war in the spring of 1672 as by the fact that, in this year, the increasing disagreements in the Khaṭak ruling family over leadership turned into a severe long-term conflict with recurrent military confrontations. The conflict was initiated by Khushḥāl's third son and Ashraf's full brother Bahrām Khān (1643–1712), who enlisted support from some of his relatives, the leading Khaṭak clans, and the Mughal officials of Kabul province. Ignoring the principle of primogeniture that was advocated by Khushḥāl, Bahrām challenged the supremacy of his father and elder brother.

Fragmentary details of the intricate story of political struggle and armed clashes among the Khaṭak elite and Ashraf Khān's involvement in these events can be gleaned from the records of 'The Khaṭaks' Chronicle'. In 1673, Ashraf ceded chieftaincy to Bahrām but regained it by force during the following year, with the help of Khushḥāl Khān's detachments. After the Mughal–Afghan war, he gradually distanced himself from his father, seeking a more advantageous position in his ambiguous relationship with the Mughals. By 1680, his disputes with Khushḥāl Khān over the control of Taray-Bolāq—the southern parts of the Khaṭak domain—even escalated into occasional military skirmishes. According to Afzal Khān (1665/1666–1740/1741), who was Ashraf's eldest son and the compiler of the 'Chronicle', during the period of higher tension between his father and grandfather, the latter proclaimed him a legitimate successor to the Khaṭak chieftaincy and performed an improvised investiture ceremony by bestowing on him a 'turban of power'.¹² Khushḥāl Khān's strong discontent with his eldest son during this period is clearly expressed in a series of his poetic invectives against Ashraf.

¹⁰ For a study of Ashraf Khān's life and works, see Z. Andzor, *Də zandzīrūno shā'ir Ashraf Khān Hijrī: Də Hijrī zhwandlik* (Kabul, 1985).

¹¹ The two mentioned sources are Khushḥāl Khān Khaṭak, *Kulliyāt*, (ed.) D. M. Kāmil Momand (Peshawar, 1952); and Afzal Khān Khaṭak, *Tārikh-i muraṣṣa'*, (ed.) D. M. Kāmil Momand (Peshawar, 1974), pp. 254–513.

¹² Afzal, *Tārikh-i muraṣṣa'*, p. 350.

Although Afzal asserts in the ‘Chronicle’ that his father never displayed any disrespect and unfriendliness towards ‘honourable Khān’, Khushhāl brusquely disparaged Ashraf in verses for his alleged cowardice and greediness—the two most despised qualities in the Pashtun unwritten code of honour, which was an important part of Pashtunwali.¹³

In 1681, for a number of reasons, including incessant disturbances in the Khaṭak territories and continuous intrigues of his main opponent Bahrām Khān, Ashraf Khān fell into disgrace with the Mughal governor of Kabul province and repeated the fate of his father though with a more tragic finale. During a regular visit to Peshawar, he was unexpectedly arrested under the pretext of disloyalty and deported to India as a political prisoner.¹⁴ However, unlike Khushhāl Khān, Ashraf failed to obtain a pardon and permission to return home. He remained imprisoned, first in the fort of Gwāliyār (present-day Gwalior in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh) and then in the fort of Bijāpūr (present-day Vijayapura in the state of Karnataka) until his death in 1694. After the arrest of Ashraf, Bahrām Khān’s faction gained the upper hand in the long struggle for power and the Khaṭak tribal assembly (*jirga*) voted for Bahrām as a new ruler. Afzal affirms in the ‘Chronicle’ that Bahrām, in order to be elected, pledged to take all possible means to seek the release of Ashraf Khān but eventually neglected his promises.¹⁵

It is very likely that most of the lyrics that Ashraf left were written during the 14-year period of his detention in India (1681–1694). Many of his poems are replete with a variety of motifs that pertain to the genre of prison poetry (*ḥabsiyya*), the emergence of which is commonly associated with the works of the medieval Persian poet Mas‘ūd Sa‘d Salmān (d. 1121) of Lahore.¹⁶ It is for this reason that Ashraf Khān chose the epithet ‘Hijrī’ (‘separated’) as his main literary name (*takhalluṣ*).¹⁷ Although the majority of his *ḥabsiyya* verses are love lyrics that are written in a traditional manner with extensive use of clichéd phrasings, the very spirit of Ashraf Khān’s poetry derives from his father’s artistic vision, which is foremost in what concerns the poetical expression of genuine feelings and thoughts that are prompted by the realities of personal life in particular societal environments and circumstances. Following his father’s literary approach, for example, Ashraf composed an autobiographical poem that reports some concrete facts of his life and reads, to a certain extent, as a kind of penance (*tawba*), thus also alluding to the classical genre of ascetic poetry (*zuhdiyya*). Ashraf seems to be responding here to Khushhāl Khān’s earlier poetical reproaches that were addressed to him, as he avows that he preferred avarice to reputation and honour (*nām-u nang*), and too eagerly became involved in a fratricidal conflict in which he discredited himself by having rudely offended his father.¹⁸ His four touching elegies (*marṣiya*) to Khushhāl Khān, despite an inevitable portion of embellished hyperboles, demonstrate his sincere respect and affection towards his father and offer a fairly accurate evaluation of Khushhāl’s outstanding personality and substantial contribution to Pashtun culture.¹⁹

¹³ Khushhāl, *Kulliyāt*, pp. 586–587, 831, 844.

¹⁴ Afzal, *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣa‘*, p. 493.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ See e.g. S. Sharma, *Persian Poetry at the Indian Frontier: Mas‘ūd Sa‘d Salmān of Lahore* (New Delhi, 2000), pp. 68–106.

¹⁷ His other two poetical signatures are ‘Khaṭak’ and ‘Rohī’ (‘the one from Roh’), the latter being an adjective from the historical toponym ‘Roh’ that was used in early modern times in India as a designation of the Pashtun tribal areas (Paštūnkhwā). On Roh, see H. G. Raverty, *Notes on Afghanistan and Part of Baluchistan, Geographical, Ethnographical, and Historical* (London, 1888), p. 657; O. Caroe, *The Pathans 550 B. C. – A. D. 1957* (London, 1958), p. 439; J. J. L. Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire c. 1710–1780* (Leiden, New York, and Köln, 1995), pp. 9–10, 104–113.

¹⁸ Ashraf Khān Hijrī, *Dīwān*, (ed.) H. Khalīl (Peshawar, 1958), pp. 93–96.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 139–141, 142–148, 535–536, 547–548.

While living under custody in India, Ashraf Khān regularly corresponded with his relatives, as proven by his own occasional mentions of a ‘messenger from Roh’ (*qāṣid la Roha*) or a ‘messenger from the homeland’ (*qāṣid da waṭan*), and of letters that he received from his friends and beloved. Two of his long poems (65 and 57 distiches) are written as conversations with such a messenger about the current situation in the Khaṭak tribe.²⁰ Detailed and very emotive discussions of real people and events make these poems important historical documents that, together with Ashraf’s other poetical pieces that deal with similar issues, should be included in the small body of authentic sources in Pashto that cover the developments in Pashtun tribal areas during this period. Ashraf Khān’s arrest and imprisonment compelled Khushhāl Khān to change his former negative feelings towards his son into compassion and solidarity. In a *ghazal* that was written in response to a letter sent by Ashraf at the very beginning of his exile in India, Khushhāl says:

Ashraf Khān has written to me,
and I am very happy with his letter!
[He writes,] ‘I have been in prison for five months now
and, father, I am so heartbroken!’
O my son, I was very worried about you.
I am well only if you are well²¹

Undoubtedly, it is due to Ashraf’s unimpeded contact with his family via couriers and correspondence that his literary work has been rather well preserved in the archives of the Khaṭak chieftains.

Among the most conspicuous motifs of Ashraf Khān’s prison lyrics are his nostalgic memories of the Khaṭak homeland (*waṭan*) and reflections on the art of poetry that were entwined with traditional authorial self-praises. In the writings of a Pashtun tribal ruler who shared Khushhāl Khān’s worldview and literary aesthetics, these motifs were connected with the discourse on ethnic self-identity. Ashraf Khān’s views on poetry and personal achievements in Pashto literature are articulated both in a number of monothematic pieces and in numerous single lines in poems on other topics. Ashraf’s monothematic poems on the art of poetry and related subjects are mostly written in the form of imaginary dialogues. The poet discusses relevant matters with either his mind (*aql*) or his heart (*zrā*) or Heaven (*sipihr*, *gardūn*) or an Angel (*malak*) seen in a dream or simply ‘someone’ (*yaw tsok*). The dialogical form of lyrical meditations—a conversation with oneself—is a distinctive stylistic trait of Ashraf Khān’s poetry in general. This can easily be explained as a natural consequence of the poet’s position as a prisoner, deprived of the opportunity to communicate daily with his kinfolk in his native vernacular.

Ashraf Hijri’s descriptions of poetic art and self-appraisals

In characterising poetic art, Ashraf Khān repeatedly and emphatically advocated a conventional medieval idea of poetry as ‘licit magic’ (*sihr ḥalāl*). In the opening lines of one of his self-praises, which also includes a brief eulogy to Khushhāl Khān, introduced as his ‘teacher’ (*ustād*) in poetry, Ashraf formulates his literary manifesto:

If someone calls poetry magic, this is my verse;
Verses of all others are just verses, these ones are magic.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 171–179, 257–262.

²¹ Khushhāl, *Kulliyāt*, p. 180.

If you do not believe this, look at them:
 Every *ghazal* of mine testifies to this claim.
 My magic is licit, trust me!
 All other magic in this world is forbidden (*ḥarām*).
 And I am doing this magic not only in my language,
 My verses in Persian are even better than these in Pashto!²²

Defined by Julie S. Meisami as ‘the Arabo-Persian commonplace of poetry’, the idea that the poetic word has a ‘quasi-magical power’ is traditionally understood as having originated from the Hadith: ‘Some eloquent speech is as effective as magic’ (*inna min al-bayāni la-siḥran*).²³ Although the theoretical development of this idea is often associated with scholars such as ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078 or 1081), its regular and ubiquitous use for a metaphoric designation of poetry suggests that, in early modern times, it was already common rather than professional scholarly knowledge.²⁴ As a long-established popular motif, the equating of poetry with magic can be traced back to the verses of some early Persian authors of the eleventh century. For example, in an encomium to Sultan Mas‘ūd I Ghaznawī (r. 1030–1040), Manūchihri Dāmghānī (d. circa 1040/41) says: ‘The poetry which you have heard is lawful enchantment (*siḥr-i nikū*), / it is sweet measure (*wazn-i shīrīn*), it is flowing utterance (*lafẓ-i jāri*).’²⁵ At around the same time, the Ismailite poet and preacher Nāṣir Khusraw (d. 1072 or 1078), in a veiled description of the poetic word, stated that ‘the Prophet gave it the appellation “licit magic” (*rasūl-ash laqab dād siḥr-i ḥalāl*)’.²⁶ Ashraf Khān did not refer to a direct source for his definition of poetry as *siḥr ḥalāl*, but there is little doubt that he derived this idea from classical Persian lyrics rather than academic treatises on poetics. In his verses, Ashraf mentions the names of two Persian poets of the twelfth century several times, so they were obviously his favourites—Awḥad al-Dīn Muḥammad Anwarī (d. 1169/70 or after 1186/87) and Afzal al-Dīn Khāqānī Shirwānī (d. 1199).²⁷ As both of them employed the notion of ‘licit magic’, their poems were most likely among the main texts that inspired Ashraf to embrace and convey in Pashto this engaging concept that was allegedly rooted in a saying of the Muslim Prophet.²⁸

Another common metaphor for poetry that was used by Ashraf to figuratively describe it is the ‘world of meanings’ (*dā ma ‘no jahān*). The variants of this basic image, which predictably urged the poet to declare himself the ‘King in the world of meanings’ (*dā ma ‘no*

²² Ashraf, *Dīwān*, p. 501; cf. pp. 537, 549, 552, 577. Ashraf is said to have left a collection of poems in Persian that can be extracted from the manuscripts of his *Dīwān* in Pashto (e.g. Andzor, *Dā zandzīrūno shā‘ir*, p. 61; Z. Hewādmāl, *Dā pašto adabiyāto tārikh: larghūne aw māndzanay dawre* (Peshawar, 2000), p. 153).

²³ J. S. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton, 1987), p. 54; J. S. Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Poetry: Orient Pearls* (London, 2003), p. 64; Al-Bukhari, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (trans.) M. Muḥsin Khan (Riyadh, 1997), vol. 7, p. 366. Once, Ashraf Khān describes his verses as ‘the magic of speech’ (*siḥr-i bayān*) (Ashraf, *Dīwān*, p. 537). For the interpretation of poetry as an art of ‘licit magic’ in Islamic culture, see also J.-C. Bürgel, *The Feather of Simurgh: The ‘Licit Magic’ of the Arts in Medieval Islam* (New York, 1988).

²⁴ For a summary of al-Jurjānī’s works, see W. P. Heinrichs, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078 or 474/1081)’, in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 2 vols, (eds.) J. S. Meisami and P. Starkey (London and New York, 1998), pp. 16–17.

²⁵ J. W. Clinton, *The Divan of Manūchihri Dāmghānī: A Critical Study* (Minneapolis, 1972), pp. 85–86. In some manuscripts of Manūchihri’s poems, the words *siḥr-i nikū* are rendered as *bahr-i nikū* (‘good fortune’); see Manūchihri Dāmghānī, *Dīwān*, 2nd edn, (ed.) M. Dabīrsiyāqī (Tehran, 1996), p. 110.

²⁶ Nāṣir Khusraw, *Dīwān*, 2nd edn, (ed.) J. Manṣūr (Tehran, 1996), p. 301.

²⁷ Ashraf, *Dīwān*, pp. 535–536, 548, 577.

²⁸ For examples of the use of this metaphor by Anwarī and Khāqānī, see Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, p. 181; and M. L. Reisner and N. Yu. Chalisova, ‘Obraz poezii v poezii: literaturnaia refleksii v persidskoj klassike X–XIV vv. (kasyda i masnavi)’, in *Poetologicheskie pamiatniki Vostoka: obraz, stil’, zhanr* (Moscow, 2010), pp. 203, 207.

pə jahān shāh), were the ‘playing field (*maydān*) of meanings’ in which the poet defeats his rivals and wins the game or the ‘big ocean (*loy yam*) of meanings’ from which he procures beautiful pearls.²⁹ A more creative image that reveals the author’s passion for falconry is drawn in the verse: ‘When I release the falcon of thought (*də fikr bāz*) from the hands of my heart, / I capture the goose of meanings (*də ma’no qāz*) with his talons.’³⁰ Ashraf Khān’s definitions of poetry also include popular metaphors such as the ‘bride of words’ (*‘arūs-i sukhan*) that had been widely used in different variations by Persian authors since the eleventh century.³¹ This trope lays at the basis of an allegorical description of poetry in a *ghazal* by Khushḥāl Khān in which he depicts a ‘bride of truth’ (*də ḥaqīqat nāwe*) who is sitting astride a black horse of written letters with a veil of poetic devices on her face.³² Ashraf rendered in Pashto the early variant of this metaphor in a self-praising verse: ‘The bride of words (*də khabəro nāwe*) was a widow until now; / today, your bright thought (*roshan fikr*) is a conqueror of her heart.’³³

In his numerous brief self-praises, which were often included in the last lines of the poems as a suitable context for the insertion of the author’s signature (*takhalluṣ*), Ashraf Khān frequently repeated old clichés in which he compared his verses to gems, pearls, and sugar, and proclaimed himself to be the supreme ruler of poetry and eloquence, or the world master of words (*sukhanwar də jahān*), or the imam among the most prominent poets.³⁴ A standard motif of poetic rivalry is present in Ashraf’s statements about nightingales (i.e. other poets) who envy him for his mellifluous verses or in a comparison of his poems with arms—sword and spear—aimed at competitors.³⁵ In the dispute with his mind, Ashraf affectedly expresses doubts about the acceptability and decency of self-praising, but the mind assures him that an accomplished poet is fully eligible for it.³⁶ Lacking originality in concepts and wordings, such *fakhriyya* statements were important above all for outlining a relevant framework of debates on literary criticism issues and wider topics of creative work and artistry within the emerging traditions of written literature in Pashto.

More noteworthy are Ashraf Khān’s *fakhriyya* verses that disclose some real features of his personality. His conversation with ‘someone’ begins with the plain assertion ‘I made poetry my pastime in Bījāpūr’ and, during this talk, his unnamed, perhaps imagined, interlocutor notices manuscripts of poems around him.³⁷ In the dialogue with Heaven, Ashraf Khān reproves fate for imprisoning him in Indian Deccan and inflicting all kinds of troubles upon him—the ‘greatest master of words’, a Pathan (*patān*), and a native (*waṭanī*) of Rohistān.³⁸ The poet’s talks with his mind and an Angel include a discussion of his pen name ‘Hijrī’: both collocutors try to convince him that his real name ‘Ashraf’ (lit. ‘the most glorious’) is better suited to his brilliant poems than the soubriquet ‘Separated’ that was chosen for an explicable but very sad reason.³⁹

²⁹ Ashraf, *Dīwān*, pp. 243, 408, 496, 552.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

³¹ For an early example, see e.g. Nāṣir Khusraw, *Dīwān*, p. 301. For a discussion of the ‘comely bride’ image in Sa’dī Shirāzī’s (d. 1292) poetry, with an emphasis on its erotic connotations, see D. Ingenito, *Beholding Beauty: Sa’di of Shiraz and the Aesthetics of Desire in Medieval Persian Poetry* (Leiden and Boston, 2021), pp. 95–97.

³² Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, p. 131.

³³ Ashraf, *Dīwān*, p. 241.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 238, 240, 406, 426–427, 548, 577.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 426, 496, 504.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 537.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 237–239.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 240–241, 558–560.

Of particular significance are Ashraf Khān's recurring reminders about his ethnicity and merits in Pashto writings. By emphasising an ethnical aspect of his creative work, Ashraf provided valuable documentary evidence that, by the end of the seventeenth century, the idea that writing in Pashto was not a less important element of Pashtun identity than just speaking Pashto had finally taken shape. Most of Ashraf's statements on this issue are verbalised in the vein of the *fakhriyya* genre: the author insistently calls himself the best Pashtun poet who has no equal.⁴⁰ His request to be regarded as 'the second Khāqānī among Afghans' or 'Khāqānī or Anwarī in Pashto', on the one hand, affirms the unquestionably high status of classical Persian poetry and its immense influence on the developing Pashto literature.⁴¹ The names of two particular Persian poets seem to indicate Ashraf's personal literary tastes and preferences. On the other hand, such comparisons imply a deliberate differentiation between literary traditions in Persian and Pashto. Paying tribute to Persian literature and exaggeratedly claiming that his own verses in Persian were better than his Pashto verses, the poet seems to have sought a more subtle way in which to express his ethnic sentiments and declare his origin: 'His Persian [poetry] even surpasses his poems in Pashto, / though Hijrī is Khaṭak by origin, a Pashtun from Roh.'⁴² The accentuation of his Khaṭak descent in this and other verses also betrays the author's inherent tribalist ideology that was predicated on the multilevel ethnic self-consciousness. In everyday life, Ashraf Khān, like his fellow tribesmen, associated himself primarily with his clan rather than with his tribe: 'I am of Pashtun origin, but I am Khaṭak [...] and among the Khaṭaks, mind you, I am Ḥasankhel.'⁴³

Ashraf Hijrī on Pashto poetry

Ashraf Khān's brief overview of Pashto poetry in the poem 'Men's wealth is knowledge and art ...' (*dā mardāno badāyī 'ilm-u hunar dāy*) consists of two almost equal parts, the first one being a didactic introduction to the second.⁴⁴ The poet begins by praising knowledge (*'ilm*) and art (*hunar*) in general and comes to a conclusion that both have not yet become habitual things among Pashtuns (distiches 1–18). His critical remark that 'ignorance (*jahl*) is like sugar for Pashtuns' echoes similar assertions to those of many other Pashtun literati of this period, indirectly supporting their common opinion that the primary mission of their writings was the education and cultural instruction of the native Pashto speakers.⁴⁵ To highlight the special role of poetic art in the intellectual progress of human society, Ashraf further explains that the ability of speech (*gūyāyī*) has been bestowed on people by God to distinguish them from animals and that the highest level of this ability is eloquence (*sukhanwarī*), which most conspicuously manifests itself

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 181, 396, 408, 560.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 535, 548.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 482.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 244–249.

⁴⁵ Criticisms of ignorance that prevail among compatriots is a common motif in the Pashto didactic texts of the seventeenth century, regardless of their genre characteristics, ideologies, and functional purposes. For example, the Roshānī poet Mīrẓā Khān Anṣārī (d. 1630/31), who often complained about the lack of education among his audience, concluded one of his philosophical *ghazals* with the exclamation: 'If you are so firmly attached to the mores of ignorance (*jahl*), / why are you listening then to Mīrẓā's words, o Pathan (*patān*)?' (Mīrẓā Khān Anṣārī, *Dīwān*, (ed.) Dost [Shīnwāray] (Kabul 1975), p. 193). The Sunni preacher Bābū Jān (d. after 1661/1662) assessed his Pashtun listeners in the same way: 'Bābū Jān told this story (about the prophet 'Īsā) to ignorant (*jāhil*) people' (Bābū Jān, *Kitāb-i Bābū Jān* (Ms. C 1907, Saint-Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts), fol. 107a). Khushḥāl Khān also regretted that Pashtuns had insufficient knowledge (*'ilm*) to differentiate between true scholars and swindlers, and asserted that his fellow tribesmen, the Khaṭaks, were eager to treat every spiritual master as God (*rabb*) 'out of ignorance (*jahl*)' (Khushḥāl Khān Khaṭak, *Swāt-nāma*, (ed.) 'A. Ḥabībī (Kabul, 1979), pp. 62–63).

in poetry. After reiterating Khushḥāl Khān's thesis in the *Dastār-nāma* that professional poetry—that is, superior eloquence—requires profound learning and special skills, Ashraf turns to the discussion of those Pashtun poets whom he considered to be the best masters of their art.⁴⁶ In each case, he confines himself to laudatory and metaphoric characterisations, without explicating any specific grounds for his assessments.

The list of the best Pashtun poets opens with Khushḥāl Khān. As usual, Ashraf does not call his father by name and refers to him simply as the 'teacher' (or 'master'—*ustād*). High appraisal of Khushḥāl's poetry and its dominant position among the poetical works of other Pashtun authors is expressed by its comparison, although it is not very inventive, with the Sun illuminating the whole world and the Moon overshadowing the stars. In his elegies to Khushḥāl Khān, Ashraf likewise praised his father's literary talents mainly by way of metaphors and hyperboles. Khushḥāl's contribution to Pashtun culture is most noticeably underscored in the following lines of a chronogram that was written right after his demise in 1689:

The mine of art (*kān dā hunar*) is destroyed, my dear,
the one that was named Khaṭak and was the best of Pashtuns.
By origin, he was Khaṭak, this is not a lie;
but if all Pashtuns are a body, he was the apple of its eye.⁴⁷

In a number of brief encomiums to Khushḥāl in his other poems, Ashraf repeated the same ideas, often to emphasise his own status in Pashto poetry as the main successor of his father and teacher.⁴⁸

The next three poets on Ashraf's list are his brothers 'Abd al-Qādir Khān (1653–d. after 1713), Sikandar Khān (b. *circa* 1657/1658–d. after 1704), and Ṣadr Khān (b. *circa* 1654/1655–d. after 1712). Also introduced as Khushḥāl's 'disciples' (*shāgirdān*), they are de facto the most acknowledged Khaṭak authors, whose writings are now considered Pashto classics. Worth mentioning is that some of their acclaimed works, such as 'Abd al-Qādir's free translations from Persian *Yūsuf aw Zulaykhā* (1700/1701) and *Guldasta* (1712), or Ṣadr Khān's poetical renderings of the Pashtun folk narratives *Dilay aw Shahay* (1698/99) and *Ādam Khān aw Durkhānay* (1706/07), were written long after the death of Ashraf in India in 1694.⁴⁹ This fact may suggest that these Khaṭak authors had already enjoyed popularity in the early 1690s, mainly as lyricists, and their poems were known to educated Pashtuns both in the tribal areas and in the Indo-Afghan diaspora. Ashraf's verses also confirm the assumption that Ṣadr Khān composed more poems than have survived to this day.⁵⁰

From among the Pashtun poets of the earlier period, Ashraf mentioned four Roshānī authors—Arzānī Khweṣhkay (d. after 1601/02), Mīrzā Khān Anṣārī (d. 1630/31), Wāṣil Roshānī (d. after 1648), and Dawlat Lohānāy (d. after 1658). The same names, sometimes accompanied by laconic critical assessments, can also be found in Khushḥāl's verses.⁵¹ Like his father, Ashraf refrained from commenting on the affiliation of these poets with the Roshānī community and their unorthodox mystical philosophies. He only hinted at

⁴⁶ Khushḥāl Khān Khaṭak, *Dastār-nāma*, foreword by Ṣ. Rishtīn, glossary by D. M. Kāmil Momand (Kabul, 1966), pp. 23–24.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 547.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 237, 243, 501, 535.

⁴⁹ Of such works, Ashraf Khān should have known Sikandar Khān's Pashto translation of Niẓāmī Ganjawī's (d. 1209) *Laylī wa Majnūn* that dated from 1679/1680.

⁵⁰ Zarīn Andzor, *Də Ṣadr-i Khushḥāl zhwand aw āṣār* (Peshawar, 1996), pp. 70–72; Hewādmal, *Də paṣhto adabiyāto tārikh*, p. 159.

⁵¹ Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, pp. 533–534, 861–862.

the peculiar inspirational tenor of Wāṣil's Sufi poetry by calling it a 'door to mystical ecstasy' (*də ḥāl dar*). The creative work of Mīrzā Khān, who rightfully earned his reputation as being the leading contributor to the growth of Pashto written poetry, was esteemed by Ashraf in much the same way as the work of Khushḥāl. Ashraf assigns to Mīrzā's poetry the symbolical meaning of a crown and states that every Pashtun author should feel indebted to him. In his other verses with similar estimations of Mīrzā Khān's literary accomplishments, Ashraf admitted that, as the epitome of poetical mastery of the past, this Roshānī poet was the only worthy rival with whom he would have wished to compete in artistry.⁵²

The last two authors in Ashraf Khān's list are his contemporaries 'Abd al-Raḥmān Momand and Qalandar. The former, who was undoubtedly the most popular classical poet among Pashtuns of all backgrounds, was highly commended by Ashraf, who called him a sweet-voiced nightingale from Peshawar and declared that the easily identifiable quality of his verses did not even need to be verified by the author's signature (here *laqab*).⁵³ Unlike Raḥmān Bābā and all the other poets on Ashraf's list, Qalandar is a much less known Pashtun author of the second half of the seventeenth century. He should not be confused with Qalandar Akozay (d. after 1737)—a later poet with the same *takhalluṣ* who left a small collection of love lyrics.⁵⁴ The works of the 'first' Qalandar apparently have not survived except for a *ghazal* that was quoted in full by Ashraf Khān because its defiant message provoked him to write a response (*jawāb*).⁵⁵ It appears from Ashraf's caustic comments that he felt challenged above all by the following remarkable declaration in Qalandar's poem:

I have created a new manner (*nəway tarz*) in the Pashto language,
I am the Sultan among the Afghan poets.
Those who boast over their Pashto verses
Only gather ears of corn along the edges [of the field], while I am a [true] harvester.
I have glorified the poetry in the Pashto language,
I do not sing verses in Persian because I am an Afghan!⁵⁶

Mockingly supposing in his rejoinder that Qalandar may have been intoxicated when he wrote these boastful lines, Ashraf blamed him for arrogance and groundless pretensions, and noted that this overconfident 'harvester' could actually present only empty ears and not heaps of ground grains. His cutting 'review' ends with an expected laudation of Khushḥāl Khān, 'the Shah in the realm of poetry', who, in his own poetical self-praises, claimed priority in Pashto literature in a similar vein. In another poem, Ashraf remarks in passing that Qalandar 'makes it (poetry) in the large land of Deccan', thus telling us that this author lived in India and very probably came from the Indo-Afghan diaspora.⁵⁷ Ashraf's both critical and witty reply to Qalandar's *ghazal* does not seem to contradict the fact that the latter is included in his list of the best Pashtun poets. It displays the conventionalities of the *fakhriyya* genre as well as the customary phrasings of poetical contests. Besides, Ashraf's list of poets suggests a hierarchy in which Qalandar stands far below Khushḥāl Khān, while his poem, in Ashraf's interpretation, bluntly disregards this hierarchy and Khushḥāl's indisputable leading position in it. The popularity of

⁵² Ashraf, *Dīwān*, pp. 102, 169, 238, 240, 241, 265, 462, 501, 549.

⁵³ On Raḥmān Bābā, see e.g. J. Enevoldsen, *Selections from Rahman Baba* (Herning, Denmark, 1977).

⁵⁴ Qalandar, *Dīwān*, (ed.) Z. Hewādmal (Kabul, 1977); see also Hewādmal, *Də pašto adabiyāto tārikh*, p. 217.

⁵⁵ Ashraf, *Dīwān*, pp. 97–102; cf. Hewādmal, *Də pašto adabiyāto tārikh*, p. 168.

⁵⁶ Ashraf, *Dīwān*, pp. 97–98.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 549.

Qalandar, an Indo-Afghan poet, in the Pashtun tribal areas is also attested by the references to him in the works of Khushhāl Khān and Sikandar Khān.⁵⁸ This provides us with more evidence that, during the second half of the seventeenth century, Pashto writings spread rather quickly among literate Pashtuns who resided in different regions of the Mughal empire.

Kāzīm Khān Shaydā: a Rohilkhand ‘nightingale’ from Pashtunkhwa

The earliest notes on Kāzīm Khān in Henry G. Raverty’s *Selections from the Poetry of the Afghans* still remain the basic reference source for considering that this poet was the son of Afzal Khān and grandson of Ashraf Khān.⁵⁹ However, this relationship, cited from folk stories, is more than doubtful, as Dost M. Kāmil painstakingly explained in his profound essay in the introduction to the edition of the *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣa*.⁶⁰ Kāzīm Khān may indeed have come from the Khaṭak ruling clan and may even have been a distant descendant of Khushhāl Khān, but nowhere in his verses did he acknowledge this important fact or hint at being the offspring of Afzal.⁶¹ A few intriguing details of his early life as related by Raverty are not supported by any documented sources or the poet’s own writings. His poems only confirm that, at least since the late 1740s, he had been permanently residing in the Indo-Afghan domains of Rohilkhand, probably in Rampur principality, and was a staunch member of the Naqshbandī community.⁶² His professional occupations and social status in Rohilkhand are unknown. The writing of poetry, in his own words, was his innate disposition and largely a result of the emotional stress that was caused by his separation from his homeland and long journey to a new domicile. In one of his *qaṣīdas*, in which he vividly describes the unbearable heat of India in late

⁵⁸ Khushhāl, *Kulliyāt*, p. 681; on Sikandar’s reference, see Hewādmal, *Də pašto adabiyāto tārikh*, p. 168.

⁵⁹ H. G. Raverty, *Selections from the Poetry of the Afghans, from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century, Literally Translated from the Original Pushto; With Notices of the Different Authors, and Remark on the Mystic Doctrine and Poetry of the Šūfīs* (London, 1867), pp. 305–307; cf. Kāzīm Khān Shaydā, *Dīwān*, (ed.) ‘A. Benawā (Kabul, 1954), pp. i–xi; Hewādmal, *Də pašto adabiyāto tārikh*, pp. 221–222.

⁶⁰ Afzal, *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣa*, pp. xxxix–xlxx.

⁶¹ In Kāzīm’s two chronogram quatrains on his father’s (*wālid*) death, the latter is not named, but the enciphered date indicates that he passed away in 1184 A.H. (1770/71), i.e. much later than Afzal Khān (Kāzīm, *Dīwān*, p. 216).

⁶² Kāzīm left a *qaṣīda* with a brief laudatory description of the Naqshbandī spiritual lineage (*silsila*) and three short encomiums dedicated to the eponymous founder of this lineage Bahā’ al-Dīn Naqshband (d. 1389), the ‘Renewer (*mujaddid*) of the second millennium’ Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624), and his own Naqshbandī teacher (*pīr-u murshid*) Ghulām Ma’ṣūm (d. 1747), a descendant of Aḥmad Sirhindī (Kāzīm, *Dīwān*, pp. 203–206). On the rise and manifold ideological and political impacts of the Naqshbandiyya in Mughal India, see e.g. Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India. Vol. 2. From the Sixteenth Century to Modern Century* (Delhi, 1983), pp. 174–263; A. F. Buehler, ‘The Naqshbandiyya in Tīmūrid India: the central Asian legacy’, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7 (1996), pp. 208–228; I. Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (London, 2007), pp. 49–67; Muzaffar Alam, *The Mughals and the Sufis: Islam and Political Imagination in India, 1500–1750* (Albany, NY, 2021), pp. 70–92, 331–388. For notes on the recruitment of Afghan followers into the Naqshbandiyya community in the first half of the seventeenth century, see N. Green, ‘Tribe, diaspora, and sainthood in Afghan history’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 67 (2008), pp. 198–199. For a survey of the far-reaching missionary activities of the Naqshbandī–Mujaddidiyya, including its influential Ma’ṣūmiyya branch, in the Durrānī state (1747–1823), see Waleed Ziad, ‘Transporting knowledge in the Durrani empire: two manuals of Naqshbandi–Mujaddidi Sufi practice’, in *Afghanistan’s Islam: From Conversion to the Taliban*, (ed.) N. Green (Oakland, CA, 2017), pp. 105–126; and Waleed Ziad, ‘From Yarkand to Sindh via Kabul: the rise of Naqshbandi–Mujaddidi Sufi networks in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’, in *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, (eds.) A. Amanat and A. Ashraf (Leiden, 2019), pp. 125–168. For Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī’s personal connections with the Naqshbandī–Mujaddidiyya leaders, see Sajjad Nejatie, ‘The Pearl of Pearls: The Abdālī–Durrānī Confederacy and Its Transformation under Aḥmad Shāh, Durr-i Durrān’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2017), pp. 341–346.

spring, Kāzīm asserts that the verses, which allude to his homeland of Roh, with its cool mountain climate, turn the white sheets of paper on which they are written into slabs of ice, thus helping him to overcome the torments of the local weather.⁶³

In the authorial preface to his poetry collection, Kāzīm Khān reports that he compiled it on the order of Miyān Muḥammadī Šāhib-zāda (d. 1805/1806), the eldest son of Muḥammad ‘Umar Tsamkanay (Pers. Chamkanī, d. 1776)—the patriarch of arguably the most influential family of the Naqshbandī sheikhs of Pashtun descent in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁶⁴ Muḥammadī Šāhib-zāda was also a great patron of Pashto literature. Colophons in a large number of extant Pashto manuscripts of this period attest that he regularly ordered various books in Pashto for his library and was often the dedicatee of such works. Kāzīm Khān was not acquainted with Miyān Muḥammadī personally but received the latter’s request to assemble a collection of his Pashto verses through his brother Muḥammad ‘Ābid Khān, who came to visit him in Rohilkhand.⁶⁵ Written in extremely intricate Pashto prose that is interspersed with numerous quotations from Persian poetry, Kāzīm Khān’s preface to his *Dīwān* is a primary source for the poet’s life and creative activity. Kāzīm informs the reader that he finished working on the *Dīwān* in 1767/1768, having included only his selected poems, and warns that his verses should not be confused with those of another poet with the same name from the Khatak capital town of Sarāy-Akora (present-day Akora Khattak, Pakistan). At the very beginning of his essay, the author introduces himself as Muḥammad Kāzīm by name, Shaydā (‘Love-Struck’) by pen name (*takhalluṣ*), Khatak by origin (*nasab*), Ḥanafī by religious doctrine (*mazhab*), and Naqshbandī by spiritual affiliation (*mashrab*). In the concluding remarks, he expresses the hope that sophisticated readers will enjoy his verses and remember him with a good prayer.

Kāzīm Khān’s statements that his poetry was intended for highly educated and perspicacious (lit. ‘hair-splitting’, *mūshiqāf*) intellectuals and therefore could not be understood by thick-heads (*kawdan*) constitute a recurring motif that appears in his numerous *fakh-riyya* verses.⁶⁶ The poem in which he expresses his frustration at the inability of those around him to comprehend his elaborate poetic language of Pashto begins as follows:

The people of India do not understand my language,
Nor do the people of Iran and Tūrān.
The Pashtuns of Roh are also deprived of this skill
Since they are not aware of poetic diction (*badī*) and meanings (*ma’ānī*).
Each of my topics (*mazmūn*) is like a hidden treasure
Guarded by the snakes of written lines.⁶⁷

However, such assertions, which were encapsulated in the poet’s figurative verdict that the delicate curls of his verses need a special comb of insightful thinking, were not far

⁶³ Kāzīm, *Dīwān*, pp. 196–197.

⁶⁴ On Muḥammad ‘Umar Tsamkanay and his descendants, see ‘Abd al-Shakūr Rashād, *Də Tsamkano Miyā ‘Umar* (Kabul, 1981); Timur Khan, ‘A “good Qaṣba”: Chamkanī and the confluence of politics, economy and religion in Durrānī Peshawar, 1747–1834’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 65 (2022), pp. 638–642. For an overview of Miyān Muḥammadī Šāhib-zāda’s miscellaneous contributions to the Pashto-language literature and intellectual culture, see Zalmai Hewādmal, ‘Də stər rūḥānī aw farhangī shakhṣiyyat Muḥammadī Šāhib-zāda də dwasawayəm talin pə munāsabat’, *Lemə (The Afghans’ Quarterly Literary and Cultural Magazine)* 13–14 (2000), pp. 17–24.

⁶⁵ Kāzīm, *Dīwān*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 87, 106, 111, 148, 161, 166.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 206–207.

from the truth.⁶⁸ In classical Pashto poetry, Kāzīm Khān's lyrics are generally considered to be the finest example of the so-called 'Indian style' that is characterised by deliberately puzzling rhetoric and paradoxical imagery.⁶⁹ Like similar specimens of early modern Persian poetry in which this style became mainstream at the turn of the sixteenth century primarily among Indo-Persian authors, Kāzīm's Pashto verses require not only a sophisticated artistic vision, but also an arduous intellectual effort to be properly read and interpreted. In a series of quatrains, Kāzīm unequivocally demonstrated his literary predilections and origins of creative methods by eulogising a number of the celebrated paragons of the 'Indian style' in Persian poetry, such as Ṭālib Āmulī (d. 1626/1627), Asīr Iṣfahānī (d. 1639), Abū Ṭālib Kalīm Kāshānī (d. 1651), Muḥammad Ṭāhīr Ghānī Kashmīrī (d. 1668/1669), Qāsim Mashhadī Dīwāna (d. 1672/1673), Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī (d. 1676), Nāšīr 'Alī Sirhindī (d. 1696/1697), and Mīrzā 'Abd al-Qādir Bīdil (d. 1720/1721).⁷⁰

Despite his criticism of Pashtuns for their alleged incompetence in refined poetics, Kāzīm Khān avowed that he composed his verses while thinking of his readership in his homeland (*waṭan*). The poet either urged himself to send his 'colourful' (*rangīn*) poems to Roh, Peshawar, and his hometown Sarāy-Akoṛa; or boastfully asserted that, there, his poems would resound in the mountains like echo and fill the meadows and gardens with spring; or wondered whether his friends at home would be able to respond to them.⁷¹ In his self-praises, he introduced himself as the 'nightingale from Sarāy' and maintained that other Afghan poets honoured him as if he were Khushḥāl Khān.⁷² Speaking of two unnamed Momands who would have especially welcomed his poetical work if they had been alive, Kāzīm was undoubtedly referring to 'Abd al-Raḥmān and 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (d. *circa* 1732/1733). By using his own pen name 'Love-Struck' (*shaydā*) as an epithet for these poets, Kāzīm obviously disclosed the immediate Pashto sources of his creative inspiration.⁷³ More clear evidence of Kāzīm's self-perception as a Pashto-language poet who continued literary traditions of his predecessors are his strophic verses: a *mukhammas* that was written as a response (*jawāb*) to a love *ghazal* by 'Abd al-Qādir Khaṭāk and three *musaddas*-poems with quotations (*taẓmīn*) from other leading Pashtun authors of the past, including 'Abd al-Raḥmān, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, and Khushḥāl Khān.⁷⁴ Although Kāzīm recurrently underscored the exquisiteness of his

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 210.

⁶⁹ For summaries and re-examinations of long-lasting debates on the 'Indian style' in Persian literature, see e.g. J. Rypka et al., *History of Iranian literature* (Dordrecht, 1968), pp. 295–302; W. Heinz, *Der indische Stil in der persischen Literatur* (Wiesbaden, 1973); Muḥammad Rizā Shafī'ī Kadkanī, 'Persian literature (Belles-Lettres) from the time of Jāmī to the present day', in *History of Persian Literature from the Beginning of the Islamic Period to the Present Day*, (ed.) G. Morrison (Leiden and Köln, 1981), pp. 145–165; E. Yarshater, 'The Indian or Safavid style: progress or decline?', in *Persian Literature*, (ed.) E. Yarshater (Albany, NY, 1988), pp. 249–288; Muzaffar Alam, 'The pursuit of Persian: language in Mughal politics', *Modern Asian Studies* 32 (1998), pp. 330–342; M. Alam, 'The culture and politics of Persian in precolonial Hindustan', in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, (ed.) Sh. Pollock (Berkeley, LA and London, 2003), pp. 171–189; S. R. Faruqi, 'A stranger in the city: the poetics of Sabk-e Hindi', *Annual of Urdu Studies* 19 (2004), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/18639> (accessed 18 April 2023); Rajeev Kinra, 'Fresh words for a fresh world: Tāza-Gū'ī and the poetics of newness in early modern Indo-Persian poetry', *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* 3 (2007), pp. 125–149; Rajeev Kinra, 'Make it fresh: time, tradition, and Indo-Persian literary modernity', in *Time, History, and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia*, (ed.) A. Murphy (London and New York, 2011), pp. 12–39; Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2012), pp. 206–11.

⁷⁰ Kāzīm, *Dīwān*, pp. 135, 142, 147, 149, 158, 159, 160, 164.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 45, 83, 109.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 170.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 176–183.

verses, he once acknowledged that, deep in his heart, he remained ‘a simple (*sāda*) Afghan from Roh’.⁷⁵

In the introduction to his *Dīwān*, Kāzīm Khān briefly explicated his understanding of the nature of poetry by defining it as ‘licit magic’ that was based on the art of hyperbole (*ṣan ‘at dā mubālaghe*). His very ornate definition of hyperbole as the main poetic device is essentially consonant with what Khushḥāl Khān, in repeating earlier common opinion, straightforwardly called deceit (*dārogh*).⁷⁶ Since the introduction was intended for his spiritual patrons such as Muḥammadī Šāḥib-zāda Tsamkanay, Kāzīm delicately invited the reader to look for exaggerations, first of all in his own self-praises, which, except for a short *ghazal* and a part of his long essay, are mostly single lines that are scattered throughout his poems.⁷⁷ As a rule, Kāzīm lauds the excellence of his verses—that is, his literary product—rather than his personal talents and skills. Such laudations generally lack original thoughts or metaphors, but there are some noteworthy examples of the ‘Indian’-style rhetoric, such as the lines in which he recommends that his *Dīwān* should be read by beauties, as its ‘colourful’ poems may adorn them better than henna.⁷⁸

Kāzīm Khān’s remarks on poetry as literary labour are often accompanied by the motif of writing that was popular with early Pashtun poets. However, unlike his distant predecessors, who had initiated writing in the Pashto language many decades ago, Kāzīm employed this motif only as a source of effective visual images and tropes, without didactical connotations concerning the importance of literacy and the promotion of written Pashto. In a *ghazal* with the telling epiphora ‘poetry’ (*shi ‘r*), Kāzīm describes the process of the composition of love lyrics as the crying of the pen (*zharā dā qalam*), which is a guileless metaphor for writing as the technical process of spilling the ink.⁷⁹ In other verses, he compares black letters on white pages to mourners who are wearing black clothes or imagines a sea of poetry enclosed in a piece of paper.⁸⁰ His quatrain with a eulogy of letters (*tori*) that ‘brought together water and flame’ is also a figurative description of poetry writing.⁸¹

Kāzīm Khān’s essay ‘The state of Pashto poetry’

That the discourse on literary criticism issues was of particular importance for Kāzīm Khān and his educated milieu is most evident from the structure of his *Dīwān*, in which the long essay ‘The state of Pashto poetry’ immediately follows two opening poems—a glorification of God (*ṣanā*) and the author’s prayer (*munājāt*).⁸²

The content of this essay can be roughly divided into three parts. The first (distiches 1–28) is a very critical evaluation of Pashto poetry in general. Kāzīm’s attitudes and sentiments concerning the quality of poetical texts in Pashto obviously stemmed from a common recognition of the long-established dominance and superiority of Persian literary traditions as well as his explicable inability to distinguish between the poetics of folk and written verse. The poem begins with the author’s poignant complaints about his mother tongue because of its allegedly poor suitability for the composition of perfectly metricised verses: ‘The Pashto language is completely / disordered and disarranged. // It discords with [poetical] meters (*awzān*) / and evades balance (*mizān*). // When placed

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷⁶ Khushḥāl, *Dastār-nāma*, p. 24.

⁷⁷ Kāzīm, *Dīwān*, p. 41.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 98.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 13–21.

on a scale, / it moves up and down.⁸³ Kāzim failed to understand that the metrical system ('arūz) of the Persian quantitative poetry, which was borrowed centuries ago from the Arabic poetics, could not be deployed for the prosody of the Pashto accentual verse. On the other hand, his statements echoed the idea that was highlighted earlier by Khushhāl Khān, who insisted on regarding systematised metrics (irrespective of its prosodic characteristics) as the main criterion of perfect poetry. By reproving the majority of Pashto poets for passing off haphazardly metricised (*musajja*) texts that were compiled from 'prose locutions' (*dā naṣr 'ibārāt*) as genuine poetry, Kāzim, like Khushhāl long before him, apparently applied strict norms of theoretical poetics not only to any samples of amateurish poetical exercises in Pashto, but also to folk verse and pieces in rhythmical prose (*saḡ*), which were abundant in the Pashto literature of this period.

Besides, his exaggerated quasi-scholarly criticism of Pashto poetry, which purportedly 'became pitiable (*zalīl*)' at the hands of a lot of unlearned versifiers, reads as an indirect affirmation of the exclusivity of true poetical mastery and, thus, as a premise for the authorial self-praise in the last part of the poem. In concluding his introductory remarks, Kāzim compares poetry to a beautiful garden in which a nightingale—that is, a gifted author who is proficient in poetic devices (*ṣanāyi*) and rhetoric (*badāyi*)—is often obliged to suffer the proximity of a bunch of crows who can only upset flowers with their so-called 'songs'.

The second part of the essay (distiches 29–86) begins with an encomium to Khushhāl Khān, who is presented as the leading and unrivalled Pashto poet of the past. Unlike Ashraf Khān, who paid tribute to nine other notable Pashtun litterateurs of the seventeenth century, Kāzim limited himself to very laconic compliments in two distiches (31, 32) to the unnamed 'eloquent and erudite' authors from his kin (*khānadān*), the Khaṭaks, and three Roshānī poets who were the owners of 'good words (*kalām*) and literary products (*hāṣil*)'—Mīrzā Khān, Dawlat, and Wāṣil. When evaluating Khushhāl Khān's exceptional contribution to Pashto poetry, Kāzim portrays him as the true creator of all Pashto literature. Apart from a series of figurative comparisons in which Khushhāl's oeuvre is described as a clear path in the mountains or a safe bridge over a perilous river, Kāzim tried to specify some distinct features of Khushhāl's literary thinking and language, such as the expressiveness of wordings (*salāsat dā 'ibārāt*), subtlety of allusions (*laṭāfat dā ishārāt*), accuracy of meanings (*diqqat dā ma 'ānī*), clarity of exposition (*pā kalām ke zāhira*), and omniscience (*hamadānī*).

After proclaiming that Khushhāl Khān was the most prominent poet of Pashtunkhwa (Roh), Kāzim then proceeds to eulogise Khushhāl's hometown and his own birthplace Sarāy-Akoṛa. In this long metaphorical eulogy, Kāzim quotes Khushhāl's quintessential verse from the poem *Firāq-nāma* ('The Book of Separation', 1665): 'Love for the homeland, my dear friend, / was given to me together with faith' (distich 63).⁸⁴ This reference points at the primary literary source of Kāzim Khān's nostalgic motifs. However, his overly artificial and trite depiction of Sarāy as a picturesque garden that is abundant with multicoloured flowers and sweet-voiced nightingales contrasts sharply with the uncommonly realistic, visually impressive, and truly touching description of the Khaṭak homeland by Khushhāl Khān in the *Firāq-nāma*. Good wishes to Sarāy and its inhabitants are followed in Kāzim's essay by those addressed to Peshawar, which is alternatively called by its other name, Bagrām (distiches 76–86). A vague explanation of the reason for his praising Peshawar as being on a par with Sarāy indicates that the author regarded it as another major centre of Pashto literary traditions in Roh. Unfortunately, he did not even hint at who exactly, in his opinion, enjoyed the reputation of eloquent speakers (*zabānāwar*)

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁸⁴ Cf. Khushhāl Khān Khaṭak, *Firāq-nāma*, (ed.) Z. Hewādmal (Kabul, 1984), p. 28.

from Peshawar, although a few lines below suggest that he could have had in mind the celebrated Momand poets ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd.

Verbose authorial self-praise makes up the third and largest part of Kāzīm Khān’s essay—almost half of it (distiches 87–158). This text elaborates on the same ideas as the author asserts elsewhere in his short self-laudations. Once again underlining the status of Khushḥāl Khān as the founding father of Pashto literature, Kāzīm, similarly to his predecessor Qalandar (see above), declares himself the creator of a ‘new manner’ (*nəway ʔarz*) in Pashto poetry, apparently implying by this his ‘Indian style’ approach. In reference to the unnamed Momand authors who had practised ‘licit magic’ before him, Kāzīm used images that were based on the popular Quranic stories about the prophet Mūsā—namely, those in which God transforms Mūsā’s staff into a serpent and then back into its original shape, and makes his hand white ‘without evil’ (Qur’an, 20:17–23, 27:10–12). Kāzīm Khān envisions how the magic—that is, poetry—has turned the written lines of the Momand poets into dragons while his own pen has become the staff that, guided by the powerful ‘white hand’, is going to display even more impressive magical exploits (*kārnāma*) (distiches 91–94).

The content of the poet’s long self-praise suggests that this text was initially intended to prove its author’s initial claim to the creation of the ‘new manner’ by demonstrating his ability to reformulate in Pashto old and conventional topoi of the *fakhriyya* genre in line with the contemporaneous tendencies in Indo-Persian poetry. By resorting to deliberately entangled rhetoric as a counterbalance to largely clichéd figurativeness, Kāzīm Khān extols his imagination (*khiyāl*) that ‘turns the *qalam* into a stalk of rose’; his bright mind (*ra’y*) that outshines the Sun and, being an ‘envoy of the heights’, humbles Heaven; and his brilliant, flawless, limpid, and colourful (*rangīn*) meanings (*ma’āni*) and topics (*maẓāmīn*) that are the distinctive products of his nature and thought, although, he admits, ‘unintentional resemblance (*tawārud*) is possible’ (distiches 107–114).⁸⁵ Metaphorical descriptions of the poet’s creative accomplishments draw on both a clear image of a shell that generously yields pearls and a more complicated one that depicts wooden cage bars that become sugar cane under the poet’s sweet breath (distiches 105–106). The cage and sugar most likely allude here to a popular comparison of poets with parrots, who are mentioned by Kāzīm Khān in a previous line as being those who cannot equal him in eloquence. This image had a particular meaning in Indo-Persian poetry, not least due to the much-discussed verse of Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī (d. 1390): ‘All the Indian parrots become sugar-crunching / as this Persian sugar-candy goes to Bengal’ (*shakar-shikan shawand hama ʔūʔiyān-i hind / zin qand-i pārsī ki ba bangāla mīrawad*).⁸⁶

In distiches 120–138, Kāzīm tries to explain the purpose of writing stylistically complex poetry, thus unveiling some extra-literary tasks of the ‘new manner’. In his opinion, a perfect literary text should be written in such a way that its reading would preclude any haste (*ta’jīl*) and induce slow and deep contemplation (*ta’ammul*). As proof, the poet provides a number of mundane analogies from everyday life, which were a common feature of the ‘Indian style’ rhetoric. For example, Kāzīm reminds the reader that, to admire the beauty of spring, one needs to walk slowly through a garden, or that hasty swallowing does not allow anybody to enjoy the taste of a good meal, or that a speedy ride blurs the difference between a busy street in a city and a barren desert. Fast reading, according to Kāzīm, may lead to confusion about what is written ‘above and below’ and entail futile weariness.

⁸⁵ Terms such as *maẓmūn* (Pl. *maẓāmīn*), *ma’ni* (Pl. *ma’āni*), *khiyāl*, *ʔarz*, and *rangīn/rangīni* were among the key markers of both poetical and speculative discourses on the ‘Indian style’ poetics. For a comprehensive discussion of this terminology, see Faruqi, ‘Stranger in the city’, pp. 25–47.

⁸⁶ Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī, *Dīwān*, (ed.) S. A. Anjawī (Tehran, 1967), p. 86; cf. e.g. Alam, ‘Culture and politics’, p. 155.

Another aspect of the author's reflections on the 'new manner' of poetry is that the latter requires an exceptionally sophisticated readership. Kāzīm expresses concern about uneducated and ignorant people who defame every true talent and art, as 'for the one who is used to consuming grass, its taste is better than that of halva' (distiches 120–125). A stereotypical figure of the envious one (*hāsīd*) that was borrowed by Kāzīm from the old stock of *fakhriyya* images exemplifies those who discredit and harm refined poetry (distiches 115–119). The routine motif of poetical rivalry is also present in his essay in the likewise standard allegory of poetry as a polo field (*maydān*) in which the author is going to defeat all contenders by confidently winning the 'ball of meaning' with his 'stick of words' (distiches 98–101).

The final 20 distiches (139–158) of the author's self-praise and of the poem as a whole are addressed to the competent and benevolent reader, who may be both any 'expert in this art' in general and Muḥammadī Šāḥīb-zāda Tsamkanay, the dedicatee of Kāzīm's *Dīwān*, in particular. The poet invites the reader to enjoy his exquisite, skilfully written verses that are replete with amazing thoughts and marvellous expressions, pleads for a lenient attitude towards unavoidable shortcomings that can be traced even in the works of such great word masters as Anwarī, and asks to be well appreciated and remembered in good prayers in this life and after death. His invitation to get pleasure from reading 'this manuscript' (*dā nuskha*) proves that it was the author's idea to place the *masnawī*-poem with the essay on Pashto poetry at the beginning of the *Dīwān*, thus providing the reader with a clue to the correct understanding of the artistic concept underlying his poetic work.

Conclusion

The verses of Ashraf Khān Hijrī and Kāzīm Khān Shaydā—two classical Pashtun poets of Khatak descent, whose lifetimes are separated by almost a century—provide valuable textual evidence that, in the early modern period, Pashtun litterateurs and their educated readership took an unflinching interest in the discussion of various issues that were related to creative writing in the Pashto language. This interest was caused not only by the progress in literacy and learning among Pashtuns, but also, to a large degree, by the ongoing debates about Pashtun identity and its criteria, including the most evident and important linguistic component. These debates apparently began to acquire a conceptual framework during the rule of the Lodī Dynasty in the Delhi Sultanate at the turn of the sixteenth century and intensified after the political rise of Pashtun tribes in between the Mughal and the Safavid polities in the first half of the eighteenth century. Being involved in this discourse as Pashtun intellectuals who sought their distinct position within the cosmopolitan Persophone culture, Ashraf Hijrī and Kāzīm Shaydā had similar personal motivations for highlighting linguistic and ethnic aspects of their literary work. Both of them were engaged in writing poetry in Pashto when living, though due to different circumstances, in multi-language environments of India that were far beyond their Pashto-speaking homelands.

Like the writings of most other Pashtun litterateurs of this period, the poems of Ashraf and Kāzīm demonstrate neither an attempt to proclaim a kind of ethnocultural idiosyncrasy and insularity nor a blind imitation of Persian poetical traditions. To win a reputation as learned and sophisticated men of letters, they could not but employ the rich inventory of Persian poetry with regard to its general aesthetic principles, changing stylistic tendencies, rhetoric, vocabulary, and imagery, but the differing prosody of their native vernacular as well as their inborn tribalist mentality and outspoken ethnic self-consciousness determined the specifics of their creative work as, foremost, a continuation of literary traditions in Pashto. Describing his verses as 'licit magic', Ashraf Hijrī openly

admitted the artistic influence of such renowned medieval Persian poets as Anwarī and Khāqānī. Several decades later, Kāzīm Shaydā announced his attachment to the then highly popular ‘new manner’, or the ‘Indian style’ Persian poetry, and praised its famous proponents, such as Ṭālīb Āmulī, Ṣā’ib Tabrīzī, and Mīrzā Bīdil. However, both Ashraf and Kāzīm declaratively introduced themselves as being essentially Pashtun poets and, underlining their tribal affiliation to the Khaṭak lineage, acknowledged the creative leadership of Khushḥāl Khān Khaṭak as the unrivalled master (*ustād*) of poetic art per se.

Both authors left poetical essays on Pashto poetry, with the much longer essay by Kāzīm appearing to be an indirect response to or even an imitation of the earlier work by Ashraf, who in turn repeated some key views of his father Khushḥāl Khān. The essays begin similarly with the outright criticism of Pashtuns for their ignorance and neglect of learning and fine arts, including poetics. The discussions of Pashto poetry open with similarly loud encomiums to Khushḥāl Khān, but differ in the authors’ elaboration of the main topic. If Ashraf Hijrī tried to make a balanced and more or less candid survey of the most renowned Pashtun poets of whom he named nine, Kāzīm Shaydā preferred to dwell on his own contribution to Pashto poetry, though skilfully turning the traditional authorial self-praise (*fakhriyya*) into the explication of the ‘new manner’ and its both artistic and extra-literary advantages. However, in his short remarks about other Pashtun poets, Kāzīm obviously followed the ‘classification’ of his predecessor, as he divided the distinguished authors into the same three groups—the Roshānīs, the Khaṭaks, and the Momands, the first being a supra-tribal religious community and the other two being associated with particular tribes.

The essays of Ashraf Hijrī and Kāzīm Shaydā are important, if still little-known, written documents that offer the authentic views of two early modern Pashtun poets on various aspects of literary work in their native idiom and shed light on how artistry and ethnicity were discussed as interconnected issues by Pashtun intellectuals of this period. Especially significant is that both authors, like other Pashtun literati, considered the enlightening of their fellow countrymen to be one of the objectives of their creative activity. Their harsh criticism of the low levels of literacy and education among Pashtun tribesmen concealed their deep concern about the advancement of Pashto as a language of learning and literature. As representatives of the Pashtun educated elite, Ashraf and Kāzīm apparently regarded the art of poetry and their own sophisticated written verses as a perfect tool for their pedagogical efforts, which were, of course, aimed primarily at people of their social milieu.

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