

# “The Time of Lament”: A Momand drama of 1711 through the eyes of Pashtun litterateurs

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## Abstract

This article offers a comparative examination of the literary responses of four leading early modern Pashtun authors to an armed clash in the Momand tribe in 1711. The responses include a chronicle record in prose (Afzal Khān Khaṭak) and three poems – an elegy (‘Abd al-Raḥmān Momand), a satire (‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Momand), and a war ode (‘Abd al-Qādir Khaṭak). Discussed as both authentic historical documents and creative writings linked to a local social discourse, these Pashto texts enable us to reassess the intensity of everyday literary communications in Pashtun tribal areas in early modern times and append new factual material to the study of ethno-cultural processes within the Persophone oecumene. The salient stylistic and rhetoric diversity of the texts not only highlights the authors’ individual mindsets and literary techniques, but also provides an insight into a variety of social moods, political attitudes and ethics in the Pashtun traditional society.

**Keywords:** Pashto literature, Early modern poetry in Islamic societies, Genres, Text functionality, Literary communication, Tribalism

## Introduction

A series of literary responses by several celebrated authors to the same recent local event does not seem to be common in literary traditions of the Persophone cultural oecumene in medieval and early modern times. One such case in Pashto literature, which developed within this oecumene under the strong influence of Persian classics, can be regarded as absolutely unique. Four texts written by acclaimed Pashtun authors in connection with one incident – a brutal skirmish between two clans of the Momand tribe in 1711 – could probably have appeared as reverberations of a considerable public response to an extraordinary if provincial event. What makes these texts particularly noteworthy as authentic historical documents is that they, first, contain contemporaneous evidence of the Momand incident and, second, represent different or even quite opposite personal views on a local tribal drama.

Regarding the facts of the event, the most informative of these texts is a brief record in prose by Afzal Khān Khaṭak (1665/66–c. 1740/41) in *The Khaṭaks’ Chronicle*, the original part of his historiographical compilation *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣa’* (Afzal 1974: 402). It is this cursory entry in one of Afzal’s memoiristic narratives that provides us with some concrete details of the Momand incident and, thus, a key to the proper understanding of three other texts. The latter are poetic responses by the leading Pashto authors of the late seventeenth and

early eighteenth centuries: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Momand, widely known as Raḥmān Bābā (d. after 1711), ‘Abd al-Qādir Khaṭāk (1653– d. after 1713), and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Momand (d. c. 1732/33). All three poets wrote predominantly meditative spiritual lyrics reiterating in Pashto canonized topics and motifs of Persian poetry. In the collected poetical works (*dīwān*) of each of these renowned Pashtun adherents of traditionalism, a poem dedicated to the Momand incident stands apart from other verse and forms a striking contrast to continuous rephrasing of typical meditations on mystical love, religious philosophy, and morals. Within the poets’ abstractive lyrics we come across occasional references to historical realities, e.g. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s sporadic reproofs of the Mughal Emperor Awrangzīb (r. 1658–1707), or his ruminations on the unequal fortunes of the owners of rainfed and irrigated lands, or ‘Abd al-Qādir’s panegyrics (*madḥiyya*) and elegies (*marsiyya*) to his father Khushḥāl Khān (1613–89). However, the poems on the Momand incident put the literary work of Raḥmān, Qādir, and Ḥamīd into their historical context in a more explicit way by linking it with a local social discourse.

On the other hand, these poems once again prove the importance of *belles-lettres*, including lyrical verse, as at least a supplemental source for historiography, especially when the total corpus of extant writings covering a particular period in the socio-political history of a region and its population is relatively limited, which is the case for pre-modern Pashto literature. With regard to the national literary tradition, the poetic comments of Raḥmān, Qādir, and Ḥamīd on a historical event are a weak echo of the verses of their immediate predecessor Khushḥāl Khān Khaṭāk. From 1645/46 Khushḥāl regularly addressed various socio-historical issues in his poetry, but after he was imprisoned by the Mughals in 1664 his lyrics acquired unprecedented, even in Persian literature, quasirealistic traits of a private journal in verse. Already in *The Khaṭaks’ Chronicle*, finished in 1724, Khushḥāl’s *dīwān* is often quoted as an unparalleled documentary source of data on the poet’s own biography and the life of his compatriots in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> G. Morgenstierne accurately evaluated the core features of Khushḥāl’s lyrics as follows: “... whatever he writes bears the mark of what he has seen and experienced. It is this live and rich picture we get of his own vital, virile and passionate personality which first captivates the reader and makes his *Divan* a human document close to life, the like of which is not often found in Oriental literature” (1960: 52).

In earlier Pashto writings, references to historical events are extremely rare. An account of the life and activities of the Roshānī mystic Bāyazīd Anṣārī (d. c. 1572) in the religious textbook *Makhzan al-islām* by Akhūnd Darweza (d. 1618/19 or 1638/39) may be described as a kind of “side effect” of the

1 The first most detailed essays on Khushḥāl Khān’s biography based on his own writings and *The Khaṭaks’ Chronicle* were published in Urdu and Pashto by D.M. Kāmil (1915–81) in the early 1950s (Kāmil 1951; Khushḥāl 1952: xi–lii). In Western scholarship Khushḥāl’s verses have been translated and examined several times beginning with the pioneering book on Pashtuns by M. Elphinstone (1839: 254–9). However, even the best works on the subject lacked Kāmil’s full expertise in the original sources (cf. Caroe 1958: 221–46; Mackenzie 1965). More recent studies with an overall review of Khushḥāl’s life and poetical works include Hewādmal 2001 and Pelevin 2001.

sharp ideological dispute between the rival spiritual guides (1969: 128–36). The first examples of responses to current developments in Pashto lyrics were most likely the poems of Mīrẓā Khān Anṣārī (d. 1630/31) who in 1624/25 wrote a brief elegy to his cousin Aḥdād and in 1630/31, shortly before his own death, composed a very emotive pacifist *ghazal* with sad reflections on violent wars between the Mughals and local Hindu rulers in Gujarat and Deccan (1975: 72–3, 129–30).<sup>2</sup> After 1619, Mīrẓā Khān, a grandson of Bāyazīd Anṣārī, migrated from the Pashtun tribal territories in the Peshawar valley (present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan) to India, where he entered the service of the Mughals. According to Dawlat Lohānāy (d. after 1658), another Roshānī poet from the Pashtun diaspora in India, Mīrẓā Khān perished in 1630/31 in the war in Deccan (Dawlat 1975: 20). The author of the anonymous doxographic essay *Dabistān-i mazāhib* (1904: 311) (written between 1645 and 1658), now identified as Mīr Zū 'l-Fiqār Ardistānī or Mūbadshāh, specifies that Mīrẓā Khān was killed in battle in the vicinity of Dawlatābād, most likely the town in the present-day state of Maharashtra. The mood and wording of Mīrẓā Khān's anti-war *ghazal* are very similar to those in the verses of 'Abd al-Raḥmān on the Momand incident: "[Killed] Muslims and infidels lie intermingled; / nobody removes them – neither buries, nor burns. // Astonishingly bloodthirsty is this time, / but clouds have not yet rained the tears of mercy" (Mīrẓā 1975: 72.) For understandable reasons the poets of Momand descent were much more strongly affected by the bloody clash between their fellow tribesmen than was 'Abd al-Qādir Khaṭāk, who belonged to the military-administrative elite of the neighbouring Pashtun tribe.

The story of the Momand incident was recounted for the first time by H.G. Raverty (1825–1906) in a long footnote to his English translation of 'Abd al-Ḥamīd's poem in "Selections from the poetry of the Afghans" (1867: 123–6). Though Raverty did not indicate his sources, except for the reference to the related poem by 'Abd al-Raḥmān, it is clear that he closely retold the account of Afzal Khān from *The Khaṭaks' Chronicle* with some colourful details either based on his own interpretation of the corresponding Pashto texts or derived from oral traditions which were still alive in the mid-nineteenth century. The English versified translation of 'Abd al-Raḥmān's poem was published much later by J. Enevoldsen (1977) who in the note on the historical background of Raḥmān's verses repeated Raverty's comments word-for-word (pp. 94–7, 177). To accentuate the humanistic tone of the poem, Enevoldsen gave it the elegant and very accurate title "Anatomy of Evil".

The name of 'Abd al-Qādir Khaṭāk as the third Pashto poet who had responded to the Momand drama was added to the names of Raḥmān and Ḥamīd by D.M. Kāmil, the editor of Afzal Khān's *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣa'*. In a comprehensive analysis of Afzal's work in the introduction to the edition, Kāmil made a critical remark:

2 For a brief discussion of the second poem within the study of Mīrẓā Khān's literary work see Mannanov 2006: 121–9, 240–1 and Pelevin 2005: 153–62.

In his book *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣaʿ* Afzal Khān also tells about an incident which is very sad and woeful, but instructive as well, and about which venerable ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Momand, may God have mercy on him, late ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Momand and ʿAbd al-Qādir Khaṭāk, the uncle of our historian, have written long poems. How nice it would have been, if our historian had consciously paid more attention to the Pashtuns' culture of his times and informed us about the lives and literary achievements of at least some of great poets, such as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Bābā and ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, or those among his uncles, such as ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān, Sikandar Khān and Ṣadr Khān (Afzal 1974: xxx).

The opening lines of three poems are quoted by Kāmil in the note to Afzal's account of the incident (Afzal 1974: 1262–3).

The present article offers a brief comparative examination of all original Pashto texts on the Momand drama of 1711 as both historical documents and creative writings. The far-reaching aim of this research is to provide new written evidence to the fact that the everyday literary activities of Pashtuns in tribal areas in pre-modern times were much more intensive than is widely imagined now. The texts under discussion suggest that despite the high average level of illiteracy among tribesmen, social discourses around local events in Pashtun tribal areas sometimes could have taken the form of written expression in Pashto.

### “Save us God from such a misfortune!” (Afzal Khān Khaṭāk)

Afzal Khān's report belongs to a small group of fragments with no direct relation to the main content of *The Khaṭāks' Chronicle*. The latter is defined by Afzal Khān himself as a supplement to *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣaʿ* which is basically a Pashto translation of the Persian history of the Pashtuns, *Makhzan-i Afghānī* by Niʿmatallāh Harawī.<sup>3</sup> Afzal entitled *The Chronicle* “An account of events in our own tribe” (*bayān dā khpālo qabāʿilo dā sarguzasht*) (Afzal 1974: 16). Extant manuscripts of *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣaʿ* attest that *The Chronicle* was not finished, nor properly structured and edited, before being widely released. What we have now is in fact a remnant of the Khaṭāk chiefs' family archive composed of writings by Khushḥāl and Afzal. However, *The Chronicle* occupies almost half of the whole corpus of *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣaʿ*.

The record of the Momand drama is placed in between the narratives which tell of Afzal Khān's struggle for chieftainship with his uncle Bahrām Khān (d. 1712) in 1689–1712 and with his younger brother Nāmdār Khān in 1712–23. This text follows another extrinsic fragment with a much longer account of developments in Qandahar among the western Pashtun tribes, the Abdālīs (later the Durrānīs)

3 Niʿmatallāh's work is available in two versions. It is very likely that the more voluminous version, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī wa Makhzan-i Afghānī* (1612–13), was an extended edition of the original shorter one which bore the title *Makhzan-i Afghānī* (1610–11) and had wider circulation among Pashtuns (Niʿmatallāh 1960–62; Dorn 1836; Elliot and Dowson 1873: 67–115). It was the shorter version of Niʿmatallāh's book that Afzal Khān translated into Pashto around 1720–21.

and the Ghilzays, in the first decade of the eighteenth century (Afzal 1974: 398–402). Both pieces were inserted into *The Chronicle* apparently because there was no other suitable place in *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣaʿ*. As compared with the fragment about the western Pashtuns, which seems to be a later interpolation and raises many questions about its origins and authorship, the report on the Momand incident was undoubtedly written by Afzal as an entry in his personal diaries. It is very probable that Afzal Khān mentioned this haunting event for the better memorization of the date of his own final victory over Bahrām Khān who in 1711 was expelled from the Khaṭāk dominion and died in exile the next year. Afzal's report is marked out in the text by the subheading "The Case of Jamāl" (*Muqaddama dā Jamāl*) and runs as follows:

After the death of Padishah Awrangzīb Jamāl Muhmand and few witless short-sighted [individuals] with him launched a riot. Among the Muhmands he was a Mūsriẓay. But Mūsriẓay is a weak clan of the Muhmands. His claim was this one: "In this riot I shall gain repute and glory, shall obtain power (*arbābī*)!" In the meantime many excesses took place. When in the year of 1122 (1710/11) the governorship in the Kabul province was conferred on Nāṣir Khān, the latter arrived in Peshawar and entrusted Jamāl with power. However, Nāṣir Khān knew of Jamāl's unworthy deeds committed before and after his appointment to the governorship. While exercising his power, Jamāl plundered the village of ʿĪsā Muhmand. [Then] he ascended to Tal(?). ʿĪsā Muhmand is powerful in his clan. He made an agreement with Nāṣir Khān. The Mughals have their own benefit in the strife between Pashtuns. A verse (*miṣraʿ*): "On whatever side there are killed ones, it is for the benefit of Islam."<sup>4</sup>

In the meanwhile the wedding of Jamāl's son was arranged. Nāṣir Khān also gave him two thousand rupees as a gift. Then, by incitement of the Mughals, ʿĪsā made his [retaliatory] move. That night, when the wedding of Jamāl's son was celebrated, ʿĪsā came to him with his posse and approached his house. Jamāl was unaware of the [upcoming] trouble. He came out to face them, but he had no strength to fight. Having been wounded, he came back inside the house. ʿĪsā set fire to the house, and Jamāl burned there. Eighty people – men, women, small children – burned with him in that house where the wedding was. This event occurred in 1123 (1711/12).<sup>5</sup> Save us God from such a misfortune! (Afzal 1974: 402).

Retelling this fragment, H.G. Raverty named Jamāl Khān's clan "Khudrzī", drawing on a line from ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd's poem translated by him as, "Truly, the Almighty hath made the Khudrzīs infamous by Jamāl" (Raverty 1867: 126).

- 4 An old Persian proverb: *ba (zi) har taraf ki shavad kushta sūd-i islām-ast*. For its detailed interpretation see Partavī Āmulī 1990: 590–4.
- 5 The last two months of the Hijri year 1123 fall in the winter period between 11.12.1711 and 08.02.1712. The wedding ceremony most likely took place in spring or early summer, i.e. in 1711.

According to D.M. Kāmil's comments, in a Momand oral tradition (*riwāyat*) this small clan is called "Musrīzay" (or "Mushtarzay"), while the clan of 'Īsā is identified as Māshokhel (Afzal 1974: 1262). The ethnonym mentioned by 'Abd al-Ḥamīd is likely to be read as "Khidrīzay" since it seems to be a derivative of the name of the mystical prophet Khizr associated in Islamic popular beliefs with water and land fertility (Krasnowolska 2009). A large number of Pashtun clans from various tribes bear this name, the best known being the Khidarzays of the Yūsufzay-Mandar tribe (cf. *Dictionary* 1910: 26, 229; Syāl 1988: 52, 56, 64, 112, 168, 219, 228). Khidrīzay was probably a subdivision of the Momands to which the Jamāl Khān's small clan Mūsīzay belonged.

Although Afzal Khān was not personally interested in the conflict between two Momand khans, and did not know either of them closely, his report clearly reveals his negative attitude towards the ambitious Jamāl Khān. The latter's rise to power Afzal calls "a riot" (*shūrish*). Jamāl's companions are described as "witless short-sighted [individuals]" (*zāhirbīn kūtahandīsh*) and their doings are qualified as "excesses" (*ifrāt-tafrīt*). Afzal puts a noticeable emphasis on the fact that Jamāl Khān's clan was weak in the Momand tribe (*mūsīzay pə muhmando ke kamzore təpa da*). These observations suggest that a pretentious person from a humble social background could build a military-administrative career and gain repute and glory (*nām-nāmūs*) only through violence. It is not by chance that he defines the leadership Jamāl so much desired as *arbābī* and not *sardārī* or *khānī*, the terms he regularly deployed in *The Chronicle* for the notion of chieftainship. *Arbāb* (the Arabic plural of *rabb*, "lord") was a common title for Pashtun tribal leaders in the Peshawar region, mostly the Momands and the Khalīls, who served the Mughals (later the Sikhs and the British) in the capacity of "middlemen". Their main duty was to provide communication between the foreign imperial authorities and Pashtun tribes (cf. Caroe 1958: 325, 348). Thus, Afzal Khān deliberately wished to stress that Jamāl was a parvenu who ascended to power in his tribe only as an imperial servant, a Mughal puppet, and not as a worthy licit claimant. Such an evaluation of Jamāl Khān's career agrees with the fundamental topic of *The Khaṭak's Chronicle* – the idea of legitimacy of political leadership and authority. In this light the story of the Momand conflict in *The Chronicle* serves as an additional example of the tragic consequences that may result from illegal power. There is little doubt that in recounting the Momand incident Afzal Khān had in mind the struggle for supremacy in his own tribe, and the overt reproach of Jamāl masked the author's resentment against his uncle and political adversary Bahrām Khān, the failed usurper of the Khaṭak chieftainship.

Towards Jamāl's antagonist 'Īsā, whose act of vengeance resulted in tragedy with many innocent casualties including small children, Afzal Khān demonstrates a rather neutral attitude. He portrays 'Īsā as a powerful man of his clan (*pə khpəl khel ke zorawər dəy*) who was able to make a separate personal agreement (*joṛa*) with the Mughal administration. It seems that even the use of the antonyms "weak" (*kamzoray*) and "strong" (*zorawər*) in the characterization of opposing parties to the conflict betrays Afzal Khān's concealed respect for 'Īsā. Despite an evident and sincere compassion for the dead, voiced in the last phrases, as well as a discontent with the fratricidal clash between fellow tribesmen, Afzal Khān has no word of criticism with respect to the intrinsic

drawbacks of the tribal law of retaliation. Other narratives in *The Chronicle* confirm his strict adherence to this law, the story of Khushhāl Khān’s revenge for the death of his father Shahbāz Khān in January 1641 being the most persuasive example. In a brutal depiction of the slaughter executed by Khaṭāk combatants on Khushhāl’s order in the village of the Yūsufzay clan Akākhel, no remorse is expressed: “And they spared no one of animals, men, women, children, but killed whoever ran into them. Rivers of blood they set streaming in their yards. The blood of dogs and people flowed intermingled” (Afzal 1974: 271; cf. Plowden 1893: 207).

A certain ambiguity can be detected in Afzal Khān’s stance towards the Mughal authorities. On the one hand, he openly blames the Mughals for their routine imperial tactics of divide and rule aimed at igniting “the strife between Pashtuns” (*də mughal pə wayrānəy ke [də] paxtānə khpəla mudda’ ā da*). On the other, being a Mughal vassal and fief holder (*jāgīrdār*), he maintained close personal ties with Nāṣir Khān, then the Governor of Kabul province. Everywhere in *The Chronicle* Afzal Khān is at pains to point out that he had always been on friendly terms with Nāṣir Khān since the latter’s first visit to Pakhtunkhwa in 1703 in the entourage of Bahādur Shāh (r. 1707–12), the second son of Awrangzīb (r. 1658–1707) (e.g. Afzal 1974: 363–4). Among numerous reports of his amicable relationship with Nāṣir Khān, the lively story about the goose hunt that Afzal organized in 1704 for Mughal Prince Rafī‘ al-Shān (killed in 1712) and the Kabul Governor deserves special attention as a nice specimen of early Pashto narrative prose (Afzal 1974: 369–71). In the account of the Momand incident Afzal Khān pays a subtle compliment to Nāṣir Khān for his generous wedding gift of 2,000 rupees to Jamāl’s son, but refrains from mentioning his name when speaking of the insidious double-faced policy of the Mughal administration towards Pashtuns.

Unfortunately, Afzal Khān does not specify in his story the locality in which the incident took place, if the phrase “he ascended to Tal” (*pə tal ye khatəna wukra*) is not an indirect indication to it. Even if Tal (lit. “hill”) here is really a toponym, its geographical position is uncertain. D.M. Kāmil, an expert on the subject, did not comment on the matter. However, in one fragment of *The Chronicle* the word “Tal” is undoubtedly mentioned as the name of a geographical locality: Afzal Khān tells here in passing that Tal was a popular hunting place (p. 426). The context helps to locate this Tal somewhere on the north-western borders of the Khaṭāk territories to the south-east of Peshawar. This was the area where the Khaṭāk domain partly adjoined the lands of those Momand clans which, in the mid-sixteenth century, had left the mountainous region to the north of the Khyber Pass and settled in the valley of Bāra, a southern tributary of the Kabul river (Caroe 1958: 187). According to ‘Abd al-Qādir Khaṭāk, the Momand incident happened exactly on the banks of Bāra (see below).

### “The time of lament” (‘Abd al-Raḥmān Momand)

In ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s *dīwān*, the poem on the Momand drama is of particular importance as both a unique example of the poet’s reaction to earthly, tribal affairs and the only authentic evidence of the fact that in 1711 he was still

alive (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 1963: 81–4).<sup>6</sup> Drawing a parallel between ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and the Roshani poet Mīrzā Khān Anṣārī, who likewise authored mostly traditional religio-philosophical lyrics but on the verge of his death wrote an “innovative” anti-war *ghazal*, we may assume that Raḥmān also composed similar verses towards the end of his life in a state of strong emotional strain. It appears that the mass murder of his fellow tribesmen in 1711 finally drove ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, who was in his sixties or older, to step aside from traditionalist lyrics and mould previously abstract humanistic motifs into a distinct, socially engaged protest against violence. However, both the rhetoric and the tone of the poem indicate that formally it was written as a mourning elegy dedicated to Jamāl Khān and his people. Thus, Raḥmān’s poem may be regarded as a contribution to the elaboration of the classic genre of *marṣiyya*.

Of the 28 distiches of the poem, only the first 17 directly concern the incident itself. Even if Raḥmān’s sympathies were with Jamāl, he tried in his verses not to take sides openly. His message in the poem was to express compassion towards the victims of fratricide and to condemn malice and cruelty in human society in general. Besides, he was undoubtedly well aware of Jamāl Khān’s former wrongdoings which led to the tragedy. It seems that from the very beginning of the poem Raḥmān purposely shifted accent to the theme of true friendship and honour by introducing a character who is not mentioned in Afzal Khān’s report, “Gul Khān and Jamāl Khān had many friends, / but no one was useful in the time of lament (*zāristān*)” (distich 1). In fact, it is gratitude to a man named Gul Khān for his faithfulness to Jamāl and self-sacrifice that shapes the poet’s reflections of the dramatic event. Apparently Raḥmān personally knew Gul Khān, who was among honourable guests invited to the wedding with their relatives.

In eight distiches (5–12) the poet elaborates the motif of the fire which killed two “sincere friends” with their wives and children. Three times he repeats the plea for salvation (*al-ghiyās*) from such a monstrous evil as burning people alive and occasionally employs hyperbole to picture the global scale of the incident: e.g. he calls it the Day of Resurrection (*qiyāmat*), reproaches the earth, the skies and the mountains for being silent and undisturbed by the tragedy, or, alluding to Muslim mythology, compares the fire to that in which the tyrant Namrūd (Biblical Nimrod) attempted to kill the prophet Ibrāhīm (Quran 21: 68–9, 29: 23/24, 37: 95/97–96/98). In accordance with Afzal Khān’s report, these verses prove that the fire was the culmination of the Momand drama. No other details of the incident are provided in Raḥmān’s poem except for the fact that it happened on Sunday (distich 14).

6 In an essay on Raḥmān’s literary work M. ‘Abd al-Qādir (1905–69), the founder and first director of the Pashto Academy in Peshawar, mentions the date of the Momand incident with reference to Afzal Khān’s *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣa’*, but makes no explicit conclusions about the years of the poet’s life (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 1963: xv). D.M. Kāmil was of the opinion that Raḥmān’s poem on the incident is the only documented testimony to the latest known date in the poet’s biography (Afzal 1974: 1263; cf. Enevoldsen 1977: 10–11). According to Z. Hewādmal, research by ‘A. Rashād suggests that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān passed away in 1128 H.Q., i.e. in 1715/16 (see his comments in Sa’īd and Hotak 1987: 289).



The names of Jamāl and ʿĪsā, the principal actors in the conflict, are mentioned together only to exculpate both from direct charges of homicide: "It is not the guilt of ʿĪsā and Jamāl, / but the tricks of Shayṭān and the lower self (*nafs*). // People killed their own relatives, / but all this was predestined by God" (distiches 16, 17).<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, in the verses about the fire there is a slightly disguised accusation of the assailants: "How impudent were that fire and those people / who did not extinguish it by a rain of tears!" (distich 8).

Declaring that the key motif behind the incident was the mundane desire for "worldly goods" (*dunyā*), i.e. power and wealth, Raḥmān touches on a conventional topic of Sufi homiletic literature. He joins those Sufi preachers who not only denounced the lower self, *nafs*, as the breeding ground of lust and base instincts but also portrayed it as a zoomorphic creature (cf. Schimmel 1975: 112–3). From the old stock of poetic images Raḥmān chose the description of *nafs* as a dog (*spay*) which "drinks water and eats food" (distich 13).<sup>8</sup>

In the remaining part of the poem Raḥmān addresses the broad issue of violence in two aspects. First, he examines the roots of violence in despotism and arbitrariness of rulers (*bādashāhān*), "Kings are doing what they wish" (distich 18). Instead of indulging in commonplace lamentations and admonitions he briefly recalls three cases from history – the recent wars for succession in the Mughal Empire, associated in the poet's mind with the names of the winners, Awrangzīb in 1658 and Shāh ʿĀlam A ʿzam (Bahādur Shāh) in 1707, and the assassination of the Islamic Prophet's grandson Ḥusayn in 680, the latter being perceived as a symbol of martyrdom by Sunni Pashtuns even nowadays.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Raḥmān pointed to the strife for political power as the principal social factor in violence and bloodshed. Like other Pashtun litterateurs of his times Raḥmān felt free to criticize contemporaneous Mughal rulers. Emperor Shāh ʿĀlam, who died a few months

7 In the Peshawar edition of Raḥmān's *dīwān* (1963) and many other, earlier and later, editions, the name "Jamāl" in this distich is rendered as "Dajjāl" (lit. "deceiver", the apocalyptic personage of the Muslim eschatology) and, therefore, "ʿĪsā" is to be understood here correspondingly as the name of the Muslim prophet (see Abel 1991). Enevoldsen supposed that this "curious slip of the pen" occurred during the preparation of the first critical edition of the *dīwān* in the early 1870s (1977: 177, 187). However, "the slip" has a longer history, for it appears in the manuscripts of the *dīwān* dating back to the eighteenth century. The author of this paper was able to consult only three copies of Raḥmān's *dīwān* in the library of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of St Petersburg. The earliest copy, dated from the eighteenth century, has the variant "Dajjāl" (C 1901, fol. 115b), but the latest (1829) has "Jamāl" (A 965, fol. 91b), while in the third one (C 1908, eighteenth century) the poem under discussion is omitted. For a full description of these manuscripts see Kushev 1976: 37–43. It is very likely that already in the eighteenth century some copyists of Raḥmān's *dīwān* who were unaware of the historical background of his poem took the word "ʿĪsā" for the name of the prophet and, having reinterpreted the original meaning of the verse, deliberately changed the name "Jamāl" into "Dajjāl".

8 The topic of the struggle with *nafs* was elaborated on in the Pashto poetry of the Roshani mystics (see Pelevin 2005: 252–3). In a sense, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān echoed Dawlat Lohānāy who preferred to depict *nafs* as an unruly horse, but once compared it to a dog, "*Nafs* is a dog who runs after carrion; / be well prepared to fight with it!" (Dawlat 1975: 32).

9 The name of his elder brother Ḥasan is also mentioned in this verse, though the latter was not killed by sword in a war of faith (*ghazā*), as is emotionally stated by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, but died in 669/70 of a prolonged illness.

after the Momand incident in early 1712, was characterized by Raḥmān as the one who “covered with blood all the land of Hindustan” (distich 19). Such forthright and sharp statements were not considered indiscreet, probably because they were intended for a domestic readership and articulated not in official cosmopolitan Persian, but in regional Pashto.

The second aspect of Raḥmān’s discourse on violence is rightly defined by Enevoldsen as “a powerful ‘anatomy of evil’ which comes very close to the Biblical doctrine of Original Sin” (1977: 177). The unsophisticated verses in which the poet explains violence as a product of inborn vices of human nature sound like a fragment of public sermon addressed to laymen:

Such is the fate of everyone who strives for worldly goods,  
 Be it a human, or a spirit, or an animal.  
 The offspring of Adam kill each other on the earth,  
 Fishes eat each other’s flesh in the sea,  
 And like fishes who eat flesh in the sea,  
 Birds do the same thing in the air.  
 Those who crawl and those who fly in these times –  
 All of them fight with each other.  
 Worldly goods are a dead body,  
 This is why the dervishes run away from them.  
 Wickedness in these times is greater  
 Than what Raḥmān could describe to anyone. (Distiches 23–28)

‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s poem and Afzal Khān’s report were evidently written at about the same time, just after the Momand incident. If Raḥmān was unlikely to be acquainted with the personal diaries of the Khaṭak chieftain, the latter may have known the poem of the very popular Pashtun poet from the neighbouring tribe. Of course, Afzal was informed about the incident through other sources, but Raḥmān’s affecting verses could have inspired him to leave a note on the Momand conflict among the narratives that focused entirely on the events in the Khaṭak domain.

### “He who digs a pit for others. . .” (‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Momand)

H.G. Raverty (1867: 124) noted that ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd had written his poem as a reply to the verses of Raḥmān Bābā, his fellow tribesman of an older generation, with the aim of justifying ‘Īsā, his fellow clansman. Both Ḥamīd and ‘Īsā were Māshokhels, while Raḥmān belonged to a different clan, possibly Ibrāhīmkhel (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 1963: iii; Hewādmal 2000: 174). According to Raverty (1867: 85–86), “Mashū Khel” was also the name of the poet’s home village where his descendants were still living in the mid-nineteenth century.

In his poem Ḥamīd does not so much acquit ‘Īsā as reprove Jamāl Khān who, conversely, is mourned by Raḥmān (‘Abd al-Ḥamīd [1958]: 95–6). Essentially, the entire text of Ḥamīd’s poem is an accusatory speech addressed to the murdered Momand chieftain. In terms of poetic genres it may be best defined as *hajw* (social satire), though irony and mockery are here replaced with outspoken condemnation. The poem’s main idea is unequivocally stated in its first distich:

“Every chieftain (*sardār*) who plots evil against his people, / should hold in front of him the case of Jamāl like a mirror”. Then, employing a whole range of rhetorical tools, the poet expounds at length on Jamāl Khān’s viciousness and misconduct only to declare that this chieftain was justly punished for his avarice and malice towards his kinsfolk.

Beneath his own feet cuts the boughs that man  
 Who nurtures a strong desire for evil towards relatives.  
 In the end only carrion will remain of that chieftain,  
 Who urges his belly to relish his wrongdoings.  
 The one who encroaches on the other’s life and property  
 Will lose his own life and property first.  
 He will himself fall into it – this is a proverb;  
 He who digs a pit for others commits a sin.  
 Fighting and killing will happen in the house of those  
 Who wish fighting and killing for others. (Distiches 2–6)

Ḥamīd’s long diatribe contains few historical details. Besides the ethnonym “Khidrīzay”, presumably related to Jamāl Khān’s tribal subdivision (distich 23, see above) he mentions the name “Jalāl”, attributed by Raverty to Jamāl’s son whose wedding celebration turned into the massacre. Rather cynically reproaching both father and son, the poet hints at the fact that Jamāl Khān’s authority in the Momand tribe depended on the support of “aliens” (*pradī*), i.e. the Mughals: “Courage is not attainable with the help of aliens without relatives; / this is what Jamāl and Jalāl shout from their graves” (distich 8). In one metaphorical verse Ḥamīd even succeeds in displaying the sequence of the drama’s acts: “Other people are always being burned / because of those who break the hope of sword against a wall” (distich 22). Afzal Khān’s report gives a clue to interpreting this verse, as follows: Jamāl Khān and his men failed to resist their attackers in close combat and hid behind the walls of the house; to force them to leave the shelter, the attackers set fire to the house, which caused a mass murder.

Ḥamīd himself is silent about the fact that his poem was an answer to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s verses. Moreover, he never mentions in his writings either the name of Raḥmān Bābā, or the names of other celebrated Pashtun poets, whereas in the former’s *dīwān* we find references to Khushḥāl Khān and Dawlat Lohānāy, who in their turn occasionally remembered Mīrzā Khān Anṣārī and other early Roshānī authors (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 1963: 67, 75, 140; Khushḥāl 1952: 533–4, 623, 861–2; Dawlat 1975: 20, 149–50). The conspicuous aestheticism and intentional intricacy of Ḥamīd’s poetical wording, often identified with the so-called “Indian style” of later Persian classics, as well as the very title of his *dīwān* “Pearls and corals” (*Durr aw Marjān*) and the supercilious phrase “Persian speakers bit their fingers in amazement, / when Ḥamīd displayed eloquence in Pashto” ([1958]: 131) testify to the poet’s very high opinion of his exceptional literary mastery.

However, in Ḥamīd’s few passing remarks we may detect allusions to Raḥmān’s poem. His assertion that Jamāl Khān was as much guilty “as Yazīd who was responsible for [the murder] of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn” (distich 19) is

an obvious reply to Raḥmān's verse where the names of the Islamic prophet's grandsons are mentioned together as the martyrs of war (see above). Like Raḥmān, Ḥamīd erroneously connected the death of Ḥasan in 669/70 and the murder of Ḥusayn in 680 with the name of the second Umayyad caliph Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya (r. 680–683), who according to the available evidence had been involved only in the latter case. Certainly, Ḥamīd points to Raḥmān and himself when he observes, "Let the one who is unaware of the true state of affairs say everything; / he who knows always speaks with reason" (distich 21). The last lines in Ḥamīd's poem leave little doubt that it was conceived as a polemical answer to Raḥmān's verses, "Such are the habits of this epoch: / when somebody grieves for the death of someone, the other rejoices at it" (distich 25). Being an uncompromising objection to the mournful homily of the highly esteemed Momand bard, Ḥamīd's poem seems to contradict the tribal legend which tells that Raḥmān once met with Ḥamīd "and was so pleased with his modesty and humility, that he gave him his blessing" (Raverty 1867: 86).

To win a poetic dispute with Raḥmān, Ḥamīd abundantly embellished his accusatory speech with various means of artistic expression – comparisons, metaphors, aphorisms, etc. Thus, he compares Jamāl Khān with a hawk who only tires and weakens himself attacking the larger quarry of a falcon (distich 9), or with a moth who carelessly dies in a flame (distich 14), or with a sultry desert which can never be made cultivable by sweet water (distich 17). Exposing Jamāl Khān's moral defects, Ḥamīd quotes two popular proverbs: one about a person who maliciously digs a pit for others (distich 5), and another about a wolf's whelp brought up by incautious people (distich 18).<sup>10</sup> Several figurative expressions in Ḥamīd's poem may be understood as local idioms, e.g. the locution "to thread a needle with the flash of lightning" (*dā breḫnā pā ranā stān peyal*) with the meaning "to do futile things" in the phrase, "An unworthy person who aspires to dignity through enmity / threads a needle with the flash of lightning and makes [only] a hassle" (distich 15). The most characteristic sample of "Indian style" imagery is the verse in which Jamāl Khān is blamed for illegal encroachment on other people's property: "He who puts on another's clothes by force / makes the wrap for his wounds unclean" (distich 12). The plain idea of the inviolability of private property is figuratively formulated here through the unconventional image based on everyday realities. Slightly rephrased, this poetical aphorism, actually an invented proverb, goes as follows: "The cloth of a misappropriated garment is impure to bandage wounds".

Unlike Raḥmān Bābā, who in his poem condemned violence *per se* and called for mercy, Ḥamīd in his response bluntly expressed quite different feelings of revenge and even gloating over the death of a sworn enemy of his own clan. However, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd's large arsenal of wise sayings, moralistic admonitions, reasoned appeals for justice, as well as sophisticated poetical devices, do not help him to match the powerful humanistic tonality of Raḥmān's verses.

10 For Pashtun poets the literary source of this proverb was the verse of Sa'dī Shīrāzī (d. 1292) from *Gulistān*, "Eventually a wolf's whelp will become a wolf, / even if it is raised among people" (*'āqibat gurg-zāda gurg shavad / garchi bā ādamī buzurg shavad*) (Sa'dī 1996: 42). In "The Khaṭaks' chronicle" Afzal Khān (1974: 406) quotes this verse to reprove his rebellious younger brother Nāmdār Khān.

### "All Pashtuns speak of honour . . ." ('Abd al-Qādir Khaṭāk)

The considerations that impelled 'Abd al-Qādir to compose a poem on the incident in the neighbouring tribe are not entirely clear ('Abd al-Qādir 1969: 254–5). No other historical event, except for the death of his father in 1689, is discussed in his poetry. The most suitable explanation is that Qādir, like his nephew Afzal Khān, wished to draw a parallel between the Momand conflict and the current war for supremacy among the Khaṭāks, but his comparison was not in favour of Afzal.

In *The Chronicle* Afzal Khān (1974: 408) many times speaks of 'Abd al-Qādir, often disrespectfully nicknamed "Kādī", as his political opponent who, secretly or openly, plotted against him during his long confrontation with Bahrām Khān in 1681–1712. Afzal reports that when, after Bahrām's death, 'Abd al-Qādir sided with his younger brother Nāmdār Khān, he arrested his uncle with other mutinous relatives, for he "considered imprisonment a better solution than murder or exile". According to Afzal, this happened in June 1713, and in subsequent accounts the name of 'Abd al-Qādir is never mentioned again. H.G. Raverty's assertion that Qādir was in fact executed by Afzal is not supported by a reference to any sources, "Æbd-ul-Kadir, together with ten of his brothers, and a number of their sons, were put to death, at the village of Zama Garraey, in one day, and buried in one grave; thus escaping the sorrows and troubles of chieftainship" (Raverty 1867: 269).

A few verses in the second part of Qādir's poem may relate to developments in the Khaṭāk territories in 1710–11. Afzal Khān recounts in *The Chronicle* (1974: 391–8) that towards the summer of 1710 Bahrām Khān captured the Khaṭāk chieftains' residence Sarāy-Akoṛa (present-day Akora Khattak) with the aid of some Pashtun tribes including the Yūsufzays. Afzal had less military strength and was forced to escape to the Khaṭāk mountains in the south. Hired Pashtun troops were not satisfied with payment for their service and, after a few raids on the Khaṭāk settlements, left Bahrām Khān with only 200 horsemen. In October 1710 Afzal Khān regained possession of Sarāy-Akoṛa and by the spring of 1711 restored his authority in the Khaṭāk domain. 'Abd al-Qādir, who had allegedly rendered assistance to Bahrām, fled to the Yūsufzay lands. Afzal's account explains why Qādir, in his poem, unexpectedly attacks the Yūsufzays, blaming them for avarice and lack of honour (distich 15). In the following verse the poet formulates a maxim: "All Pashtuns speak of honour (*nang*), / but only those have honour who are selfless and not mercenary" (distich 16). Then, in distiches 20–21, Qādir accuses unnamed people who provoke discords and thus weaken the troops (*laṣkar*).

In the closing passage of four verses the author shifts the focus of his criticism to the Mughal imperial authorities (distiches 22–25). He declares that one should not neither trust the Mughals whose oaths are "Satanic traps" nor fear too much their disunited armies since the princes (*shāhzādagān*) "are occupied with the war for power". A cynical conclusion in this philippic could have been addressed as well to his nephew Afzal Khān, "Make a stairway of heads and climb up! / Rising to a high rank is not easy" (distich 25). These verses suggest also that Qādir might have finished the poem in the early 1712 when the descendants of Emperor Bahādur Shāh started the war for the Mughal throne.

The Momand incident itself is described in distiches 5–13 after the philosophical introduction in which the poet ponders the vicissitudes of life and calls for a cupbearer to bring him a wine that would blur the difference between joy and sadness. In contrast to the Momand poets who mostly reflected on ethical aspects of the clash, ‘Abd al-Qādir draws an imaginary picture of the very battle accentuating the episode of the hand-to-hand sword fight and ignoring the fact of the fire highlighted by all other authors. Following an old poetical tradition, Qādir tells the story on behalf of a wind:

Today the morning wind came from Peshawar  
 And told me a few words as if in the [human] language.  
 This night the Momands fought with blades  
 As neither Afghans nor Turanians had ever fought before.  
 Bows shouted with arrows’ voices: “Attack them!”  
 And blades beat the dishonourable cohort of Jamāl Khān.  
 When troops succour those who are oppressed,  
 God help them, for these are blessed troops!  
 They made a blooming tulip garden in the very heat of summer;  
 Imprisoned are those who do not see such a spring.  
 The waters of Bāra they made red like wine,  
 All boulders in its headwaters are purple.  
 The fighters screamed with one voice:  
 “Beat them, beat these Hindustanis!”  
 Black night became bright as morning because of the blades  
 Which shone like a spring lightning.  
 The Momands always gave weight to Pashtuns,  
 When their dignity was at loss because of those ruling the Afghans.<sup>11</sup>  
 (Distiches 5–13)

Needless to say, in these verses Qādir not only sympathizes with Jamāl Khān’s adversaries portrayed as the defenders of the oppressed, but even praises them, thus siding with ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd. He even unwittingly echoes Ḥamīd, introducing into his poem a proverb with the same explanatory remark *dā matal dāy* (“this is a proverb”), “The blade cuts by its nature – this is a proverb; / the blades of the Momands now are nothing but ore” (distich 18).<sup>12</sup> In the next verse Qādir continues to laud the Momands for bravery, asserting that they are perfect fighters in the open field in comparison to other tribes such as the Afīdays or the Shinwārays, who prefer to wage warfare in mountains.

The political overtones of Qādir’s poem are easily discernible. By depicting Jamāl Khān as a dishonourable henchman of the Mughals the poet alludes to the vassalage of his nephew Afzal Khān, who in 1710 refused to join a wide coalition of Pashtun tribes against the imperial administration of Kabul province and

11 By “those ruling among Afghans” (*mīr-afghānī*) ‘Abd al-Qādir obviously meant the Mughals and their servants among Pashtuns, such as Jamāl Khān Momand and his combatants, who are contemptuously called “Hindustanis” in distich 11.

12 Qādir quotes this Pashto proverb as *tegh pə ašl ghwətsawəl kā*. In a modern collection of Pashto proverbs it runs as *tūra pə ašlwālī ghwətsa kawī* (Shahrānī 2008: 42).

confronted the insurgents who then provided military support to Bahrām Khān. If in Afzal Khān’s report Jamāl Khān Momand is implicitly compared to Bahrām Khān Khaṭāk as an illegitimate contender for tribal leadership, in ‘Abd al-Qādir’s poem he is an alter ego of Afzal himself as an imperial vassal tyrannizing his fellow tribesmen.

The literary style of Qādir’s poem, atypically for his lyrics, bears a strong resemblance to that of the popular war ballads of Khushḥāl Khān, which had already become classics of the genre in the seventeenth century. Qādir chose the rhyme on *-ānī*, the same as in Khushḥāl’s ballad about the defeat of the Khaṭāks in a clash with the Bangashs in 1676, having changed only the grammatical epistrophe *wa* (“was”) to *dī* (“are”) (Khushḥāl 1952: 857–60). Khushḥāl’s poem (*qiṭ‘a*) begins with *dā bangax̄ pā tūra māt na yam bāwar kira / dā gunbat pā jang me mate āsmānī wa* (“I am not defeated by the blades of the Bangashs, believe me; / my defeat in the battle at Gunbat was from Heaven”), and the first distich in Qādir’s poem (*qaṣīda*) is *dā kārūna chi nān gānda ‘ayānī dī / hets pā khwā pā khāṭīr na wū āsmānī dī* (“The things that happen today and tomorrow / were not in thoughts at all, they are from Heaven”). In this distich Qādir also rephrased the opening verse of Khushḥāl’s other ode written in 1674 in connection with the events of the Mughal–Afghan war of 1672–76: *chi pā khwā pā khāṭīr na hase ‘ayān shī / dzine tsə chāre paydā pā dā jahān shī* (“When something turns out otherwise than it was in thoughts, / what things may happen in this world”) (Khushḥāl 1952: 612–3). Of 26 rhyme words in Qādir’s poem, 17 coincide with those in Khushḥāl’s ballad “I am not defeated...”, some of them generating similar motifs and ideas. For example, the Persian word *nānī* (“mercenary”)<sup>13</sup> is used in both poems negatively to characterize allied troops – the Yūsufzays in Qādir’s poem and some Khaṭāk clans in that of Khushḥāl. Qādir’s verse (distich 16, cited above) is a rephrasing of Khushḥāl’s lines, “A troop may fight either for fame and honour (*nām-u nang*) or for gold; / this posse of mine was not fighting for honour, it was mercenary!” (Khushḥāl 1952: 858).

The symbolic figure of a cupbearer (*sāqī*) in the philosophical introduction to Qādir’s poem was not so much a tribute paid to the canon of classical Persian lyrics as an allusion to Khushḥāl’s most famous war ode “Whence did this spring come again...” (*byā lə kūma rā-paydā shū dā bahār*) translated into English as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century by Mountstuart Elphinstone (1839: 257–9; Khushḥāl 1952: 526–8). Khushḥāl’s ode also opens with a brief overture which belongs to the traditional genre of the landscape spring lyrics. The concluding verse of this introduction is, “O cupbearer, give me full, full cups / so that I may become wholly indulged in wine drinking!” Qādir rephrased this verse by changing its frank hedonistic appeal into a moralizing statement from the philosophy of life, “O cupbearer, bring me a cup so that everything may become equal to me, / for both sorrow and joy have no constancy, they are transient”. Another, even more distinct, reference to the major source of influence in Qādir’s poem is an almost literal quotation

13 The adjective *nānī* (from *nān* “bread”) is a part of the Persian locution *dūst-i nānī* (“selfish and false friend”) opposed to *dūst-i jānī* (“selfless and sincere friend”).

of the verse from Khushhāl's ode where the bloodstained battlefield is compared to a blooming garden of tulips: "White blades they made red with blood; / a tulip garden bloomed in the heat of summer" (cf. Qādir's distich 9 above). Parallel lines in Pashto are *pə ahār ke shigufṭa shū lālazār* (Khushhāl) and *lālazār-ye shigufṭa pə srə ahār krə* (Qādir).

As for the possible connection of Qādir's verses with those of the Momand authors, one may point to the very similar number of distiches in all three texts: 28 (Raḥmān), 25 (Ḥamīd) and 26 (Qādir). There is no reason not to assume that Qādir had the chance to become acquainted with the verses of the Momand lyricists before he decided to compose his only war ballade with a quite unexpected description of the dramatic clash in the neighbouring tribe.

## Conclusion

For many reasons, beginning with sensitive issues of national and language policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Pashto literature of early modern times is still regarded, even in academic circles, as a kind of peripheral and mostly imitative offshoot of the transborder Persophone culture.<sup>14</sup> This misconception may lead to the continuation of significant lacunas both in Afghan and wider regional studies. With respect to the study of Islamic traditions among Pashtuns and their neighbours, these lacunae were rightly defined as "known unknowns" by Green (2017: 26–7). Leaving aside political and emotive aspects of the Pashtuns' ethno-cultural self-identity, it should be admitted that Pashto writings of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries are still generally overlooked as primary sources of reliable and very often unique factual data for studying various facets of social and cultural developments among Pashtun tribes in this period.<sup>15</sup> Some of these writings, such as the lyrical poems examined above, have value as both artistic texts and authentic historical documents. To read them as only a marginal continuation or a switch-code interpretation of Persian poetry would lead to a superficial judgement about their creative originality and societal implications.

Towards the early eighteenth century Pashto writings had passed through the initial and formative phases of development and evolved into an autonomous national literature. Of course, there was no way for Pashto to become a written "Islamic language" other than to emulate the time-honoured literary traditions of

14 Cf. the final résumé in the brief outline of the history of Pashto classical literature by Andreyev (2010: 113). Shorter overviews of classical Pashto writings by Widmark and Wide well reflect a generally limited knowledge of the subject in Western scholarship (Widmark 2011: 64–7; Wide 2013: 92–4). In his study, Widmark discusses at length the reasons for "the marginalisation of Pashto scholarship" in Afghanistan and Pakistan and for "the deficiency of Pashto studies by scholars in the West", rightly indicating the problem of the ambivalent social and legal status of the language itself as the main obstacle to invigorating academic research into Pashto literature (2011: 54–64). The same or similar ideas are articulated by other scholars (see Bartlotti 2010: 130–2 and Caron 2013: 113–4).

15 For a rare example of considering Pashto literary texts of this period as historical sources see Nichols 2001: 52–6. Here, a poem of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Momand on landowners, although quoted in a versified English translation by J. Jens Enevoldsen, is discussed in the context of socio-economic research.



Persian (cf. Fagner 1999: 37–9, 91–2). Nevertheless, even the earliest specimens of Pashto writings bore visible features of stylistic and rhythmical patterns different from those of Persian and reflected some distinct peculiarities of Pashtun authors' ethnic mentality. The creative work of Khushḥāl Khān Khaṭāk in the second half of the seventeenth century was a watershed in the history of Pashto literature. From then onwards, a proper and non-superficial understanding of Pashto writings requires a careful differentiation between three layers of topical and formal elements, viz. traditionalist, ethnic, and individual. Most important is that it created a local literary context partly independent of the cosmopolitan Persian, and it is within this context that Pashto writings are to be examined first, before introducing them into a broader literary discourse in other languages.

The four literary pieces discussed in this article seem fully to support such an approach. Written in response to a local incident, a tribal armed clash with numerous civilian casualties, these texts can be accurately interpreted only within their particular socio-historic and literary environment. It was this environment that created favourable conditions in which a resonant event could trigger a chain of literary responses in the regional idiom. A spontaneous written discussion of the Momand incident of 1711 took various forms in Pashto verse and prose – a chronicle record, an elegy, a critical objection, an external observation shaped as a war ballad. Each of the responses saliently displays the author's personality, his individual mindset, and his artistic manner. On the other hand, brought together, these texts provide rare documentary evidence of an event from the Pashtun history of a period poorly reflected in available written sources.

The three poems on the incident also demonstrate that a proper interpretation of even stock rhetorical tools and figurative language in the Persophone oecumene's literatures of pre-modern and later times depends not only on familiarity with the conventional poetic vocabulary, long established and canonized in the medieval Persian classics, but on the knowledge of intermediate sources of influence or direct borrowings from local writings. By introducing the stereotyped images of Yazīd, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn into his thoughts on violence, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Momand did not refer to any older literary or confessional traditions, but repeated 'Abd al-Raḥmān's verses with the same erroneous deviation from historical truth, and the symbolic figure of a cupbearer (*sāqī*) in 'Abd al-Qādir Khaṭāk's poem was not a reference to the standard lyrical terminology, but a direct allusion to an ode of his father Khushḥāl Khān.

The clearly observable stylistic and rhetoric diversity of the texts discussed not only highlights the authors' individual characters, but also helps to give an insight into a variety of social moods, political attitudes and ethics in the Pashtun society of the early eighteenth century, just on the eve of the creation of the prototype of the modern Afghan state. Two Khaṭāk litterateurs, Afzal Khān and 'Abd al-Qādir Khān, expressed views of the tribal military-administrative elite, while two Momand poets voiced minds of the educated "middle" stratum, i.e. ordinary tribesmen with full legal status. Afzal and Qādir, who were political rivals, looked at the Momand incident as into a mirror reflecting the struggle for leadership in their own tribe. The former regarded it through the lens of his conception of legitimate supremacy, and the latter used this case to ponder destructive factors in military alliances. In emulation of Khushḥāl Khān's war ballades, Qādir even

exaggeratedly glorified the imagined battle scene, while others saw it as a terrible finale to fratricidal bloodshed. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Momand, despite demonstrative aestheticism and all the refinements of his “Indian style” lyrics, was so upset with the wrongs committed against his fellow clansmen that he involuntarily disclosed his inborn attachment to tribal laws and the ideology of blood feud. Unlike his fellow countrymen, Raḥmān Bābā overcame the boundaries of tribal consciousness and manifestly condemned violence outright, irrespective of its causes. With this steadfast humanistic tenor in his verses Raḥmān rightly earned a reputation as a truly devoted preacher of spiritual and moral values in Pashto classical literature and eventually became the most respected and loved Pashtun poet of all times.

Probably the only matter that united these four Pashtun litterateurs, as may be directly inferred from the texts, was their common, extremely negative, attitude towards the Mughal imperial authorities, always perceived as enemies, or at least “aliens” (*pradī*) even by those tribal rulers who officially recognized their overlordship. In Raḥmān Bābā’s pacifying homilies the Mughals are also mentioned mostly with negative connotations. Such unanimity was unlikely to be a derivative of a purely rhetorical cliché, but was more likely a sign of a shared political ideology which in a few decades after the Momand incident facilitated the transition of administrative authority in the Peshawar valley to the Durrānīs, a ruling dynasty of Pashtun origin.

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