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The Inception of Literary Criticism in Early Modern Pashto Writings

*The article overviews the earliest Pashto texts, mostly poetic, in which the incipient forms of literary criticism can be traced as authorial self-reflections related in Persian classics to the self-praise genre (*fakhriyya*) and explanations of reasons for composing works (*sabab-i taʾlīf*). Under close examination are the seventeenth century verses of the poets affiliated with the Roshānī religious community and the writings of Khushḥāl Khān Khaṭak (d. 1689). Analyzed texts prove that through the rudimentary discourse on a variety of literary criticism topics, Pashtun authors of early modern times declared and justified the presence of emerging literature in Pashto within the Persophone cultural space of Mughal India, articulating simultaneously their commitment to the proliferation of literacy and Islamic book culture among their countrymen.*

Keywords: Pashto Literature; Pashtuns; Early Modern Literary Criticism; Persian Poetry; Persophone Culture; Mughal India; Literacy

Introduction: From Vernacular to Written Language

In a short preface to the *Makhzan al-Islām*, the first manual of religious instruction in Pashto, the Sunni theologian Ākhūnd Darweza (d. after 1615) gave such a simple explanation of his choice of language for this book:

> People will always revere, trust and obey no other scholar than the one who speaks with them in the same language. Hence, this humble servant wishes to expound in Afghan (*afghānī*) to the best of his ability on all the tenets of the faith which he knows from Arabic and Persian books.[1]

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[1]Darweza, *Makhzan*, 1. Cf. this statement with the similar if more verbose comment by the Bengali religious author ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm about the practical necessity of the use of the Bengali language for similar purposes (quoted in d'Hubert, "Persian at the Court or in the Village," 104).

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At the end of the *Makhzan*, Darweza adds: "What Darweza tells is an exposition of the holy Prophet's faith. Pashtuns do not understand another language, so he teaches them in Pashto."[2] The *Makhzan al-Islām* (1605, authorial edition) was co-written by Darweza's son ʿAbd al-Karīm (d. 1661/62), who recorded his father's lectures, rendering oral texts in rhythmic Pashto prose (*sajʿ*). The last edition of the book (1700) was supplemented with a number of homiletic verses in Pashto composed by Darweza's descendants and followers.[3]

The story of the *Makhzan* reflects in a sense the evolution of a large part of the early literature in Pashto. Intended for preaching either traditionalist Islamic dogmas or mystical Sufi doctrines, the texts in the local vernacular were being written down for the sake of accuracy in phrasing religious formulas and their wider dissemination. Both the high literary status and emotive strength of poetry motivated early Pashtun authors to write their sermons in versified form. Drawing on classical models of Persian Sufi lyrics, the litterateurs affiliated with the Roshani community made the main contribution to the creation of Pashto written poetry. However, the teachers of traditionalist Islam, such as Darweza and his followers, paid less attention to rhetorical embellishments and means of artistic expression. Pashto texts of the homiletic compendiums like the *Nāfiʿ al-muslimīn* (1659/60) by Mīr Ḥusayn or "The Book of Bābū Jān" (the second half of the seventeenth century) well exhibit successive stages of a transfer from awkward semi-prose to elegant verse.[4]

The above-cited Darweza's statements in the *Makhzan*, addressed to the residents of the rural tribal areas, clearly indicate that Pashto was employed to make dogmatic instructions comprehensible to Pashtun laymen who were not well versed in other languages, including Persian, the *lingua franca* of the vast Persophone cultural space. Darweza was not the only one who stated this fact. A century later, in the second decade of the eighteenth century, the Khaṭak chieftain Afżal Khān (1665/66–ca. 1741) pointed out the same reason for translating into Pashto the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* (*Makhzan-i Afghānī*), the book on the history of Pashtuns written in Persian in 1612–13 by the Mughal chronicler Niʿmatallāh Harawī.[5] It appears that the regular use of Pashto in writings began no earlier than in the sixteenth century and was stimulated largely by an ideological clash between Muslim traditionalists and exponents of mystical philosophies, namely the Roshanis, who were the first to propound their teachings in written form in the native vernacular of the Pashtun tribal areas.[6] Substantial dialectal differences in Pashto were smoothed out to a

[2]Darweza, *Makhzan*, 136. The preface to the *Makhzan* is written in Persian in order to introduce the book and explain its purpose and content to those who are not familiar with Pashto. The book's conclusion is in Pashto. This is why the language of the book is identified as "Afghan" in the first case, and as "Pashto" in the second. On the etymology of the endonym "Pashtun" and the exonym "Afghan" see Morgenstierne, *New Etymological Vocabulary of Pashto*, 67; Cheung, "On the Origin of the Terms."

[3]On *Makhzan*'s co-authors and editions see Kushev, *Afganskaia rukopisnaia kniga*, 40–8.

[4]Pelevin, *Afganskaia poeziia*, 37–50, 256–70.

[5]Afżal, *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣaʿ*, 14: "I translated a book from the Persian language into Pashto so that Pashtuns may easily read it."

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certain degree in its quasi-standard bookish form, which developed throughout the seventeenth century and had three graphic variants.[7] The rise of Pashto as a new literary language within the Persophone cultural ecumene could not challenge the centuries-old dominance of Persian, the cosmopolitan language of administration, literature and interethnic contacts in general.[8] It took a long time for Pashto to become an official language of Afghanistan in 1936. However, despite its high constitutional status reaffirmed in 2004, Pashto still seems to lack a clear prospect of being equal with Dari (Afghanistan's Persian) as a widely acknowledged medium of interethnic communication in the country.[9]

The peripheral position of Pashto in the Persophone ecumene could not favor the extensive growth of literary production in this language, taking into account that the continuous strong pressure of imperial Persian was always being accompanied by the varied and no less important influence of the northwestern Indo-Aryan idioms. On the other hand, Pashto's regional character in conjunction with the distinct ethno-cultural idiosyncrasies of its speakers offered an opportunity for relative creative autonomy for men of letters. Such an autonomy could be enjoyed especially by those gifted individuals whose world outlook differed from Sufi philosophies that fueled traditionalism in Persian and emerging Pashto literatures. In the segmentary society of the Pashtuns, it was the representatives of educated military-administrative elite who made a step away from the Procrustean bed of the Persian literary canon. Adherence to customary law and tribal ethics (*Pashtunwali*), antithetical to many Sufi ideas and morals, provided a favorable ideological ground for a more individual approach to creative writing. The dichotomy between "self" (*khpəl*) and "other" (*praday*, lit. "alien"), one of the cornerstones of the Pashtuns' tribalistic ideology, in regard to language and culture presumed that socio-ethnic boundaries were not tribal, but separated all Pashto-speaking territories (Pakhtunkhwa) from other lands. Pashto in any dialectal form was considered *khpəl* while any other language, including Persian, *praday*. The perception of the shared language as a basic criterion of Pashtun identity fostered authorial self-reflections that became an important part of literary criticism in early Pashto writings.[10]

[6]On the disputed authenticity of Pashto texts supposedly dated to much earlier period see Loi, *Il tesoro nascoto degli Afghani*; Kushev, *Afganskaia rukopisnaia kniga*, 27–9; MacKenzie, "Development of the Pashto Script."

[7]Cf. MacKenzie, "Standard Pashto"; Kushev, *Afganskiĭ iazyk*, 116–26.

[8]Despite the increasing interest in various ethno-cultural and socio-historical processes in the Persophone ecumene, commonly designated as "the Persianate World," the emergence and the development of written Pashto in interaction with Persian as well as issues related to the formation of Pashtun cultural identity have not yet become a subject of serious research. Cf. a number of recently published collective studies: Spooner and Hanaway, *Literacy in the Persianate World*; Peacock and Tor, *Medieval Central Asia and the Persianate World*; Michalak and Rodziewicz, *Quest of Identity*; Green, *Persianate World: The Frontiers*; Amanat and Ashraf, *Persianate World*.

[9]On the status of Pashto in Afghanistan and Pakistan see Hakala, "Locating 'Pashto' in Afghanistan"; Nawid, "Language Policy in Afghanistan"; Nichols, "Pashto Language Policy"; Weinreich, *We Are Here to Stay*, 13–19, 79–102.

[10]On the key attributes of Pashtun identity see Barth, "Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance," 119.

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Pashto Literary Tradition in the Persophone Cultural Environment

The religious content and homiletic purposes of early Pashto writings legitimized the appearance of a new Islamic written language, but could not generate a substantial discourse on issues related to literary criticism in its broadest sense.[11] Such a discourse required a more advanced literary tradition, i.e. a larger corpus of miscellaneous texts for examination, a certain specificity of this tradition, and educated people able to formulate their critical views on literature in written Pashto. These binding prerequisites began to take shape towards the middle of the seventeenth century. The above-quoted remarks by Ākhūnd Darweza show that a starting point for the discussion of Pashto writings was an explanation of causes and aims of choosing the native vernacular for recording religious instructions. In terms of Persian literary tradition, this kind of discourse belonged to the topic regularly touched on in the prefaces to works of many genres under the rubric "The reason for composing the book" (*sabab-i taʾlīf-i kitāb*), the only but important difference being that early Pashtun authors highlighted the ethno-linguistic aspect of their creative activity. Thus, an initial form of Pashto literary criticism developed as a manifestation of authorial self-consciousness combined with ethnic self-identification and based on argumentation about the expediency and necessity of producing written texts in the Pashto language. Its implications were predominantly important for the self-assertion of the Pashto literary tradition within the Persophone ecumene, rather than for creating a framework for scholarly disputes.

A thematically wider and analytically deeper consideration of literary-critical issues was initiated by Khushḥāl Khān (1613–89), the chief of the Khaṫak tribe, which inhabited the lands on the west bank of the Indus and, from both a geographical and political perspective, occupied a frontier zone between the Persophone space of the Mughal empire and the insulate Pashtun tribal areas. Khushḥāl Khān was the first Pashtun author who attempted to make an overall assessment of the emerging literary tradition in his native language and declared its right to exist alongside the dominating cosmopolitan literature in Persian. While previous Pashtun authors left only sporadic and brief comments on the motives of their literary occupations, Khushḥāl Khān embarked on a full-fledged critical discussion of creative writing in general and Pashto written poetry in particular.

It goes without saying that, in composing their works, both Khushḥāl and his predecessors unavoidably followed the fundamental aesthetic principles of Islamic Persophone culture and the rules of classical Persian poetics and rhetoric. It was Persian

[11]Taking into consideration an intrinsic syncretism of the Islamic medieval and early modern scholarship in Arabic and Persian, any attempt to divorce literary criticism (evaluation of particular works and authors) from literary theory proper (poetics, rhetoric, prosody) with respect to early Pashto writings would be extremely artificial, if at all possible. Both disciplines appear to have been closely interconnected from the times of their rise in Arabic literature. For brief definitions of these notions see Meisami, "Literary Criticism"; Heinrichs, "Rhetoric and Poetics." For general outlines of medieval Arabic literary criticism see Abu Deeb, "Literary Criticism"; Ouyang, *Literary Criticism*. On the impact of Arabic scholarship on Persian literary studies see van Gelder, "Traditional Literary Theory."

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literature that furnished their inventory of genres, topoi, motifs, imagery, and rhetorical devices. And it was Persian classical poetry that determined their approach to literary criticism, not as a branch of medieval philology, but as an authorial self-reflection originating from poetic self-praise (*fakhriyya*) and comments on the reasons for composition (*sabab-i taʾlīf*).[12] However, the prosody of Pashto written poetry differed from that of Persian and, despite being called *ʿarūż*, always retained its original tonic nature.[13] A uniform system of meters derived from folk songs (but not from the Arabic-Persian quantitative versification) in combination with particular phonological features endued Pashto verses with a distinctive sound and rhythm. Thus, prosody became probably the most salient boundary between *khpəl* and *praday* in Pashto written poetry.

Another crucial factor that distinguished early Pashto writings from Persian literature of any period was the lack of professional paid authors and the institute of patronage. If Persian literature emerged as a professional court poetry and the great part of it remained as such throughout the centuries, a semblance of court literature in Pashto appeared only in the second half of the eighteenth century with the rise of the Durrānī empire and the Indo-Afghan principalities of Rohilkhand in North India. But this late tradition did not prove to be very productive. The lack of administrative and financial support and, therefore, any institutionalized control, had both negative and positive effects on the evolution of Pashto literature. Among few positive consequences was that it fostered the peculiarities of Pashtun authors' self-perception and views on creative writing.

The ambivalent role of patronage seems to have been instrumental in opening the discourse on literature among Persian poets and scholars. An intense discussion about the nature, the goals, and the societal functions of poetry can be traced in Persian literature since the eleventh century. On the whole, the range of opinions came down to two basic ideas stemming from the answer to a simple question about which master does the poet serve—the heavenly or the earthly one, i.e. God or King. ʿUnṣurī (d. 1039), the poet laureate at the Ghaznavid court, formulated a motto for poet-panegyrists who served kings, i.e. earthly patrons, to earn their living: "Wealth, grandeur and innermost desires in this world / the one has obtained in no other way than in the king's service (*khidmat-i sulṭān*)."[14] Among the earliest mouthpieces for the contrary view was the Ismāʿīlī poet-preacher Nāṣir Khusraw (d. ca. 1072) who advocated

[12]A study of this approach in Persian classics with a commented anthology of most important texts is found in Reisner, "Motivy avtorskogo samosoznaniia v persidskoĭ gazeli"; Reisner, "Motivy avtorskogo samosoznaniia v persidskoĭ klassicheskoĭ kasyde"; Reisner and Chalisova, "Obraz poezii v poezii." For more general observations on the emic vision of Persian poetry see Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 299–317; de Bruijn, "Classical Persian Literature," 35–40. A summary of major Persian works on literary theory (rhetoric and poetics) is in Chalisova, "Persian Rhetoric"; manifold results of implementing this theory in literary practice are scrutinized in Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*.

[13]On the prosody of Pashto verse see MacKenzie, "Pashto Verse"; Manalai, "Métrique du Pashto" (I am grateful to Mateusz Kłagisz for this reference); Pelevin, *Afganskaia poeziia*, 139–52. An overview of classical Persian prosody is found in Utas, "Prosody: Meter and Rhyme."

[14]ʿUnṣūrī, *Dīwān*, 211.

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the concept of poetry as a tool of spiritual homily and interpreting the hidden meaning of the Islamic sacred scripture. Nāṣir Khusraw regarded his own verses as the worship of God (lit. *shiʿr-i zuhd-u ṭāʿat-u ḥikmat*, "verses of abstinence, devotion and wisdom"), and uncompromisingly denounced panegyric court poetry, expressing open disapproval of its famous representatives, including ʿUnṣurī.[15] Under the pressure of real-life circumstances, the most eminent Persian poets of later times, apparently beginning with such renowned authors as Sanāʾī (d. ca. 1130) and Anwarī (d. after 1169/70), tried to reconcile these polar opinions in what became the art of multilevel polysemy in the Persian classical canon. A reader of Persian lyrics was expected to be prepared to properly engage with a polysemantic poetic vocabulary in which, for example, the word *maʿshūq* ("beloved"), beyond its immediate meaning, could also have had a metaphoric denotation of God and a eulogized suzerain.[16]

The well-known short and elliptical—but quite precise—definition of poetry as a professional occupation or "craft" (*ṣināʿat*) was offered by the Ghūrid courtier Niẓāmī ʿArūżī in the *Chahār Maqāla* (or *Majmaʿ al-nawādir*, 1156/57). ʿArūżī describes poetry writing as the construction of analogies (*qiyāsāt*) based on imagination (*mawhima*) to present things differently from what they really are (lit. to display small things as big ones, beauty as ugliness, and vice versa) so that ambiguity of poetical expression (*īhām*) should arouse strong passions and conflicting emotions in people and, thus, by ruling people's minds and feelings, poetry should help to maintain social order (*niẓām-i ʿālam*).[17] Such candid and quite pragmatic explanation of the essence of poetry (*māhiyyat-i ʿilm-i shiʿr*) and the poet's competence in it (*ṣalāḥiyyat-i shāʿir*) perfectly corresponds to both polar opinions mentioned above. In the case of Nāṣir Khusraw, it should be remembered that as an Ismāʿīlī preacher (*dāʿī*), he formally served the eighth Fāṭimid caliph, al-Mustanṣir (r. 1036–94), "the imam of the epoch" (*imām-i zamān*), to whom he swore allegiance and dedicated a long laudatory poem apart from many single distiches.[18] Aimed at spiritual teaching and moralistic admonition, religio-philosophical poetry also manipulated people's emotions to achieve certain ideological and ensuing socio-political goals.

Though the issue of artistic freedom in the social sense appears to be rather anachronistic for the discourse on creative writing in medieval and early modern literature, epochs dominated by religious consciousness and the ideology of traditionalism, this matter in a rudimentary form was constantly being addressed by Persian poets with different worldviews in their comments on the negative or positive effects of vassalage. The motif of insecurity about serving earthly rulers continuously recurs throughout the first chapter of Saʿdī's *Gulistān* (1258), which has won in the Persophone ecumene, including Pashtun readership, an overall acclaim as an indisputable masterpiece of Persian classics and a universal book of wisdom. In the stories col-

[15]E.g. Nāṣir Khusraw, *Dīwān*, 63–4.
[16]Cf. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 273–9; Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, 46–51.
[17]Niẓāmī ʿArūżī, *Chahār Maqāla*, 30.
[18]Nāṣir Khusraw, *Dīwān*, 231–6.

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lected under the title "On the Ways of Kings," Saʿdī (d. 1292) dwells mainly on bureaucratic service, but considering the introduction to this book and the author's personal life experience, one can be sure that he had in mind court litterateurs as well. His general advice to intellectuals, as may be concluded from his numerous statements, is to refrain from service to kings as far as possible: "To knead burnt lime with [bare] hands / is better than [standing reverently] in front of the ruler with hands on the chest."[19] In a verse that summarizes his views on freedom of opinion and expression at the king's court, Saʿdī sarcastically observes, "If [the sultan] says in the daytime that this is the night, / one must reply, 'here are the Moon and the Pleiades'."[20]

As for early Pashtun poet-preachers who versified strict doctrinal ideas, either traditionalist or theosophical, the issue of artistic freedom seems irrelevant. However, the case of Khushḥāl Khān Khaṭak is quite different. Typologically, Khushḥāl's personality is not comparable to that of any significant Persian man of letters, from "the Adam of poets" Rūdakī (d. ca. 940/1) in Sāmānid Transoxiana and Khorasan to Bīdil (d. 1721) in India. Khushḥāl lived in the segmentary rural society of the Pashtuns, an area that was only formally integrated into the administrative system of the Mughal state and otherwise belonged to the tribal ruling elite. Creative writing was not his profession or primary occupation, but a leisure pursuit alongside a range of military and administrative affairs. He did not make his living by literary work, nor professed through it any spiritual doctrines or specific ideologies. He was not affiliated with any religious communities, Sufi brotherhoods, or literary circles and considered himself in the first place a warrior and a chieftain. Nothing forced him to write except for his own strong inner wish. Nobody was his mentor, patron, or critic. He never had to satisfy anyone's tastes or conform to someone else's views. He expressed in his writings any feelings and thoughts he wanted to express and often disregarded stylistic, thematic, and even aesthetic conventionalities, as well as genre frameworks set by literary traditions of the past.[21]

Khushḥāl's breakaway from a traditional approach to poetry writing was caused above all by the drastic change in his life in 1664, when he was arrested by the Mughal authorities under the pretext of disloyalty and dispatched to the Rantambhor prison in Rajasthan (now Ranthambore Fort). He spent a year and a half there, and then was kept as a hostage in Delhi for three more years. It was in this period that Khushḥāl's writings became explicitly personal, close to life, and permeated with ethno-cultural motifs. A formal resemblance in this biographical episode between Khushḥāl and the acclaimed Indo-Persian poet Masʿūd Saʿd Salmān (d. 1121/22), the Ghaznavid high official who created the genre of prison lyrics (*ḥabsiyya*) during his seventeen years of incarceration and exile, is limited only to the experience of imprisonment, which caused serious emotional distress for both authors and forced them to introduce a strongly expressed personal element into their poetry.

[19]Saʿdī, *Kulliyāt*, 63.
[20]Ibid., 61.
[21]Cf. similar characterizations in Morgenstierne, "Khushhal Khan," 51–2.

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However, Masʿūd Salmān always remained a Persian court poet, and his sophisticated *ḥabsiyya* verses, with respect to either factual content (*ḥasb-i ḥāl*) or the poet's philosophy of life, are very different from the prison poetry of Khushḥāl Khān, which reads more like a memoir. Khushḥāl's *ḥabsiyya* poems have a larger focus on historical actuality and more straightforwardly display the author's mentality and emotional state.[22] Moreover, unlike Masʿūd Salmān's *ḥabsiyya* lyrics, which appear as the most engaging but largely an unvaried portion of his *dīwān*, the prison verses of Khushḥāl Khān reflect the inner dynamics of the poet's departure from the traditionalist path, and therefore the process of the evolution of his creative writing.

Even more important for the shaping of Khushḥāl's authorial individuality was the fact that he preferred to write in his native Pashto instead of the cosmopolitan language of Persian. This choice was primarily determined by his socio-ethnic background and personal approach to literary activity. He was not pressured to use Persian because he did not need or intend to sell his literary product or widely distribute it for any pragmatic purposes. In contrast to his predecessors, who used Pashto in their writings to make the Persian and Arabic formulas of Islamic religious teachings understandable to Pashtun tribesmen, Khushḥāl rather quickly ceased to reproduce Persian poetic phrasings in a mechanical code-switching manner and consciously started to employ the resources of his native vernacular.[23]

Leaving aside subtle aspects of individual talent and temperament, one may assert that these two factors, namely the perception of literary labor as an unpaid, independent, and non-professional activity, and the use of the language with an as yet poorly developed written form and no restraining literary traditions, were quite objective prerequisites for a kind of creative freedom that might have been expected from an educated Pashtun tribal ruler of the early modern period. Both these factors had an impact on Khushḥāl's views on the art of poetry. These views not only characterize Khushḥāl Khān as an introspective and free-minded litterateur at the crossroads of traditionalism and modernization, but also clarify the reasons for the constantly ambiguous attitude of Pashtun readership towards his literary heritage over the span of four centuries.[24]

[22]On Khushḥāl Khān's *ḥabsiyya* verses see Pelevin, *Khushhal-Khan Khattak*, 70–84; Pelevin, *Afganskaia poeziia*, 272–82. A study of Masʿūd Salmān and his oeuvre is found in Sharma, *Persian Poetry at the Indian Frontier*.

[23]On various aspects of Khushḥāl's literary language see Zyār, *Də Khushḥāl adabī paẋto*.

[24]For Pashtun readership of any background, Khushḥāl's poetry, despite its undoubted artistic merits and emotive strength, has always lacked a required degree of traditionalism, refined spirituality, and consistency in preaching universal humanistic values. A harmonious combination of these features along with the declarative intent to overcome the limitations of tribalistic ideology distinguishes the lyrics of another classical Pashtun poet—ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Momand (d. after 1711). A typical attitude of Pashtuns to Khushḥāl and Raḥmān is formulated by J. Enevoldsen as follows: "Yes, of course, Khushhal was a great poet and a big khan, but—what do you think of Rahman Baba?" (Enevoldsen, *Selections from Rahman Baba*, 8).

Rudiments of Literary Criticism in Pashto Religious Poetry

The earliest extant book in Pashto, the *Khayr al-bayān*, opens with a technical set of instructions on writing:

> O Bāyazīd, write down the letters which suit every language for the benefit of people ... O Bāyazīd, it is for you to write down the letters, and it is for Us to show and name the letters. Write down on My order the letters like those of the Qur'an. And on some letters put dots, or circles, or other marks so that others may quickly understand them.[25]

These injunctions, like the whole text of the book, are written as having been dictated by a divine voice to the spiritual teacher Bāyazīd Anṣārī (d. ca. 1572), or "Pīr Roshān" ("The Light Master") as he was called by his disciples. The very content of the *Khayr al-bayān* does not imply any extraordinary heterodox deviation from mystical Sufi doctrines. However, the compositional form and the wordings of this theosophical treatise do betray its specificity and allow us to describe it as the first opus in which the equivocal ideology of Pashtun tribal Islam had been verbalized in the native vernacular. Bāyazīd Anṣārī's indirect statement that the Pashto letters, based on the Arabic alphabet, had been sent down to him from Heaven looks more like a claim to priority in the invention of the Pashto script, rather than an incautious avowal of prophecy.

The *Khayr al-bayān* brought about two ideologically opposing trends in early Pashto writings. Bāyazīd's followers, the Roshānīs, created the Pashto religio-philosophical poetry, which in terms of doctrine recapitulated the Pashto phrasings of the *Khayr al-bayān*, but formally emulated mainstream Sufi lyrics in Persian, mostly in the manner of code-switching. The works of Bāyazīd's critic Ākhūnd Darweza gave rise to Pashto theological literature.[26]

The Roshānī poetry flourished predominantly in Mughal India in the first half of the seventeenth century in the community of the late adherents of Bāyazīd Anṣārī's teaching. Among the verses of Dawlat Lohāṅay (d. after 1658), one of these adherents, who left a series of poetic eulogies to Bāyazīd and his descendants, there are a few laudatory remarks on the literary accomplishments of the Roshānī leaders. Dawlat praised Bāyazīd's grandson, Mīrzā Khān Anṣārī (d. 1630/31), both as a spiritual teacher and the best Pashtun poet of the past, who was "extremely generous," since "each of his verses would cost a lot if given a price."[27] His complimentary review of the *Khayr al-bayān* reads like an early specimen of literary criticism in Pashto verse:

[25]Cited and commented in Kushev, *Afganskaia rukopisnaia kniga*, 104.

[26]On early Pashto literature see Hewādmal, *Də paxto adabiyāto tārīkh*, 87–120; Andreyev, "Pashto Literature," 91–107; Mannanov, *Roshaniiskaia literatura*; Pelevin, *Afganskaia poeziia*.

[27]Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 20, 150.

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Look at the quadrilingual *Khayr al-bayān*[28]
Which was sent down to Roshān from Glorious God (*subḥān*).
There was neither a teacher, nor any intermediary;
It came to him from the Merciful by way of inspiration (*ilhām*).
It describes the stages (*manāzil*) and the stations (*maqāmāt*) [of the spiritual path]
In accordance with both the Qur'an and Hadith.
It explains the guidance of the Prophet of prophets
And includes provisions, injunctions and precepts [of faith].
It expounds on obligations and duties for each [spiritual] station
And comprises [an explication of] the recognized Tradition (*sunnat*), o human!
It was a guidebook for people and spirits (*jinnān*),
Its opponents have turned into its supporters.
What a wonderful manifest of [divine] mercy and miracle it was,
No error was in God's [decision to bestow it as] inspiration.
One thousand, two thousand, three thousand times
It came [to Bāyazīd Anṣārī] as inspiration [cast] into his mind.[29]

It follows from these verses that the late Roshānīs, residents of Mughal India, interpreted Bāyazīd Anṣārī's teaching in the *Khayr al-bayān* as a product of *ilhām* ("inspiration") which was a commonly admitted Sufi form of obtaining esoteric knowledge, a kind of personal non-prophetic revelation, "a pure gift from the generosity (*fayḍ*) of Allāh."[30] Contrary to them, Bāyazīd's contemporary and most stubborn opponent, Ākhūnd Darweza, declared the Roshānī doctrine a heresy (*ilḥād*), insisting that it was nothing else than a poorly disguised pretension to the divine revelation (*waḥy*). According to Darweza, the *Khayr al-bayān* directly testified to Bāyazīd Anṣārī's claim to the Prophet's mission (*risālat*). Darweza's extensive criticism of Bāyazīd's views and writings is found mostly in his Persian *Taẕkirat al-abrār wa ʾl-ashrār*, and a supplement, also in Persian, to the *Makhzan al-islām*.[31] It appears that Darweza and his co-author ʿAbd al-Karīm considered conventional Persian a more suitable language for the sophisticated written debate on theological matters. However, this debate was apparently part of a wider oral discourse among Pashtuns about the first religious book in their language.

In his *Makhzan*, Ākhūnd Darweza made such comments on Bāyazīd's book:

[28]Originally, the *Khayr al-bayān* was composed in four languages: Pashto, Arabic, Persian, and an Indo-Arian idiom, presumably Hindustani or Hindko. Until now only the full Pashto version of the book from the manuscript (1652) of the Berlin State Library (Ms. or. fol. 4093) has been published and studied (Bāyazīd, *Khayr al-bayān*; MacKenzie, "The Xayr ul-bayān"; Mannanov, *Roshaniĭskaia literatura*, 76–113). Another manuscript, which allegedly contains all four versions, is known through an entry in Z.Hewādmal's catalogue (*Də hind də kitābkhāno paẋto khaṭṭī nuskhe*, 9–10).

[29]Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 257.

[30]Macdonald, "Ilhām," 1119.

[31]Darweza, *Taẕkirat*, 137–59; Darweza, *Makhzan*, 122–7.

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> And this apostate (*mulḥid*) has written a book entitled *Khayr al-bayān*. And he used to say, "It has come to me in a way similar to the Qur'an. It is like the Qur'an [was] for Muḥammad." And he has written many essays on apostasy (*ilḥād*). Among the methods and tricks of this devil (*shayṭān-sīrat*) was that in every essay he expressed his thoughts in enigmas and hints, so that only a few sagacious and educated people could understand his apostatic intentions, while all others did not comprehend the meaning of his words.[32]

A very interesting remark indicating that the *Khayr al-bayān* might have been written with the help of Arzānī Khweẋkay (d. after 1601/02), Bāyazīd's disciple and the author of the first collection of poetry (*dīwān*) in Pashto, is found in the *Taẕkirat*:

> Some phrases in his book have been composed in Arabic without any comprehension, some phrases in Persian, some in Afghan, some in Indian (*hindī*). And each phrase is so discordant (*nāmawzūn*) and inconsistent (*nāmuwāfiq*) that learned people become disgusted by it ... Insofar as [this book] was replete with apostasy and blasphemy, abundant in lie and vice, this humble servant named it *Sharr al-bayān* ("The Worst Manifest"), and to call it *Khar-Bayān* ("A Donkey Manifest") is also appropriate ... Not all [this book] he has composed himself. A part of it has been written by the poet-apostate Mullā Arzānī ... A smart and eloquent poet, Arzānī composed verses in Afghan, Persian, Indian and Arabic on a variety of fallacious and heretical subjects, so he agreed to assist this damned one in [compiling] the book.[33]

It is not surprising that, having made such a deliberately exaggerated negative assessment of the *Khayr al-bayān*, Darweza urged true believers (*ahl-i sunnat wa jamāʿat*) to burn the book.[34]

Both the Roshānī poets and the authors of traditionalist works on Sunni Islam regarded their literary labor as a spiritual missionary activity aimed at preaching fundamental religious tenets to Pashtuns, i.e. as service to God. Inasmuch as Pashto mystical poetry, despite its imitativeness and a high degree of extra-literary functionality, had many more aspects of creative writing than religious manuals, it is mainly in the Roshānī verses that we come across some distinct rudiments of literary criticism, partly analogous to that in Persian poetry.

Proclaiming the glorification of God to be the ultimate purpose of poetry, the Roshānī authors declaratively distanced themselves, like Nāṣir Khusraw six centuries earlier, from court panegyrists who would praise "malevolent tyrants," obviously the Mughal rulers in their case.[35] The very nature and the process of poetry writing

[32]Darweza, *Makhzan*, 124.
[33]Darweza, *Taẕkirat*, 148–9.
[34]Darweza, *Makhzan*, 127.
[35]Mīrzā, *Dīwān*, 48, 124, 187, 249; Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 149.

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were perceived by the Roshānīs through the basic concepts of Sufi epistemology, which interpreted mystical gnostic experience as the self-knowledge of God. According to these concepts, the poet was an instrument of God's self-glorification; therefore truly spiritual verse could have been nothing else than the product of divine inspiration. Mīrzā Khān Anṣārī and Wāṣil Roẋānī (d. after 1648) regularly identified their verses as verbal manifestations of the Sufi ecstatic state of *ḥāl*, while the more restrained Dawlat Lohāṅay preferred to characterize his poetry as a result of *ilhām*.[36] The next logical step in such understandings of poetry's nature would be to equate verse with God's word. Mīrzā Khān unequivocally formulated this idea many times, and among the poems of all the Roshānī authors we may find a series of *ghazal*s verbalized as on behalf of God.[37]

However, in propounding the idea of the divine essence of poetic inspiration, the Roshānīs combined it with a more sober approach to poetry as a creative human activity. Thus, they obliquely touched upon the issue of individual authorship. Wāṣil confessed that he dipped the pen (*qalam*) in the inkwell when longing for his Friend (*yār*) and expressed satisfaction that the pen obeyed his will.[38] Dawlat occasionally remarked that writing poetry was motivated by the urgings of his heart; one of his *ghazal*s begins, "Today I have a desire in my heart / to write down a sermon (*bayān*) in verse (*naẓm*)."[39] Authorial self-consciousness is also manifested in recurring motifs of self-praise, usually incorporated into the figurative definitions of verses. Mīrzā Khān, for example, compared his verses to roses, which are fragrant for learned people but appear as thorns to ignoramuses, or asserted that each letter of his words had the meaning of a whole book.[40] Wāṣil described his poetry as a file (*ṣayqal*) for polishing hearts, or as a song of love which would wake up those who are sleeping unaware of the divine truth.[41] Dawlat invited accomplished readers to enjoy his "garden" (*bāgh*), i.e. the *dīwān* of his lyrics.[42]

On the other hand, the Roshānī authors directly acknowledged the earthly sources of their poetic inspiration. Apart from the teachings of the "perfect master" (*pīr-i kāmil*), Bāyazīd Anṣārī, these were the works of the prominent Persian poets whose influence is visible on all levels of form and content of Roshānī poetry. To expose both the doctrinal and the literary roots of the Roshānī writings, Dawlat Lohāṅay listed in his two poems the names of the most renowned Muslim mystics and poets of the past, including classical Persian authors such as Khāqānī (d. 1199), Niẓāmī (d. 1209), ʿAṭṭār (d. ca. 1220), Rūmī (d. 1273), Saʿdī (d. 1292), Ḥāfiẓ (d. ca. 1390), and Jāmī (d. 1492).[43] According to Dawlat, all these poets had obtained

[36]Mīrzā, *Dīwān*, 4, 189, 217, 222, 233; Wāṣil, *Dīwān*, 3, 24, 33, 76, 79, 89; Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 60, 65.
[37]Mīrzā, *Dīwān*, 79–81, 83–7, 91–2, 111–12, 136; Wāṣil, *Dīwān*, 7, 10–14, 32; Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 150, 152–3.
[38]Wāṣil, *Dīwān*, 8, 51.
[39]Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 152.
[40]Mīrzā, *Dīwān*, 199, 221.
[41]Wāṣil, *Dīwān*, 18, 26, 89.
[42]Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 208.
[43]Ibid., 173, 250.

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true knowledge of God (*tawḥīd*) and were transmitters of the divine light, which finally descended upon Pīr Roshān. Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār and his magnum opus, the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, are also mentioned in Dawlat's other poem, "You shall understand *tawḥīd* if you read / the inspiring (*ḥālatbakhsh*) *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* of Farīd [al-Dīn]."[44] It is even more important that Dawlat added to his lists the names of the Roshānī authors—Bāyazīd Anṣārī, Arzānī Khweẋkay, Mīrzā Khān, and ʿAlī Muḥammad Mukhliṣ (d. after 1648). Thereby he not only indicated the spiritual background of early Pashto poetry, but highlighted its existence as an already instituted literary tradition.

In this context, a *ghazal* of Wāṣil with an unexpected diatribe against "imitative words" (*taqlīdī waynā*) seems to disagree with the general idea of spiritual continuity and literary traditionalism.[45] A product of writing based on imitation is described in this poem as false and worthless, and appropriating the content (*mażmūn*) of another's work is compared to adopting a child, an action prohibited by Muslim family law according to the direct prescription of the Qur'an (33:4). Although the poem lacks any clues about the circumstances that impelled Wāṣil to condemn plagiarism as theft, it was very likely a response to a real dispute on literature with an anonymous author (*muṣannif*) mentioned in the first distich as the one who ascribes to himself other's verses.

The pragmatic attitude to written poetry as an effective verbal instrument of religious teaching caused the Roshānī authors to think over the differentiation between "good speech" (*ẋə kalām*), i.e. their own writings full of profound spiritual meaning, and "senseless talk" (*təsh qawl*), unambiguously associated by Wāṣil with entertaining folk songs and tales (*badəla*, *sandəra*, *afsāna*).[46] Dawlat wrote a poem in which he called meaningless speech *žāž* ("cud" and "nonsense"), drawing a parallel between people accustomed to idle talk and ruminant animals.[47] Such verses reflected a reasonable concern for the deficiency of qualified Pashtun readership. Wāṣil and Mīrzā Khān openly complained about uneducated audiences, obviously illiterate Pashtun tribesmen who did not understand their intricate poetical homilies.[48]

The fact of the prevailing illiteracy among Pashtuns is also implicated in a number of the Roshānī verses with praises of writing (*kẋəl*) and explanations of its practical importance. In three distiches of a *ghazal*, Mīrzā Khān eulogizes "amazing black letters" which "pour out of the *qalam* of the Perfect Master" and "show the Path like the stars."[49] Employing a similar image, Wāṣil stated that his "sweet" words emerged from *qalam* "like white sugar from black cane."[50] Dawlat accentuated the utility of writing as the vehicle of formulating spiritual teachings more accurately and preserving them for later generations more safely, e.g. "After I am gone, brothers

[44]Ibid., 95.
[45]Wāṣil, *Dīwān*, 95.
[46]Ibid., 19, 30, 48.
[47]Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 124–5.
[48]Wāṣil, *Dīwān*, 21; Mīrzā, *Dīwān*, 247.
[49]Mīrzā, *Dīwān*, 211.
[50]Wāṣil, *Dīwān*, 29.

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in faith will read / what I have told on paper about the state of my heart."[51] Mīrzā also sporadically noted that "the words of Truth" he wrote down on paper.[52] Thus, the motif of writing was closely connected to the classical topic *exegi monumentum*, which went against the Sufi principle of self-negation, but underscored the authorial self-consciousness of the Roshānī litterateurs, betraying their mundane desire to leave mark (*yādgār*, *niẋān*) in history. Mīrzā Khān once described his verses as "edifices" (*ʿimāratūna*), expected to last forever in contradistinction to the luxurious mansions of the wealthy.[53]

A more philosophical approach to writing can be traced in Wāṣil's brief allusions to the popular Sufi concept of the symbolic meaning of the Arabic letters.[54] Following this concept, Wāṣil remarked that the Arabic alphabet was to be understood as a model of the divine universe, its first letter *alif*, "the sign with no signs" (*beniẋāna niẋān*), denoting God.[55] Apart from attributing mystical meaning to letters, Wāṣil reflected on the relationship of writing and meaning and maintained that only those sounds had sense which could be written down in the form of words. The poet juxtaposed sensible human speech, which can be expressed in writing, against what he called the "empty chirring of cicadas."[56] Taking his other statements into account, we may guess that by the latter he meant the art of folk singers and storytellers. In any case, the recurrent motif of writing in the Roshānī poems seems to prove that, in the first half of the seventeenth century, the written form of Pashto was not yet widely used, and that a thin layer of educated people believed their mission was to promote literacy and bookish learning among fellow Pashtun tribesmen.

Repeated remarks of all the Roshānī poets about the language of their verses also signal that the practice of writing in Pashto was still a novelty in their times. Mīrzā Khān persistently reminded his readers that he praised God in Pashto, the first *ghazal* in his *dīwān* opening with the words "The praise of God has begun in Pashto" (*ibtidā shwa pə paẋto də ḥaqq ṣanā*).[57] Sometimes the poets commented that they were rendering in Pashto the Arabic words of the Qur'an and Hadith.[58] Dawlat specified that his poetic homilies were addressed to Pashtuns.[59]

In the case of Dawlat, we may argue that his notes on Pashto not only identified the language of his writings but were also an indirect manifestation of his ethnic self-consciousness. While Mīrzā Khān quite critically called Pashto "a raw language" (*khāma zhəba*) and invited readers to seek deep and subtle meanings in his "primitive" (*sāda*) Pashto diction, Dawlat proudly made such hyperbolized assessments of his native language as the following: "Let the words about the value of *tawḥīd* be propagated

[51]Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 64 and 41, 48.
[52]Mīrzā, *Dīwān*, 13, 64, 217.
[53]Ibid., 62.
[54]See Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 411–25.
[55]Wāṣil, *Dīwān*, 59, 69, 88.
[56]Ibid., 69.
[57]Mīrzā, *Dīwān*, 53 and 2, 4, 76, 181, 244; cf. Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 79; Wāṣil, *Dīwān*, 27.
[58]Mīrzā, *Dīwān*, 63, 106; Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 66, 72, 188.
[59]Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 4, 219.

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in this world / in Pashto verse among Arabs and non-Arabs (i.e., all peoples)."[60] In addition, Dawlat left a number of statements in which he paid homage to other Roshānī authors and extolled himself as a leading Pashtun poet: "Except for Mīrzā, or Arzānī, or dear Mukhliṣ, / no any other Pashtun poet equals you. // If someone is going to compete with you, o Dawlat, / let him sing a verse better than this one."[61] This challenge of the Roshānī poet-preacher, who announced the presence of Pashto written poetry in the multilingual setting of north India, was eagerly accepted by his contemporary Khushḥāl Khān Khaṭak, the resident of the Pashtun tribal areas, which, being less economically and culturally developed, provided a more advantageous monolingual environment for the progress of original Pashto writing.

Khushḥāl Khān on the Art of Poetry

Topics related to literary criticism are addressed by Khushḥāl Khān in a number of poems from his *dīwān*, the prose didactic essay *Dastār-nāma*, and the poetic travelogue *Swāt-nāma*. Two sections in the *Dastār-nāma* which deal with "the art of writing" (*hunar də khaṭṭ*) and "the art of poetry" (*hunar də shiʿr*) were most likely Khushḥāl's first notes on some aspects of literary labor.[62] Inspired by the Persian *Qābūs-nāma* (1082) of Kaykāwūs ʿUnṣur al-Maʿālī (b. ca. 1021), Khushḥāl Khān wrote his Pashto "Mirror for Princes," the *Dastār-nāma*, in 1665 in the Rantambhor prison. Twenty arts discussed in this essay constitute an imagined teaching program for Pashtun tribal nobility. In this curriculum writing and poetry occupy the third and the fourth places respectively after religious philosophy, lit. "self-knowledge" (*də dzān maʿrifat*), and the fundamentals of theology (*ʿilm*) as the framework for learning in general. In the book's preface, Khushḥāl mentions four categories of arts: obligatory (*farż*), required (*wājib*), traditional (*sunnat*), and individually preferred (*mustaḥabb*).[63] Though he did not specify the category of each art considered in the book, we may suppose that both writing and poetry belonged to the required ones.

The question of the immediate literary sources of Khushḥāl's essay remains open. The *Dastār-nāma* abounds in poetic excerpts and gnomic sayings, mostly in Persian, as well as quotations from the Muslim sacred texts; but all these perform exclusively rhetorical functions, whereas scholarly references to any professional treatises on the subjects under discussion, including calligraphy and poetics, are absent. In his poem the *Firāq-nāma*, Khushḥāl Khān tells us that the Rantambhor inmates used to read books.[64] Doubtless, he also had access to this "prison library," but it could hardly offer something like Rashīd al-Dīn Vaṭvāṭ's (d. 1182/83) *Ḥadāʾiq al-siḥr* or Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Rāzī's (d. after 1227) *Muʾjam* two basic works on

[60]Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 79; cf. Mīrzā, *Dīwān*, 170, 174, 190.
[61]Dawlat, *Dīwān*, 218.
[62]Khushḥāl, *Dastār-nāma*, 18–25.
[63]Ibid., 7.
[64]Khushḥāl, *Firāq-nāma*, 55.

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Persian poetics. About his formal education in childhood and youth we have no details except for the following remark in the *Dastār-nāma*:

> My teacher Shāh Uways Ṣadīqī Mūltānī was a great and blessed (*mutabarrak*) man. He was an expert in both exoteric and esoteric sciences (*ʿulūm-i ẓāhirī wa bāṭinī*). He often used to utter this verse, "There are the beloved, the book, the bow and the pen; / everything else is anguish, torment, and pain."[65]

Throughout his writings, Khushḥāl Khān sporadically stated that reading was among his favorite occupations. In a later poem (1683/84), he confessed that he had never been a diligent student, but acquired knowledge as a gifted autodidact: "My inborn abilities are bestowed [by God] (*ʿaṭāyī*) but not [obtained] by learning (*taḥṣīl*), / [this is how] I am versed in using letters (*imlā*)."[66]

In his succinct analysis of writing and poetry in the *Dastār-nāma*, Khushḥāl dwells mostly on the necessity and importance of these skills for everyone who aspires to true knowledge and high social status. His comments on writing reflects the attitude of the educated tribal elite towards literacy per se within the mainly illiterate social milieu. "All things in this world are done by writing," declares Khushḥāl in the first paragraph, stressing the significance of this skill as the basic prerequisite for literature, science and governing.[67] After lauding it, however, Khushḥāl warns that writing is a dangerous weapon in the hands of the unworthy and should be employed with much care, since what is written may cause harm as well: "On the heads of many it lays crowns, on the heads of many others it puts dust, because it has two tongues."[68] He then distinguishes between "ordinary" (lit. *ṭabīʿī*) and professional writing, i.e. calligraphy (*khushnawīsī*), which can be studied only with an instructor. In the ending paragraphs, Khushḥāl shares his expertise in the history of writing and some of its technical aspects, such as the making of ink. His notes demonstrate that an educated Pashtun chieftain in the seventeenth century was aware of the six world systems of writing—Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin (*farangī*), Indian, and Chinese, and, apparently relying on Firdawsī's *Shāh-nāma* (finished ca. 1010), believed that writing had been introduced to mankind by the mythical Iranian king Hūshang, who had learned it from a demon (*dīw*).

By turning to the discussion of poetry right after his notes on writing, Khushḥāl Khān emphasized a close relationship between them as between the content and the form and thus, like the Roshānī poets, indirectly pointed to the precedence of written literature over oral folklore traditions. In his later poems he echoed the Roshānīs in celebrating written poetry by figuratively comparing letters and verse to a black horse and "the bride of truth" sitting astride on it, her beautiful face covered by "a veil

[65]Khushḥāl, *Dastār-nāma*, 21.
[66]Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, 540.
[67]Khushḥāl, *Dastār-nāma*, 18.
[68]Ibid., 19. "Two tongues" is very likely a hint to the *qalam*'s split nib.

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of allegory (*majāz*)," or with black sand and pure gold extracted from it by experienced gold miners.[69]

A few principal ideas, briefly exposed in the *Dastār-nāma* and later elaborated in Khushḥāl's poem "I am not happy at all to be engaged in writing poetry" (1683/84), concern the essence of the poetical art. The author begins his discourse with an explanation of poetry's most distinctive feature that sets it apart from other arts and skills. Khushḥāl shares the opinion that poetry cannot be studied, for it is an outcome of a person's inborn ability (*jibillī ṭabīʿat*) and a derivative of feelings (*mushtaqq də shuʿūr*). What can and should be learned by any aspiring versifier via schooling are poetic techniques (*ṣanāyiʿ*) and rhetorical devices (*badāyiʿ*), but the spirit and the emotive strength of verse are nurtured by "pain and love" (*dard aw maḥabbat*). Thus, Khushḥāl Khān explicated the dual nature of any creative writing as a synthesis of intangible inspiration and technical mastership.

As for the subtle matter of inspiration (*ilhām*), Khushḥāl accepted the idea of its divine origin but, unlike the Roshānīs, interpreted it in a secular manner with an emphasis on the poet's individual talent and hard work. In the *Dastār-nāma*, he compares poetic inspiration to fire (*or*) which burns and destroys everything, or to "a violent guest" (*zorawər melma*) who "drinks all the blood from the heart," or to the state of inebriation (*mastī*) which is only overpowered by the force of knowledge (*ʿilm*) with difficulty.[70] Having been already articulated in the *Dastār-nāma* with a remark that the composing of only one distich (*bayt*) entails pains equal to the throes of childbirth, the description of sufferings awaiting the poet in the creative process is continued at length in the above-mentioned poem of 1683/84.[71] After the reference to "someone" who labeled poetry "men's menses" (*ḥayż al-rijāl*), Khushḥāl Khān enumerates here the many troubles that ensue from uncontrollable rushes of inspiration.[72] Describing poetry writing as an obsession that distracts an individual from concentrating on everything, including prayers and meals, Khushḥāl warns that it may lead to insanity, exhaustion, loneliness, misanthropy, and poverty. To counteract the powerful force of poetic inspiration, one has to employ the intellect, which, in the case of creative writing, presumes erudition in general and the knowledge of versification techniques in particular. This idea is figuratively explained in the *Dastār-nāma* as follows:

[69]Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, 131, 623. The image of poetry as "the bride of truth" (*də ḥaqīqat nāwe*) was derived by Khushḥāl from Persian classics, where the word "bride" (*ʿarūs*) had long become a regular metaphor denoting the product of creative writing; e.g. Nāṣir Khusraw's "the bride of words" (*ʿarūs-i sukhan*) (Nāṣir Khusraw, *Dīwān*, 301), or Saʿdī's "the bride of my thought" (*ʿarūs-i fikr-i man*) (Saʿdī, *Kulliyāt*, 33), or Ḥāfiẓ's "the bride of [my] temper" (*ʿarūs-i ṭabʿ*) (Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīwān*, 414, 516).

[70]Khushḥāl, *Dastār-nāma*, 23–4.

[71]Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, 537–9.

[72]This "someone" is most likely the Persian poet Awḥad al-Dīn Muḥammad Anwarī, who defined verse as "men's menses" in his famous *qaṣīda* with a strong disapproval of poetry writing; Anwarī, *Dīwān*, 297–8.

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> The essence of poetry is like a high wind. Big trees have the might to resist it. But if trees do not have solid footing, the wind can uproot them. The power of knowledge is needed so that the roots may be strong. Otherwise, the trees cannot avoid trouble and harm. Writing poetry without knowledge has many flaws.[73]

As an advocate of self-teaching, nowhere does Khushḥāl Khān go into much detail about any subjects related to theoretical poetics. In the *Dastār-nāma*, he very briefly describes the basic attributes of the main poetic forms (*qaṣīda*, *ghazal*, *rubāʿī*, *qiṭʿa*) and accentuates the key role of metrics (*ʿarūż*) and rhyme (*qāfiya*). In the poem "I am not happy at all … " he talks of poetry as of a craft which requires technical skills, e.g. "When the fabric of words is being woven, / some make satin from verse, others canvas."[74] In a *ghazal* where poetry is pictured as a beautiful girl, "the bride of truth," bestriding a black horse of written lines, Khushḥāl complements this image with likening the girl's decorations to poetical devices (*ṣanʿat*), such as *tashbīh* ("comparison") and *tajnīs* ("words' similitude").[75]

Agreeing with the Roshānīs in what concerns the two kinds of verse, Khushḥāl Khān figuratively identified these in the *Dastār-nāma* as "the song of the pipe" and "the cry of the donkey." The same contradistinction in the poem "I am not happy at all … " has a societal bias since here the differentiation is made between the poetry of kings (*mulūk*) and that of "jesters" (*hazzāl*). Further ruminations on the subject forced Khushḥāl to extend the first category by including in it also the authors of spiritual verse: "Poetry is the art of either a king (*mālik*) or a spiritual wayfarer (*sālik*): / an enamored (*ʿāshiq*), a sufferer (*dardmən*), or a blessed one (*abdāl*)."[76] By "jesters," as may be inferred from his other verses, Khushḥāl meant not so much court poets as illiterate tribal singers, mainly the *dumān*, who were non-Pashtun incomers with lower social status. In any case, the second kind of poetry was also denounced for being directly associated with commerce: "Let a pimple appear on the tongue of that poet / who sells the pearls of poetry for money."[77] The idea of the two kinds of verse is repeated also in Khushḥāl's small *ghazal* in praise of "good words" (*ẋə khabəre*), which echoes the Roshānīs' statements on this topic and reminds us of similar eulogies of Logos (*sukhan*) in classical Persian poetry, mostly those of Niẓāmī Ganjawī in the prefaces to his celebrated poems *Makhzan al-asrār* and *Haft paykar*. Exalting good words as the content of true poetry, Khushḥāl Khān elegantly praises himself: "I would have been sitting on the forth sky like ʿĪsā, / if I could have ascended to the sky by means of words."[78]

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[73]Khushḥāl, *Dastār-nāma*, 24.

[74]Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, 539. On the perception of poetry as a craft in Persian literature see Clinton, "Esthetics by Implication"; Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 299–305; Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, 15–9.

[75]Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, 131.

[76]Ibid., 540.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Ibid., 249–50.

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In both the *Dastār-nāma* and the poem "I am not happy at all ... " Khushḥāl also reiterated the old definition of poetry as the art of deceit (*dərogh*): "All its ornamentations are founded on deceit. Deceit is integral to it (*dərogh pəke rogh*), such is this art."[79] In the poem, he explains this idea by giving examples of few hackneyed metaphors, such as the words "tulip" (*lāla*) and "cypress" (*sabərwəna*) in the meaning of the beloved's face and stature correspondingly.[80] However, unlike his Persian predecessor Niẓāmī ʿArūżī, Khushḥāl did not assert that figurative poetic wordings should have been used to rule people's emotions for the sake of social order. In his understanding of the far-reaching aims of poetry, he was closer to Niẓāmī Ganjawī and the Roshānīs in stating that verses were a means of memorializing people and events. Notable in this respect is his remark in a war ballad on the armed clash between the Khaṭak and the Bangash tribes in 1680: "Words written on paper are going to be preserved, / this is why this story has been recorded in the journal (*bayāż*)."[81]

Khushḥāl's brief comments on the history of poetry in the *Dastār-nāma* are focused mostly on the long-debated issue of the Prophet Muḥammad's attitude to poetry. He repeats the prevailing interpretation of the Qur'anic passage "We have not taught him poetry; it is not seemly for him" (36:69) as indicating only the denial of the poetic character of the Revelation and argues that Muḥammad was well disposed to verses regularly recited in his entourage. The invention of the art of poetry is ascribed by Khushḥāl to "the sage Iflāṭūn" (Plato), whose image in his mind was no less mythical than that of Hūshang, the "creator" of writing.

"Everyone Likes What is His Own"

From the discussion of writing and poetry in the *Dastār-nāma*, Khushḥāl Khān completely omitted the linguistic aspect of these arts and nowhere mentioned either his native language or his ethnicity. Awareness of being a Pashtun poet was verbalized first in Khushḥāl's verses only a few months after he returned from Mughal captivity to his homeland in the spring of 1669. It was in this period that, under the pressure of complicated vassal duties, Khushḥāl Khān finally revised his political standpoints and declaratively rejected his former allegiance to the Mughals in a letter to the Kabul governor, Mahābat Khān. This letter was allegedly supplemented with a remarkable quatrain in Persian cited in "The Khaṭaks' Chronicle" by Khushḥāl's grandson, Afżal Khān Khaṭak:

> I said that I would become a Mughal again,
> since I had cut off the heads of many Afghans.
>
> Alas! I have not become a Mughal, because I am an Afghan.
> It's a pity when someone wastes his efforts in vain.[82]

[79]Khushḥāl, *Dastār-nāma*, 24.
[80]Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, 538.
[81]Ibid., 559.
[82]Afżal, *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣaʿ*, 299.

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As a man of letters, Khushḥāl immediately redirected these national feelings, fostered by the vicissitudes of his social life, into the discourse on creative writing. On the other hand, it appears that in India Khushḥāl Khān had a better opportunity to closely study the Roshānī poetry in which the concept of the autonomous Pashto literature had already been articulated in a rudimentary form. Following the Roshānīs, Khushḥāl started to elaborate the motifs of poetic self-praise, which, in the verses of Mīrzā Khān and especially Dawlat, already functioned as an ethnicity marker. Many of Khushḥāl's statements on his merits in Pashto literature read as responses in a virtual dispute with the Roshānī authors over poetic mastership.

Various topics pertaining to literary criticism in general and the *fakhriyya* genre in particular were considered by Khushḥāl Khān in three poems, identified in his *dīwān* as *qaṣīda*s, and a number of shorter fragments (*qiṭʿa*s). The earliest poem, of twenty-five distiches, dates back to the summer of 1670 and begins with an introduction portraying the author as an addict of love, a state that induces him to write poetry.[83] The latest and the longest is the above-mentioned poem "I am not happy at all ... ," written in the winter of 1683/84.[84] This is a multi-thematic essay of 138 distiches containing the author's most detailed and all-inclusive analysis of his personality and accomplishments. The discourse on the art of poetry occupies the first half of this text. The third poem, of twenty-four distiches, is not dated, but a rather soft taunt addressed to Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1659–1707) suggests that it could have been written shortly before the Mughal-Afghan war of 1672–76. In contrast to the verses of 1670, where Khushḥāl Khān briefly and restrainedly outlined his approach to writings in Pashto, this poem was phrased as an outright manifesto: "When I raised the banner of Pashto poetry / I conquered the land of words with the courser."[85]

Khushḥāl exaggeratedly evaluated his contribution to Pashto writings in the following quatrain (*qiṭʿa*):

> Whether in prose (*naṯr*), or in poetry (*naẓm*), or in writing (*khaṭṭ*),
> my merits in the Pashto language are countless.
>
> There had been no books, nor writing in this language before.
> It was me who compiled in it few books.[86]

The second verse is to be understood not literally but as an assertion that no book of satisfactory quality had been written in Pashto before by anyone. A commentary to this statement by Afżal Khān in "The Khaṫaks' Chronicle" runs as follows: "He says there was no learning (*ʿilm*), no writing (*qalam*), no poetry (*shiʿr*) in Pashto before him in this tribe [i.e. among the Khaṫaks]. He brought these to perfection, though an eventual perfection is not reached yet."[87] By adding to his interpretation

[83]Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, 622–3.
[84]Ibid., 536–46.
[85]Ibid., 533–5. "The courser" means here *qalam*.
[86]Ibid., 924.
[87]Afżal, *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣaʿ*, 277.

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the words "in this tribe," Afżal brought his grandfather's poetic boasting closer to the truth, for we have no documented evidence about any literary activities among the Khaṫaks before Khushḥāl Khān. Though the poet more than once repeated that he had done "a lot of good for the Pashto language," or "had made people fortunate by [writing in] the Pashto language," he sometimes also complained about the lack of those among his Pashtun compatriots who could have understood him.[88] In such cases he obviously meant foremost his poetic appeals for political unification of Pashtun tribes, but, like the Roshānī authors, he might have alluded also to the lack of a literate and educated readership.

Khushḥāl's boasts about his personal achievements were not devoid of fair judgments. He recognized the major formative influence of Persian poetry on Pashto literature and gave a very unsophisticated explanation of the reason for preferring the native vernacular to the cosmopolitan language,

> I know Persian poetry and have good taste in all of it,
> but I liked Pashto verse more: everyone likes what is his own (*khpəl*).
>
> In metrics, content, subtlety [of wording], [and] comparisons
> I have brought Pashto speech close to Persian.[89]

If Mīrzā Khān dryly labeled Pashto "a raw language," Khushḥāl evaluated his mother tongue in a completely different way:

> However beautiful the Arabic language,
> and so too Persian, which has a very sweet taste,
> no one has yet removed the veil from Pashto
> which is still left a virgin.[90]

The idea of this quatrain is reworded in Khushḥāl's other verses, where he expresses confidence that in the future he will be outperformed in Pashto poetry by more talented authors who are expected to be among his descendants.[91]

Khushḥāl's overstated evaluation of his own literary contribution correlated with his derisive remarks about other Pashtun authors, both his predecessors and contemporaries. He once wittily rated Pashto poets according to the imaginary scale of weights. Pretending to be impartial, Khushḥāl estimated numerous unnamed amateurs from half a *pāw* to one *pāw* (approximately a pound), awarded Dawlat Lohāṅay with "three *pāw*s," modestly described himself as surpassing Dawlat only by few silver coins (*sarshāhī*), and assured that a full *sīr* (four *pāw*s) would appear in a few decades in Sarāy-Akoŕa, the residence of the Khaṫak chiefs.[92] Nevertheless, by deploying the rhetoric of satire (*hajw*), Khushḥāl only proved that Pashto writings

[88]Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, 104, 131, 535, 540, 854.
[89]Ibid., 623, cf. 534, 540.
[90]Ibid., 703.
[91]Ibid., 541, 862.
[92]Ibid., 861–2.

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in his time became mature enough to be the subject of literary criticism. In his works, we come across the names of almost all the significant Pashtun litterateurs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including Shaykh Malī, the author of presumably the first but now lost book in Pashto, Pīr Roshān (Bāyazīd Anṣārī), Ākhūnd Darweza, and the Roshānī poets Arzānī Khweẋkay, Mīrzā Khān, Wāṣil, Dawlat, and Qalandar. The fact that no names of any Pashtun authors of earlier times have been mentioned by Khushḥāl seems to confirm that Pashto writings emerged in the first half of the sixteenth century. Besides, having named particular authors, Khushḥāl indicated key figures in Pashto literature and thus offered a framework for studying its evolution.

In his criticism of early Pashto writings, Khushḥāl Khān did not merely ridicule other authors, but demonstrated a rather scholarly approach. His primary discontent with the quality of Pashto poetry related to its metrics. More than once he asserted that Pashto poets used to write their verses without due compliance with the rules of prosody, whereas metrics was to be considered the main criterion of poetry. Playing on the double meaning of the word *mīzān* ("scales" and "poetic meter"), Khushḥāl noted, "I have not seen anyone in Pashto [poetry] with scales. / When Mīrzā [Khān] versified in this language he weighed [the words] manually."[93] Verses without a meter he sneeringly called "dog barking."[94] Khushḥāl's criticism of the prosody of the early Pashto verses, as well as his declaration of priority in creating Pashto meters, were not too far from the truth.[95] The Roshānī verses, in fact, reveal numerous defects in metrics, while in Khushḥāl's poetry we see a much greater degree of conformity to established metrical patterns. Moreover, having taken the Roshānī metrical system as a model, Khushḥāl introduced into Pashto poetry a range of new meters. These improvements gave him the right to underline his special contribution to the development of Pashto prosody.

Among Khushḥāl's writings, a specimen of literary criticism proper appears in a section of his *masnawī*-poem *Swāt-nāma* (1675), in which historical, ethnographical, and geographical data are supplemented with an extensive consideration of various religious matters.[96] Pondering on the poor state of religious education among Pashtuns, Khushḥāl expressed his strong disapproval of Ākhūnd Darweza, whose descendants, headed by Darweza's grandson Miyān Nūr Muḥammad, monopolized spiritual power in the Swat valley and the adjacent territories of the Yūsufzay tribe. Khushḥāl's

[93]Ibid., 623.

[94]Ibid.

[95]Cf. an explanation of a reason for stylistic shortcomings in Pashto poetry by ʿAbd al-Karīm in a copy of *Makhzan al-islām* from the manuscript collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies in St Petersburg (B 2483): "Know, dear, that those who compose verses in Afghan do not make enough efforts in rhetoric, nor keep the uniformity of rhymes and sameness of lines with regard to the number of letters and words (i.e. syllables). This is why, as you can see well, this humble one did not care at all about versification and tried only to make his words more or less harmonious (*mawzūn*), so that a listener might enjoy them and learn thoughtfully what is most important in the faith" (fols. 251b–252a).

[96]On this poem see Sultan-i-Rome, "Khushal Khan Khattak and Swat"; Pelevin, *Afganskaia poeziia*, 282–96.

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long diatribe against Darweza at the end of the poem discloses that the former regarded the latter as only one of many charlatans of non-Pashtun origin who strived to obtain full legal and social status in the tribes by offering their services as Islamic teachers and masters of religious rites:

> Darweza appeared here out of nowhere
> And with tiny knowledge became a big mullah.
> When he found out what these people were,
> He penned on paper his book.
> He looked through the *Khayr al-bayān* of Roshān
> And rejected this vague exposition.
> When he made certain that the place was empty, he began preaching
> And propagated everything his heart wished.
> Pashtuns did not have religious knowledge (*ʿilm*) at that time,
> So Darweza was for them more than a scholar (*mujtahid*).[97]

Darweza's book mentioned in these lines, the *Makhzan al-Islām*, was subjected by Khushḥāl to a detailed and very derogatory review with regard to both its content and form in thirty-five distiches of the poem.[98] As for the content, Khushḥāl's criticism was focused mainly on the interpretation of the long-ago historical events connected with the murder of the Prophet Muḥammad's descendants in 680 by the order of the Umayyad governor of Iraq. Khushḥāl Khān held the opinion, prevailing among the Shi'ites, that the Umayyad caliph Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya (d. 683) had been involved in this affair, whereas Darweza allegedly considered this opinion false and equal to the avowal of professing Shi'a (*rāfiżī*) beliefs. In the *Makhzan*, Darweza does not seem to have specified his position towards the Karbalā incident of 680. He criticizes extensively the *rāfiżī*s for rejecting the legitimacy of the first three "righteous" caliphs and traditions (*sunnat*) going back to them, but nowhere defends Yazīd or somehow justifies the Karbalā massacre.[99] Khushḥāl was only right that the author of the *Makhzan* "badly spoke of *sayyid*s," the Prophet's distant descendants, though Darweza meant exclusively impostors who laid claims to spiritual guidance. It appears that in his polemic against some ideological aspects of the *Makhzan*, Khushḥāl wished first of all to remove suspicions of sympathizing with the Shi'ites from himself and referred not so much to the book itself as to its reading by Darweza's followers, with whom he had intense theological disputes during his half-year stay in Swat in 1675.

A certain tendentiousness is also seen in Khushḥāl's criticism of the *Makhzan al-islām*'s Pashto text. For the pragmatic purposes of making dogmatic teachings more attractive to its audience, predominantly illiterate listeners, this religious manual was written in rhythmic prose (*sajʿ*) and later supplemented with a number of verses or semi-versified pieces authored by Darweza's successors (see footnote 95).

[97]Khushḥāl, *Swāt-nāma*, 62–3.
[98]Ibid., 38–47.
[99]Cf. Darweza, *Makhzan*, 90–1, 96–7, 116–18, etc.

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Khushḥāl Khān unfairly assessed all the original sections and supplementary fragments in the *Makhzan* according to formal criteria of poetry and argued that the book had been composed without observing established prosodic rules. He also expressed a low opinion about the quality of Darweza's Pashto translations from Arabic and Persian, which he called "ridiculous" (*mużḥik*) and compared to "barley" offered instead of "pearls."[100] In conclusion, Khushḥāl resorts to direct insults and states that books like the *Makhzan* are being produced by "muck-makers" (*gandapaz*) and welcomed by "muck-consumers" (*gandakhur*).[101] Despite such abusive summary, Khushḥāl Khān must be given credit for his subsequent literary response to the *Makhzan al-islām*: in 1678, three years after his visit to Swat, he composed his own religious handbook in Pashto verse entitled *Fażl-nāma*.[102]

Applying typical *fakhriyya* rhetoric, Khushḥāl imagined the geographical space of his Pashto verse's popularity as stretching from Kabul in the west to Kashmir in the north and Bengal in the east.[103] However hyperbolized and figurative this claim may have been, it does not seem to strongly contradict the fact that, in these times, the Pashtun military and administrative officers who served the Mughal authorities throughout North India, including Kashmir and Bengal, could be potential readers of Khushḥāl's Pashto poetry. In a brief annotation of his *dīwān*, described, by tradition, as a jewelry shop offering a variety of precious stones, the poet listed the main genre forms of his lyrics (*qaṣīda*, *ghazal*, *rubāʿī*, *qiṭʿa*, *maṣnawī*) and specified that in *ghazal*s he preferred traditional love themes, whereas his "brilliant *qaṣīda*s" covered all topics and abounded with admonitions.[104]

An important point of note is that Khushḥāl's *fakhriyya* verses comprise not only his authorial self-praise, but also declarations of his social status and primary occupations. In the poem "I am not happy at all … " such a declaration is worded in ten couplets, following the poet's ruminations about love as the key driving force of poetry and confessions about his own obsessive sexual desires. Summing up his long self-reflections, Khushḥāl Khān makes it clear that in social life, he figured himself a warrior and a hereditary chieftain, while writing poetry was only one of his favorite pastimes:

> Like my forefathers I am a khan and a chieftain (*sardār*),
> wars and battles are in the list of my deeds.
>
> I have seen both victories and defeats,
> it is in my nature to fight and kill.
>
> My ancestors had gone to the grave as valiant warriors,
> such is my inherited art (*hunar*).[105]

[100]Khushḥāl, *Swāt-nāma*, 45.
[101]Ibid., 47.
[102]Khushḥāl, *Fażl-nāma*.
[103]Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, 541.
[104]Ibid., 540.

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Khushḥāl saw his first battle before the age of maturity, somewhere in the middle of the 1620s, when his father Shahbāz Khān (d. 1641) took him on a raid on the Yūsufzays,[106] while he composed his first verses apparently at the age of twenty in the beginning of the 1630s ("The cauldron of my verse was placed on fire when I was twenty years old").[107]

In each of his three poems on poetry, Khushḥāl commented on his personal experience as regards inspiration. These remarks confirm his earlier theoretical premises in the *Dastār-nāma* about the poet's inborn predisposition to versification and the spontaneity of creative writing. Everywhere Khushḥāl stressed that he used to compose verses without the selfish purpose of gaining any profits and often against his own will. Though he once defined his verses as resulting from the heavenly *ilhām*, the poem "I am not happy at all … " begins with a down-to-earth clarification of his understanding of the notion of *ilhām* as being not connected to any spiritual practices, such as the Sufi meditations of *ẕikr* and *fikr*. Khushḥāl simply states here that verses appear in his mind like clouds in the rainy season, or chase him like dogs.[108] An extremely unceremonious treatment of poetic inspiration as an almost uncontrolled physical process is found in a small fragment (*qiṭʿa*), a typical record from Khushḥāl's diary in verse. In this vulgar joke, the author speaks of "two rebels" in his house who "always hold him in fever," the one being his tongue longing for poetry, and the other his phallus awaiting "the break of fast."[109] In view of Khushḥāl's liberality towards eroticism in poetry and some intimate details of his family life, one may not doubt that when he identified his poetic inspiration with a love that "threw a noose around his neck," he meant not only spiritual but carnal love as well.[110] The statement about the divine origin of his inspiration is adjacent to a verse with an explicitly erotic metaphor for the creative process: "My bedchamber is a place for virgin thoughts, / I am relishing their nipples (*tī ye nmūřəm*) day and night."[111]

While speaking of love as of a source of poetic inspiration, Khushḥāl Khān even dared to challenge the indisputable authority of Ḥāfiẓ by declaring that for a mole on a beautiful face he would give not just Bukhara and Samarqand but the whole world.[112] The context of this statement also allows it to be read as an allusion to the principle of generosity prescribed by the unwritten Pashtun code of honor (*Pashtunwali*). Together with other plain or figurative assessments of poetry writing, this rephrasing of the most famous quote from Ḥāfiẓ helps us to achieve a deeper comprehension of how literary aesthetics and social ethics were combined in the world outlook of the Pashtun poet and tribal ruler.

[105]Ibid., 544.
[106]Afẓal, *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣaʿ*, 269.
[107]Khushḥāl, *Kulliyāt*, 541.
[108]Ibid., 537.
[109]Ibid., 855–6.
[110]Ibid., 535.
[111]Ibid., 541.
[112]Ibid., 538.

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Conclusion

Incipient forms of literary criticism in early Pashto writings developed primarily as authorial self-reflections stemming from what in Persian literary tradition could be associated with poetic self-praise (*fakhriyya*) and explanations of reasons for composing works (*sabab-i ta'līf*). In both cases, Pashtun authors highlighted the fact of writing in their native language, thus, deliberately or not, claiming the right for Pashto literature to exist amid the continued dominance of written Persian in the Persophone cultural ecumene of the Mughal Empire. While the authors of religio-philosophical poetry mostly tried to provide the rationale behind choosing the local vernacular for preaching Islamic dogmas and ethical values among predominantly unlettered tribesmen, the Khaṭak chieftain Khushḥāl Khān declared and proved by his own works the capacity of Pashto to be a full-fledged literary language applicable to any genre. Unlike the religious poets, who interpreted poetic inspiration (*ilhām*) in terms of mystical epistemology, Khushḥāl Khān regarded it as an inborn divine gift urging towards spontaneous creative activity, free of being focused exclusively on spiritual homilies. All Pashtun authors openly acknowledged the high status of the Persian classical literature and its many-sided formative impact on their oeuvre, Khushḥāl affirming that he was the one who made Pashto verse to be on a par with "the poetry of Shiraz and Khujand."[113] Nevertheless, the dichotomy between "self/own" (*khpəl*) and "other/alien" (*praday*), which in the minds of Pashtun litterateurs included also the ethno-linguistic aspect of poetry writing, contributed to maintaining some distinct peculiarities of Pashto verse, above all the prosody based on tonic principles. Within the mainly illiterate milieu unaccustomed to written forms of creative expression in the native vernacular, the pioneers of Pashto written poetry regularly accentuated the significance of the alphabet, "amazing black letters" in Mīrzā Khān's words, and consciously strove to juxtapose Islamic book culture against the prevailing orality of Pashto folklore traditions. In their occasional remarks on Pashto writings, the Roshānī poets eulogized only the works of the authors affiliated with their own sectarian community, whereas Khushḥāl Khān offered brief critical comments on all the emerging literature in Pashto. If his predecessors emphasized spiritual foundations and purposes of verbalizing the shared religious and social ideologies in written Pashto, Khushḥāl paid more attention to various artistic aspects of creative writing and thought over the prospects of literary Pashto's progress in the future.

Traditions of authorial literary criticism laid down by the Roshānīs and Khushḥāl Khān were continued to varying degrees by the leading Pashtun poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, beginning with the above-mentioned ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Momand (Raḥmān Bābā) and Khushḥāl's sons Ashraf Khān Hijrī (d. 1694) and ʿAbd al-Qādir (d. after 1713). Being the authors of mainstream philosophical, didactic and love lyrics, Raḥmān and Qādir occasionally included in their verses conventional statements on the art of poetry per se, as well as notes on Pashto

[113]Ibid., 534.

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verse and laudatory self-assessments. Such an approach to literary criticism prevailed in later Pashto classics. However, Ashraf Hijrī, as the most devoted follower of his father's literary style, made a more substantial contribution to the subject. Apart from a series of verses on poetry writing in general and his own creative experience and achievements in particular, Ashraf left a critical overview of Pashto poetry in a monothematic poem of forty-one distiches.[114] A century later, another Khaṭak poet, Kāẓim Khān Shaydā (d. 1780), composed a kind of reply to Ashraf's critique: a prolix and grandiloquent essay in one hundred and fifty-four distiches entitled "The State of Pashto Poetry" (*də paẋto də shiʾr ḥasb-i ḥāl*).[115] The strongly polemical character of Kāẓim Khān's essay proves that throughout several decades of the eighteenth century, a discourse on literary criticism issues, despite a small readership, remained a constant in Pashtun intellectual culture.

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[114]Ashraf, *Dīwān*, 244–9.
[115]Kāẓim, *Dīwān*, 13–21.

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