

Ghani Khan's Poetry: A Modernist Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper is the study of Ghani Khan's poetry in the light of modernist framework. For this purpose three books of his poetic collection have been studied. It is interesting to see that Ghani Khan's poetry, in terms of diction and style, is marked by a number of modernist elements and parameters. Employment of verse libre, economy of expression and use of allusions are some of the hallmarks of his poetry. Some of his major thematic concerns are his mistrust of dogma and rejection of any sort of authority, in particular, his criticism of the persona of *Maulvi* whom he regards as a symbol of parochialism and conservatism. However, of all the modernist elements that make his work comparable with the work of other modernist and experimentalist writers of the twentieth century, fragmented narrative and use of scattered images are the two most important characteristics.

KEY TERMS: modernism, Ghani Khan, modernist style, modernist themes, modernist language

1 INTRODUCTION

Modernism, though a western product of the late 19th and early 20th century, has its impacts on various fields of human knowledge e.g. painting, philosophy, anthropology, music, sculpture and architecture; different ages, different cultures and the literature of different languages. What modernists did was that they welcomed the modern technologies and scientific experimentations and adopted its essence in different fields. The traditional art forms in painting, music, sculpture, architecture as well as literature were rejected in order to incorporate the new trends in scientific investigation and innovations. For example, in architecture, previously, curves and round shapes were in fashion, but with the onset of modernism the emphasis was shifted towards utility instead of aesthetics alone. Therefore, use of small space, glass, concrete and steel became the new norms of artistic expression in architecture. In music, discord, unrhymed musical patterns and even high volume noise and voice were introduced. In painting and sculpture the change was more obvious. It widened the range of material that was available to the artists. New standards of beauty were introduced. "The revival of collage and the importation into painting of sand, cigarette butts, linoleum, hair, straw, mud, or anything else that came to hand – this development is as familiar from jokes as from actual experience" (Adams, 1978, p. 27). These revolutions in visual arts also effected changes in other art forms. For example, the language of modernist literature too became highly condensed and imagistic. In the words of Adams (1978, p. 27), "clichés and quotations, formulas and phrases out of the linguistic garbage-midden, sufficient to make up an independent, semi-private language of its own", became a norm of literary language. The artists believed that the old ways of expression were no more able to encompass the new scattered and fragmented reality of the world.

Modernism as a literary movement brought changes not only in form but also in content, where the traditional absolute forms and themes were rejected and were experimented in new ways. For example, in poetry, free verse was introduced where lines were of different length with no traditional metres and regular rhyme scheme; importance was given to sound, and borrowing from other cultures and literary traditions became a common practice. Here juxtaposition of ideas and intertextuality were advocated. Free use of allusions was made and the gap between the present and past was reduced. Language became more sexual and more alluring. Concepts borrowed from imagism in painting, of which Ezra Pound was the leading practitioner, were brought in. Though the movement initially influenced the languages and the literatures of the western art forms, gradually these new practices put tremendous influence on the literary norms of other nations too. "It's much easier,

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however, to say where and how modernism started than where it ended, or if it has: the central and hardest problem is always the closest, the problem of now" (Adams, 1978, p. 28).

Saiyida (1965, p. 39) in her article *Urdu Nazm men Haiatke Tajrībe* (Stylistic Experiments in the Urdu Poem) cited in Habib (2007, p. 40) while declaring Rashid as the rebel of Urdu poetry says that "in our literature, the most important formal revolution was brought about around 1930, when N. M. Rashid, Mira Ji ... began the attempt for the first time in Urdu to write free verse". In Urdu poetry, this change where the traditional rules of Urdu poetry were experimented and were set free from all the restraints of the traditional values was the start of modernism in our contexts.

There are studies where modernism is explored in different literary works in Urdu. For example, various researchers have traced elements of modernism in Iqbal's works. Similarly, Habib (2007) in his article 'T. S. Eliot and Modernism in Urdu Poetry' has also discussed elements of modernism and T. S. Eliot's influence on different Urdu poets. But, as far as regional languages and literatures are concerned, there is little research where modernist elements might be studied. Furthermore, modernism is often misinterpreted and confused with modernity or modern trends by the researchers of our part of the world and hence research, in respect to modernism as a movement, is not available to a desirable extent.

Pashto literature, though not properly studied from the modernist standpoint, is one of such literature, where the influence of modernism is in plain sight. In Pashto, very recently some work has been produced where modernism and modern trends in Pashto literature have been studied but that too is preliminary work. For example, Saleem Raz's (2008) *Pashto Adabaur Naye Rujhanat*, Hanif Khalil's (2008) *Jadidiyat, Mabad Jadidiataur Pashto Adab*, Muhib Wazir's (2008) *Pashto Ghazal keJadeedtar Rujhanat*, Mustafa Kamal's (2008) *Pashto Novel keJadeed Rujhanat*, Aseer Mangal's (2008) *Pashto Afsaneke Jadeed Rujhanat*, and Mustafa kamal's (2008) *Pashto Drama keJadeed Rujhanat*, are some comparatively new studies in this direction. These works do not discuss modernism as a cultural movement, rather modern in the sense of modern trends. Furthermore, here Pashto poetry, short stories, novel and drama are discussed in general where there is no detailed modernist analysis of particular writers' works.

There are many poets, for example, Hashim Babar, FazliHaq Sheda and Sayyed Rasool Rasa who are considered as both modern and modernist poets. But Ghani Khan (1914-1996), the well-known Pashto writer, poet, and painter, is regarded a modernist poet. In this regard Salma Shaheen says:

Ghani Khan is not only in his own age but also in the 20th century the most important, the most modern poet ... who rebelled against the traditions in the real sense. ...The freedom of thought and ideological rebellion are the characteristics of his poetry. These are the values, which have placed him more modern, more different among all modern and romantic poets. He is considered unique on the basis of his deep thinking and modern style. (Salma Shaheen, 2005, pp. 143-144)

Various critics have studied Ghani Khan differently where most of them, including Mian Shah Bacha and Bakht Sheema (2010) and Shazia Babar (2005), have often focused the romantic aspects of his poetry. The present study is an attempt to explore various modernist aspects of Ghani Khan's poetry which may establish a point of departure from the previous studies of his poetry vis-à-vis Romanticism.

Ghani Khan has written several books including *Da Penjery Chaghaar* (Chirpings of the Cage), *Palwashey* (Beams of Light), *Panoos* (Chandelier), and *Latoon* (Search). The present study considers three of his books (*Panoos, Palwashey and Da Penjery Chaghaar*) for the modernist analysis.

Modernism is a loose term that encompasses a number of things in the cultural domain. Similarly, there are a number of modernisms acquiring different hues and colours in the changing spaces and time. In Morris's words, "everyone has his or her own modernism" (1989, p. 341). Therefore, only selected modernist themes are discussed with reference to Ghani Khan's poetry. There are many things which make him a modernist poet and that is why people of his age did not welcome him and thus his visionary wisdom remained unexplored. The highly artistic nature of his works did not earn him popular acclaim though ironically critical acclaim too has come to him very late since the aspects of his poetry that make him stand in line with high modernism in Europe have rarely been explored. As, according to Vicki Mahaffey (2007, p. 58) "modernist literature forces the readers to recollect fragments" so it is not easily understandable for the layman.

Ghani Khan's style and elements of modernism: Ghani Khan's style is a deviation from the traditional poetic techniques which most of his contemporaries used. It is unique in the sense that he makes his poems very rich, compact, and full of allusions. By the use of allusions there is continuous reference to the past in a very concrete manner. Similarly, his poetry also has many poems which are the true representative of free

verse. The use of allusions and free verse are the two characteristics of Ghani Khan's work, which are the hallmarks of modernist poetry

The use of allusions: There are many instances in Ghani Khan's poetry, where there is reference to the past incidents, events and persons. T. S. Eliot (1972) while referring to the use of allusions in modern poetry, in his essay *Tradition and Individual talent* says that the use of allusions by modernist poets is to provide a platform to them so to make connection between past and present.

Ghani Khan has actually filled this gap between the past and present which is truly the presence of the past. He has done this by the use of allusions. The allusions he has used are of different nature. They not only refer to the historical figures like Majnoon and Laila in his poem "Hisab" and in "Awalsthargistha da ledokhwara", Farhad and Sherenai in "Qismat", Luqman and Nimrod in "OwaGulona", SikanderBakht and Daara in "Dua", Umer bi Khayyam in "Baora", Mehmood and Ayaz in "Hisab", "Qismat", "MulaChargag" and in "Awalsthargistha da ledokhwara", Hazrat Hussain (Raziallaho) and Yazeed in "Taro", Hazrat Bilal (Raziallaho) in "Korkora" and Mughal king Shah Jehan in "Baora" but there are also allusions to Quranic text as well. For example in "Jaza" it is said:

<i>Kho sthajehanbalrangikhai</i>	But your universe should be unique
<i>Stha da patosthargokhyal</i>	Your decisions are not well-thought
<i>Ajeba di juramekhe</i>	Bizarre is the punishment
<i>Pa khonono da wisal</i>	Death sentence for the meeting lovers
<i>Lantanulbirahattathunfiqomimmathuhibbon</i>	<i>Lantanulbirahattathunfiqomimma</i>
	<i>Thuhibbon</i>

Free verse: Ghani Khan, famous for his experimentations in the poetic art, made free use of verse libre. In this regard, Ayub Sabir (n.d.) while talking about the poets, who really promoted free verse in Pashto literature, says that besides Said Rasool Rasa and FazalSheda, Ghani Khan was the person who did successful experiments. There are poems where he has used variation in different verses. One such example is his letter by the name of "YahakeemJi", written in the form of a poem to his friend Hakim SayyidulAbrarFazil. In the first two stanzas of this poem, there are some rhymed verses but the last stanza is completely devoid of any rhyme. "Latoon" is another poem where there is no rhyme at all and thus is perfect example of free verse.

Modernist themes in Ghani Khan's poetry: There are a number of modernist themes in his poetry. For example, the loss of faith and tradition and mistrust of institutions whether religious or governmental.

Theme of Cultural Pessimism: As modernism was a movement that reached its peak in the wake of World War I, disillusionment and cultural pessimism gripped the whole of the western world. As a result, its cultural production could not remain unaffected by those horrendous developments. The reasons for such pessimism in the Subcontinent where Ghani Khan grew up are numerous and they definitely influenced young Ghani Khan around that historical time. There are many poems of Ghani Khan where element of pessimism is very dominant. For example, in "MraShama", "Salam", "Dua", "Karwan" and "Sehra" this aspect of pessimism is very well depicted.

In "MraShama" Ghani Khan depicts human beings as:

<i>Ao da bandamisallaka da khass de</i>	Like dry grass human is,
<i>Thoodshi loge okiranrakrijora</i>	Catches heat, omits smoke and turns into a blaze
<i>Lambashioswazikhawrierishi</i>	Converts into flame, burns and ends up into ashes,
<i>Borraabe pi jarakrijora</i>	Mother whose son departs mourns

Similarly, in "Salam" Ghani Khan mourns the departure of youth in these words:

<i>Na saazshonasozsho</i>	Neither was a music composed nor an elegy
<i>Bas hasejwandtamamsho</i>	Absurd life met its end
<i>Na khobshonashrangsho</i>	Neither saw a dream nor enjoyed music
<i>Na yargulandamsho</i>	Nor found a sweetheart
<i>Da thorathorashparaghla</i>	And the deep black night approached
<i>Na sthorinaspogmaishi</i>	Neither a star appeared nor a moon rose
<i>Zwaniwalalarala</i>	Our youth's darkened and disappeared
<i>Yao gut aokhali jam sho</i>	Single sip finished and the bowl was empty

In "Dua", after depicting the scene of this world as full of miseries with no law and no happiness, he ends this poem with:

*Stharestargi mi ki pate ya Allah
Zama khwakhana da stawaradunya*

Close my weary eyes, O my Lord
I loathe your entire world

All the above examples suggest that Ghani Khan was inclined towards pessimism with no hope for improvement. That is why he complains to God and prays to Him to end his life because this world is not the place where he can live.

Theme of mistrust in religious dogma: The second theme that is very dominant in modernist writers is the mistrust of religious dogma and governmental institutions of control. In Ghani Khan's Poetry, Mullah is the symbol of corruption and all evils. He is always addressed as someone who is the real cause of all the confusions in the world.

In such poems as "Jannat", "Ibadat" or "Kanidunyakha da" the figure of Mullah is the butt of criticism. Mullah is represented as the one who does nothing but wait for someone to bring him "Halwa" and money.

For example, he writes:

*Dodighrapmula, jannatimula
Halwaqabmula, wilayathimula
Pa peisoqurbanaosattimula
Da pulao pa shauqkhripetimula*

Glutton maulvi, maulvi of heaven
Halwa-loving maulvi, westernized maulvi
Money loving maulvi
The maulvi who eats porridge for the taste of rice pulao

Similarly, in "Ibadat" Ghani Khan portrays maulvi as the person who worships God, not to please him but to collect money and eat halwa in his name.

*Da mulakasab
Paseedalaokenastal
Da halwa pa armanono
Thal Allah Allahkawal*

Maulvi's occupation
In performing all rituals,
For the lust for halwa
Always calling Allah

Besides challenging *Maulvi*, Ghani Khan also somewhat challenges (complains) God not directly but indirectly by denying his religious duties. In the poems "Qismat", "Jaza" and "Awalsthargistha da ledokhwara" Ghani Khan's protest is very apparent. As in "Awalsthargistha da ledokhwara" he says:

<i>Zakhogulaochamanaosharabpejanam</i>	I know blossoms, orchard and wine
<i>Aobaharpejanamaokhazan</i>	I know spring and autumn
<i>Zakhoshrangao rung aokababpejanam</i>	I know melody, color and kabab
<i>Na gunahpejanamaonashethan</i>	But what I don't know is sin and devil

This is another way of expressing his philosophy of Epicureanism, of eating, drinking, and merry-making. In "Qismat" he is more direct to make God realize His rough treatment of His creation when he says:

<i>Lewaninahafa ma shiderqurban sham</i>	Don't be annoyed with this fool
<i>Aksarodaghe da khar pa zaikulal</i>	But You often punish the one who is guiltless

It is reminiscent of Iqbal's famous poem 'Shikwa' where he complains to God of all the ills happening in the world especially to the Muslims.

2. MODERNIST IMAGERY IN GHANI KHAN'S POETRY

i. **The use of sensual words:** After going through the three books of Ghani Khan's poetry, it was observed that the language used by Ghani Khan is not ordinary language but more romantic and more alluring e.g. the use of words like lips, kissing, wine, heart, *zulf*(tresses), *masti*(liveliness), music, youth, moth and candle. Some time he is more direct to give reference to sexual aspects of language.

For example, in his poem "Waimulajan" he refers to the sensuous bodies of *hoors*:

<i>Waimulajanche pa jannatkihoripande di</i>	Says maulvi, in heaven there are hoors
<i>Ghatighati, spenispeniaoberbandi di</i>	With enormous, white and nude bodies

In the same poem, after discussing *maulvi*'s love for *hoors* and his desires for sex, he addresses *maulvi* and says that if you are talking about *hoors* and their beauty then at the same time in heaven there will be *ghelman* who will have their eyes on your daughters and mothers. After pointing out the harsh realities of heaven to the *maulvi*, he tells him that if you still desire heaven then may God bless you with it. The scene is depicted as:

Masthmasthalakan chi ba hum khkuli hum kharabwi

*Gora mulagi ta di chi las ye derlageerakri
Ta bawerlagoriahagha be derlatherakri
Aolunra di ranesi, la morderla p makhakri
Tolakhelkhanabaderlagermakriaoyakhakri
Daghakajannatwimularab de werlabozazar*

Boys hot, handsome and ugly
Look *maulvi* when ten of them grab your women
You will see and he will make her pregnant
And will grab your daughter and will follow your mother
They will ‘have’ all your family
If that is heaven then God bless you with it

- ii. **The imagistic setting:** Furthermore, Ghani Khan’s use of language is full of images where the readers are left with heap of scattered images. They are so much abundantly used that almost every poem has some sorts of images. In fact his entire poetry solidifies by the use of images and dissolves in imagism. To substantiate this statement, let’s examine a few lines from Ghani Khan’s poem “Caravan”. It is said:

*Jwandaqarar, ooraooba di, naba yeo zyeshina yeo zyekegi
Tyra aonooryao da baljor di, dasibateerashi da chi teeregi
Laka da sind da jwand hum lar da, kala pa ghraki kala medanki
Banda ajab, ajabpeda de, kor ye pa khawrakizye ye asmanki*

Life and comfort like fire and water will never assimilate
Darkness and light though made of each other will follow their paths and not merge
Like river life also has its path, sometime in mountains sometime in planes
Human, a born strange dwelling on earth with a place in the sky

In the above mention lines, the images of fire and water, darkness and light, mountain and planes earth and sky, are abundantly used. These images though scattered and fragmented, help in the interpretation of the two opposite poles i.e. life and death. Here, the readers, as famous of most of modernist writers, are instigated to search for the scattered images and form the meaning.

- iii. **Symbolism:** In terms of the use of symbolism, his poetry is truly modernist. There are many symbols in Ghani Khan’s poetry e.g. poppy and mullah. He has used poppy for the sterile and useless life. It is said in one of his poems “Reidi Gul” where the poppy replies to the poet as:

In your garden, there are thousands of flowers like me
A nameless droplet in a nameless sea.
You too, in your desert, don’t feel forlorn,
To behold you at last shall come a sore

(RafayMehmood, 2011)

In the same way mullah is also used as a symbol of corruption. In many poems, mullah is represented as someone who is the root cause of corruption, senselessness and dishonesty. While depicting the hypocrisy and senselessness of mullah, Ghani Khan says:

<i>Dwarastargay de randeydee</i>	You are blind
<i>Da bal bad da zaankhawaye</i>	Blaming others, praising yourself
<i>Tal ainakezantagorey</i>	Always looking in the mirror
<i>Da yaarnaweneysingaar</i>	Unable to see the beauty of the beloved

Here mullah is represented as a symbol of hypocrisy and self-love. It is said that mullah is always concerned about his own self while ignoring the others; therefore, Ghani Khan has turned him into an eternal symbol of all such negative traits and weak and self-centered human character.

3. CONCLUSION

Though there is no dearth of critiques of Ghani Khan’s poetry, the researchers of this brief study realized that at least in one area there is ample scope of further studies, that is, investigating Pushto poetry with reference to such influential cultural movements as modernism and postmodernism. During the course

of this paper, the researchers have also realized that,besides Ghani Khan there are many other poets like Hashim Babar, FazliHaqSheda and SayyedRasool Rasa whose work can also be studied from modernist perspective. Bringing modernist/postmodernist perspectives on the literature in our regional and national languages can open up further avenues of thought and research and in this way the rich heritage of local literature can be brought into global focus.

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