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Writing the Mughal Past in Pashto: Khushal Khan Khattak Historical Consciousness in Early Modern South Asian History

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Abstract

This paper examines Khushal Khan Khattak representation of Delhi and its rulers as a historical consciousness in Pashto literature. Khushal as a poet in modern professional sense, makes his poetry a mode of historical representation through which he highlights Delhi environment, dynastic succession, political memory, and knowledge of the past. Focusing previous accounts of Delhi and the succession list of its rulers, the study analyzes how Khushal use place, chronology, compression, selection, and characterization to construct a poetic narrative of the political past. His poetic narrative includes representation within the wider Persianate and Mughal intellectual environment in which early modern Pashto literature developed. The paper therefore argues that Khushal's historical poetry highlights the importance of vernacular literary texts for understanding historical memory in early-modern South Asia. His work shows how knowledge of the political history could be circulated beyond formal court chronicles and could be preserved through poetic forms in Pashto.

Keywords: Khushal Khan Khattak; historical consciousness; Pashto literature; historical memory; Mughal India; Delhi; Persianate culture; early modern South Asia.

Introduction

History and poetry relationship in early-modern South Asian context cannot be understood through rigid distinction between historical texts and literature. Modern historical scholarship has always privileged administrative records, chronicles, biographies, and other explicit documentary sources, while literary works are regarded primarily as expressions of aesthetics, politics, religion, and cultures. However, recent scholarship on precolonial South Asia demonstrates that both literature and poetry forms could preserve memories of political events, construct narratives of the past, represent rulers and dynasties, and articulate historically situated understandings of political change. The value of these sources does not depend on treating them as equivalent to modern historical writings. Rather, their significant historical and literary forms play a great role in communicating past knowledge. Allison Busch, highlights through her study of “early modern Hindi historical poetry” that literary texts can provide important perspectives on Mughal political history precisely because they combine historical

information with the narrative and aesthetic conventions of poetry.¹ Similarly, Daud Ali argues, that precolonial South Asian historical writing should be assessed through questions of temporality, narrative form, and the ways in which particular literary traditions constructed the visions of the past, rather than simply through modern distinction between “*history*” and “*literature*”.²

This broader historiographical approach provides a useful framework for examining the writings of Khushal Khan Khattak (1613–1689), one of the most important figures of the early-modern Pashto literature. Khushal lived and wrote during a period in which Pashtun community inhabited regions of the northwest India, closely connected to the political and cultural structures of the Mughal Empire. His intellectual production encompassed poetry and prose and addressed subjects including political authority, ethics, warfare, personal experience, tribal society, and literary practice. Modern scholarships examined Khushal not only as a major Pashto poet but also as a political thinker and participant in intellectual world of Pashtun society. Mikhail Pelevin argue that Khushal's writings should be considered within the wider literary environment of early modern Pashto and Persianate cultural world of Mughal India. His study of early-modern Pashto literary criticism explains that Khushal and other Pashtun writers have had consciously articulated the literary possibilities of Pashto while they engaged with intellectual conventions inherited from Persian literary culture.³

Khushal's intellectual and political position requires attention in the realm of Pashtun chieftaincy and Mughal political authority. His family had great connections with Mughal administration, while Khushal himself occupied a position in the Mughal administrative order before his later opposition to the empire. Therefore, his writings consist socio-political discourses in which local forms of authority, Islamic political thought, Mughal administrative institutions, and Pashtun customary norms are debated. Pelevin's examination about the writings of Khushal and his grandson Afzal Khan Khattak demonstrates that the political literature of the Khattak chiefs drew upon Persian tradition called, “*Mirror for Princes*” adapting to the circumstances of Pashtun chieftaincy.⁴ This context is particularly important for understanding Khushal's historical writings because his engagement with political authority was not detached or purely antiquarian. His representations of political events, and previous Pashtun and Mughal rulers were expressed for a world in which questions of sovereignty, warfare, loyalty, lineage, and political legitimacy had a great importance.

This study focuses on the dimensions of Khushal's literary production: his representation of Delhi and its rulers. In the passage examined here, Khushal begins by describing Delhi and then proceeds to recount a succession of rulers associated with the political history of northern India. He announces that the rulers will be discussed “one by one”, establishing a sequential structure for his account. The passage

¹ Bush, Allison. “Literary responses to the Mughal Imperium: The Historical Poems of Kesavdas.” *South Asia Research* 25, no. 1 (2005): 31-54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0262728005051606>.

² Daud Ali, “Temporality, narration and the problem of history: A view from Western India c. 1100–1400,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 50, no. 2 (2013): 237–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019464613487120>.

³ Mikhail Pelevin, “The Inception of Literary Criticism in Early Modern Pashto Writings,” *Iranian Studies* 54, nos. 5–6 (2021): 947–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2020.1829461>.

⁴ Mikhail Pelevin, “The Art of Chieftaincy in the Writings of Pashtun Tribal Rulers,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29, no. 3 (2019): 485–504, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186319000051>.

moves through a succession of dynasties and rulers, including the Chauhans, Muhammad Ghori, Qutb al-Din Aibak, Iltutmish, Raziya, Balban, the Khaljis, the Tughlaqs, the Lodis, Timur, Babur, Humayun, Sher Shah Suri, Islam Shah, and Akbar.⁵ The significance of this passage lies not merely in the number of rulers that Khushal mentions. More importantly, he introduces political past memory through sequence, selection, succession, and characterization. The past is presented as a structured succession of political authorities rather than an undifferentiated collection of stories.

The study, therefore, raises an important question about the nature of historical knowledge in early modern Pashto literature. Khushal Khan Khattak does not write about Persian court chronicle, nor does his account confirm the institutional practices associated with historiography. Therefore, dismissing the paragraph as merely poetic would ignore the deliberate historical organization of its subject matter. His sequence of poetic phrases demonstrates great effort to show the beautiful structure of Delhi and the dynastic structure of the past rulers.

He says,

<i>"Da Delhi da shar sha shaan wo shukat wo</i>	<i>Lor pa lor ye shkula y shkula y Eemarat wo</i>
<i>Shahista ye bazarona wo da shaar</i>	<i>Muhayia ye pa Bazar ki har Niamat woo</i>
<i>Da Shahnehar fawarii de pa hr koor ki</i>	<i>Da bazaar ba ye sa km bega waseyat woo</i>
<i>Pa Delhi bande gawahi da janat wala</i>	<i>Ka raghali pa Dunyia chiri janat wo".⁶</i>

In these verses Khushal glorifies Delhi, the capital of India. He praises all its beauty, weather, and seasonal fruits. He also praises the "bazaars", city of Delhi, asserting that everything was available there. Furthermore, he adds that if there has been any "Jannah", the heaven, on the surface of the world, it will be not wrong to say that it was Delhi. Khushal following statements highlights his historical vision. The problem, therefore, is not simply whether Khushal should be classified as a "historian." A more productive question is how his poetry constructs historical knowledge and how literary forms shape his representation of the past.

This distinction between a poet and a historian is particularly important because the concept of "objectivity" employed in modern historiography is not applicable to Khushal's poem. The original interpretation of the passage as an objective historical account overlooks the fact that historical representation necessarily involves selection and organization. Khushal's choice of choosing rulers determines the sequence in which they appear compresses, long periods of political history into a relatively short poetic narrative and characterizes individual rulers in systematic ways. These features do not make the passage historically useless. Instead, they reveal the interpretive character of historical representation. Busch's study of early-modern Hindi historical poetry is instructive in this respect: historical and literary registers can coexist within the same text, and the literary form of a source does not automatically disqualify it as evidence for historical culture.⁷ In a similar context, Ali's analysis of

⁵ Saeed Anwar-ul-Haq, trans., *Muntakhabat-e-Khushal Khan Khattak* (Peshawar: Pashto Academy, University of Peshawar, 2017), <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/detail/muntakhabat-khushhal-khan-khatak-ebooks>.

⁶ Anwar-ul-Haq, *Muntakhabat-e-Khushal Khan Khattak*, 127.

⁷ Allison Busch, "'Unhitching the Oxcart of Delhi': A Mughal-Period Hindi Account of Political Insurgency," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28, no. 3 (2018): 415–39.

premodern historical narratives demonstrates the importance of examining the temporal and narrational structures through which writers produced visions of the past.⁸

This research therefore approaches Khushal's Delhi poem as a historical representation and historical memory of the past, rather than attempting to establish that Khushal was a "*historian*" in the modern-Pashto professional sense. This approach also places his work within a broader history of early-modern South Asian literary cultures in which renowned poets participated in the interpretation and preservation of political memory. Busch's research on Hindi historical poetry highlight that vernacular literary sources can broaden the evidentiary base for studying Mughal-period political culture, while her later work on "Lāl Kavi's *Chatraprakāś*" highlighted that how a regional literary text could provide a local perspective on Mughal rulers and political events.⁹ These studies suggest that literary representations of the past should be analyzed according to their own interpretation rather than measured exclusively against the standards of modern historical writing.

For the background, this article investigates: How did Khushal Khan Khattak construct and communicate historical knowledge through his poetry, and what does his representation of Delhi's rulers and dynastic succession highlight about historical consciousness in early-modern Pashto literary culture? It argues that Khushal's historical poetry shows a distinctive form of early-modern historical representation. His poetry does not simply reproduce a chronological catalogue of rulers. Through selection, compression, sequencing, characterization, and poetic narration, he transforms political history into historical memory communicated through the Pashto literary verses. His treatment of Delhi rulers proves the intellectual engagement with the South Asian past that operated outside the formal conventions of Persian court historiography.

The argument proceeds in eight different stages. The first section deals Khushal within the political and intellectual environment of early-modern Pashtun society and the Mughal world. The second examines Delhi as a historical and political space in Khushal's poetry. The third analyzes his organization of rulers and dynasties and considers chronology as a means of structuring historical memory. The fourth proceeds with his characterization of kings and addresses the problem of objectivity and interpretation. The fifth places Khushal's historical representation within broader scholarship on poetry, historical consciousness, and early modern South Asian historiographical practices. The sixth deal with Persianate culture and Mughal intellectual world. The seventh and eight deals with historical vernacular past of Delhi Sultanate. The conclusion considers what Khushal's work contributes to our understanding of historical knowledge and literary culture in early-modern Pashto.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative historical and textual analysis to examine Khushal Khan Khattak's representation of Delhi and its rulers in early-modern Pashto literature. Its source is *Muntakhabat-e-Khushal Khan Khattak*, translated by Saeed Anwar-ul-Haq (2017), particularly the poetic passage in which Khushal describes Delhi and recounts the succession of its rulers. The analysis focuses on five interconnected features of historical representation: the organization of rulers and dynasties,

⁸ Allison Busch, "Literary Responses to the Mughal Imperium, 31-54.

⁹ Allison Busch, "'Unhitching the Oxcart of Delhi', 415-39.

chronological sequencing, the selection and compression of historical events, the characterization of political figures, and the use of Delhi as a historical and political space. These textual features are interpreted in relation to the political and intellectual context of seventeenth-century South Asia, drawing on relevant scholarship concerning early-modern Pashto literature, Persianate literary culture, Mughal political history, and vernacular historical poetry. The study adopts an interpretive approach that distinguishes poetic representations of the past from modern documentary historiography. Rather than treating the poem as a comprehensive or objectively verified chronicle, it investigates how historical knowledge was selected, organized, and communicated through Pashto poetic form. Where historical claims require contextual clarification, the analysis draws on published historical scholarship. This approach makes it possible to assess the poem as evidence of historical consciousness and political memory while recognizing the interpretive possibilities and limitations of literary sources.

2. Khushal Khan Khattak and the Early-Modern Pashto Intellectual World

Khushal Khan Khattak (1613–1689) was born at Akora Khattak, belonged to Utmanzai tribe. His belonging to KPK, Khyber Pakhtun Khwa, shaped political and literary environment of Pashtun tribal authority, Islamic intellectual tradition, Mughal imperial administration, when it comes to the traditional usage of Pashto language as an academic language. He was not only a poet detached from the political structures of his time but also a political head in his region. His political leadership and literary works are closely interlinked with each other. Hence, his writings provide a clear insight to examine how a seventeenth-century Pashtun intellectual understood political authority, society, morality of the past. Rather than approaching Khushal exclusively through the later nationalist image of the “national poet,” it is more historically productive to view his literary production from institutional and intellectual lenses of early modern South Asian history.

The seventeenth century was regarded as an important period in which written Pashto literature evolved. Pashto literary production had earlier roots, including the writings associated with the Roshani movement, but seventeenth century witnessed an expansion of literary activities in which authors increasingly reflected upon the possibilities and purposes of writing in Pashto. Mikhail Pelevin's study of early-modern Pashto literary criticism highlight that writers of seventeenth century did not merely produce poetry; they also developed forms of authorial self-reflection concerning literary composition, poetic practice, and the relationship between established Persian literary traditions and Pashto. Khushal Khan's writings form a significant part of intellectual evolution. Pelevin further asserts that early-modern Pashtun authors situated emerging Pashto literature within the broader Persephone cultural environment of Mughal India while simultaneously emphasizing the literary and cultural possibilities of their own language.¹⁰

In this context, Khushal's poetic engagement with historical subjects cannot be separated from that of literary form. His poetry was produced in an intellectual environment in which Persian possessed considerable prestige as a language of scholarship and administration, while Pashto was increasingly being used for literary expression and the articulation of Pashtun social and political concerns. Khushal's

¹⁰ Mikhail Pelevin, “The Inception of Literary Criticism in Early Modern Pashto Writings,” *Iranian Studies* 54, nos. 5–6 (2021): 947–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2020.1829461>.

use of Pashto therefore represented more than a linguistic choice. It allowed political, ethical, historical, and literary ideas to be articulated for an audience situated within Pashtun society while remaining connected to wider Islamic and Persianate intellectual traditions. His historical representations can be understood as part of a broader process through which Pashto writers participated in the intellectual culture of early-modern South Asia.¹¹

The political position of Khushal distinguishes his writings from purely literary work. His family had longstanding relations with the Mughal state. Khushal himself served within the Mughal administrative and military system. Recent historical scholarship identifies his position as a Mughal “*mansabdar*”, an officer, from 1641 to 1664, indicating that his earlier political career was connected to the imperial order rather defined from the outset by opposition to it.¹² This point is important because the later image of Khushal as an anti-Mughal poet can malign the changing nature of his political experience. His relationship with the Mughal state developed over time and was affected due to some political issues of 1660s.

Relationship between Mughal and Khushal Khan changed when he was arrested Aurangzeb reign. According to Shahbaz Khan and Himayatullah, his imprisonment in 1664 marked a major transformation in his relationship with Mughal authority. Following his release, Khushal rejected attempts to restore himself to Mughal service and eventually became an important participant in armed resistance against Mughal authority in the frontier region.¹³ The transformation extends beyond Khushal's political biography. It demonstrates that his literary production emerged from direct engagement with changing structures of political power. His writings therefore cannot be separated into categories such as “literature,” “history” and “politics,”; these dimensions frequently overlap within the intellectual world represented by his work.

Scholars’ examination of the writings of Khushal and Afzal Khan Khattak is especially useful for understanding this overlap. Pelevin places the political writings of the Khattak chiefs within the tradition of the “*Mirror for Princes*” (*naṣīḥat al-mulūk*), a broad genre of political and ethical instruction with deep roots in Persian and Islamic literary traditions. In the Khushal Khan context, however, this tradition was adapted to the political circumstances of Pashtun chieftaincy. Khushal's writings combined every aspect together such as Islamic political ideas, elements associated with the Mughal administrative order, and norms of Pashtun customary society.¹⁴ This literary environment encouraged writers to reflect upon rulers, governance, social order, political conduct, and the relationship between authority and morality.

To know about Khushal’s treatment of the past, the political-literary work of different scholars and Khushal himself is immensely important to be studied. His historical references were not necessarily

¹¹ Pelevin, “The Inception of Literary Criticism in Early Modern Pashto Writings”.

¹² Himayat Ullah Yaqubi and Shahbaz Khan Khattak, “Tribal Politics, Mughal mansab and the sons of Khushal Khan Khattak (1667–1674),” *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal* 8, no. 1 (2024): 117–31, <https://doi.org/10.47264/idea.lassij/8.1.7>.

¹³ Shahbaz Khan and Himayatullah, “Understanding the Anti-Mughal Struggle of Khushal Khan Khattak,” *Pakistan Perspectives* 25, no. 1 (2020).

¹⁴ Mikhail Pelevin, “The Art of Chieftaincy in the Writings of Pashtun Tribal Rulers,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29, no. 3 (2019): 485–504, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186319000051>.

produced with the intention of composing a systematic chronicle. Nevertheless, his writings demonstrate an awareness that political experience could be organized, communicated, and interpreted through literary lenses. The historical material in his poetry needs to be examined within the conventions of early modern literary culture rather than judged exclusively against the standards of modern historiography.

Khushal's representation of Delhi is a novelty added to literary world. In the poem examined in this article, Khushal begins with glorifying Delhi as a beautiful city and then moves toward its political history. He describes the city's magnificence, abundance, markets, and prosperity before turning to the rulers who successively exercised authority there.

He adds,

*“Hamgasiii ba num p num darta bayan kam
Chi da har ewa sa sa khoei sa khsiyat wo”*

He explicitly announces his intention to describe the rulers sequentially, stating that he will explain them “one by one.” along with their distinguished characters.¹⁵ The transition from the physical city to the succession of political authorities is significant. Delhi becomes more than a geographical location: it functions as a historical space in which political power changes hands across generations and dynasties.

Khushal's decision to narrate Delhi through its rulers also reflects the political concerns visible elsewhere in his writings. His political poetry repeatedly engages with the questions of leadership, loyalty, warfare, authority, conduct, and the responsibilities of rulers. The Delhi passage similarly gives political actors a central role in explaining the historical development of the city. Khushal Khan does not present all rulers through an identical formula. He compresses some reigns into brief descriptions while giving more attention to others. Consequently, the narrative is therefore simultaneously chronological and interpretive.

This provides a basis for moving beyond the original formulation of Khushal as simply a “good historian.” His poem noticed that chronology is important in his Delhi poem and that he organizes rulers sequentially. However, chronology alone does not withstand alone to transform a literary text into modern historiography. He himself declares that he will describe the characteristics of rulers, indicates that characterization is part of the poem's method. Selecting particular qualities, deciding which rulers deserve attention, and compressing long political careers into short poetic statements all involve interpretation.

The importance of this approach becomes clearer when Khushal's work is placed alongside other early-modern South Asian literary traditions. Scholarship on historical poetry in Mughal India, demonstrate that literary texts could engage with political history while simultaneously serving aesthetic, political, and cultural purposes. The coexistence of these functions means that historians should neither treat poetry as transparent factual chronicles nor dismiss it as historically irrelevant.

¹⁵ Saeed Anwar-ul-Haq, trans., *Muntakhabat-e-Khushal Khan Khattak*, 127–28.

Instead, literary texts need to be read according to their own conventions, paying attention to what poets select, how they organize time, what they omit, and how they characterize political actors.¹⁶

3. Delhi as Historical Space: Place, Dynasty, and the Organization of the Past

Khushal Khan Khattak's representation of Delhi begins not with a list of rulers but with the city itself. This opening is significant because Delhi is both a physical and historical place. Khushal first evokes the city's beauty, markets, prosperity, and abundance before turning to the succession of political authorities associated with it. The interaction between past rulers and city's environment gives the poem a particular historical structure: Delhi becomes a point of continuity through which successive political regimes can be remembered. Rather than narrating individual events in isolation, Khushal uses the city as an organizing framework for a longer political past.

*"Da Delhi banyad awal okra chohano
Pri da doeii teer so so kala Sultanat wo"*¹⁷

The poem transition to Delhi and its rulers demonstrates how Khushal compresses a long historical period into a relatively short poetic account. After announcing his intention to describe the rulers successively, he goes through a series of political figures beginning with the Chauhan means Raj Puts, and Muhammad Ghori and continuing through the early Delhi Sultanate, the Khaljis, Lodis, Tughlaqs, Timur, and the Mughal rulers Babur, Humayun, and Akbar.¹⁸ The sequence is not that much in detail. Individual reigns that have historically extended across decades are represented through brief poetic references. The technique can be called historical compression: that is to say that a large body of political history is squeezed to a systematic sequence that can be commemorated and communicated easily.

Such compression should not be viewed as historical inaccuracy. Literary texts operate through selection and condensation forms that differ from the conventions of documentary chronicle writing. Allison Busch's work on historical poetry in Mughal-period India is a relevant example here. Her study of *"Keśavdās"* and, later, of *"Lāl Kavi's Chatraprakāś"* demonstrates that vernacular poetry could preserve historical perspectives on Mughal political events while simultaneously operating according to literary conventions. Busch asserts that such texts broaden the available source base for Mughal history precisely because they reveal forms of historical culture that are not always represented in conventional Persian chronicles.¹⁹ Therefore, Khushal's poem also demonstrates the historical representation that does not need to take the form of a detailed chronological chronicle. Hence the sequence leads to a recognizable political framework. The structure more interestingly is not limited to Mughal period in which he lived and served but it covers the political history of different sultans and Mughal rulers.

The linguistic dimension of Khushal's representation is also important. His historical account is presented in Pashto rather than Persian, the language that dominated much elite administrative and historiographical writing in Mughal India. Pelevin's work on early-modern Pashto writings demonstrates that Pashtun authors of the seventeenth century participated in the wider Persophone cultural

¹⁶ Allison Busch, "Literary Responses to the Mughal Imperium, 31–54.

¹⁷ Dr, Saeed Anwar-ul-Haq, trans., *Muntakhabat-e-Khushal Khan*, 127.

¹⁸ Ibid., 127–28.

¹⁹ Allison Busch, "Literary Responses to the Mughal Imperium, 31–54.

environment of Mughal India while developing literary expression in Pashto.²⁰ Khushal's representation of Delhi can therefore be understood as part of this broader process of appropriating and communicating knowledge within an emerging Pashto literary culture. He does not attempt to reconstruct every aspect of Delhi's past. Instead, tried to construct a memorable political genealogy of the city. The history of Delhi becomes intelligible through the succession of rulers who occupied its political center.

4. Dynasties, Chronology and Historical Compression

The most striking feature of Khushal Khan Khattak's representation of Delhi is his chronological organization of political authority. After describing the beauty of Delhi he announces that its rulers following a compressed sequence extending from pre-Sultanate through Sultanate and then into Mughal period. Starting from Chuhaan's time period and then going down to Muhammad Ghori, before turning to Aibak and Iltutmish and to Tughlaq rulers and describing the authority and passion of each and every ruler till the Mughal period.

Khushal adds:

*"Da Delhi bunyad da cha palas de shavi
Pa nubat nubat da cha pri Sultanat wo"*

The sequence reveals in his treatment of the Sayyid and Lodi periods. He firstly names Khizr Khan and Muhammad Shah and then turns to Bahlul, Sikandar, and Ibrahim Lodi. This is broadly consistent with the great transition from the Sayyid dynasty to that of Lodi dynasty in fifteenth century. Sayyid dynasty ruled Delhi from 1414 to 1451, while the Lodis succeeded them and remained in power until Mughal emperor Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi in 1526 in the battle of Panipat.²¹ Khushal does not go into detail about the territorial contraction, institutional weakness, or political struggles associated with these dynasties. Therefore, his historical method is one of the condensations: political periods are represented through the names of rulers who made the succession intelligible without requiring an extended narrative of each reign.

He adds:

*"Da Islam bacha awal mueezudin wo
Chi eoi kal ye pa Delhi ki aqamat wo"*²²

Mueezudin Muhammad bin Ghori famous with "*Muhammad Ghori*" according to Khusahl was the first king of Islam. Ghori ascended the throne after the demise of Mahmud of Ghaznah. He was chief of Ghur who established his own kingdom in Ghur, situated in the north of Kabul. After the death of Mahmud of Ghaznah the struggle started between rulers of Ghaznah and Ghaur. Where, Ghayath al-Din, the Shansabani king of Ghaur, stood victorious and captured Ghaznah in 1173. He then placed Ghori there as a ruler. Ghori is credited due to systematic conquest of India that he during his policy of conquest and expansion he conquered many areas. These areas were under the rule of Ismailis and Kharijis. He did expedition and passed north-western India. Then in 1178 he conquered Multan, Lahore,

²⁰ Mikhail Pelevin, "The Inception of Literary Criticism in Early Modern Pashto Writings, 947–76.

²¹ Gavin R. G. Hambly, "Delhi Sultanate: i. Political and Cultural History," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, December 15, 1994, last updated June 30, 2016, accessed October 1, 2026, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/delhi-sultanate/delhi-sultanate-i-political-and-cultural-history/>.

²² Dr, Saeed Anwar-ul-Haq, trans., *Muntakhabat-e-Khushal Khan Khattak*, 127.

Peshawar and the rest of the territories leading to Delhi Sultanate. The chronological arrangements help to clarify the characteristics of these rulers. The phrases do not promise biography of every ruler, but they establish a narrative principle instead.

*"Chi Delhi ye raniwa la patorayia
Pa da kar ki ye der kari mushaqat wo"*

By "Pathoraia" he means Rai Patora. He is mentioning the battles of Tara'in fought between Muhammad Ghor and Rajput ruler Prithviraj Chauhan. In the first battle of Tara'in Ghor was defeated. While in the second battle of Tara'in he came with great preparation and stood victorious not only defeating the Rai Patora but also consolidating the power and executing Prithviraj Chauhan in 1192.

*"Bia la pasa Qutbadin da da maryie wo
Chi pre-eshi ye pa Hind pa nayabsat wo"*

Then there was Prince al-Din, loyal Turkish slave famous as Qutb al-Din Aybeg ruled Delhi. He conquered Delhi in one year, extending from 1193 to 1194. Sultan Aybeg's authority was later on challenged by Taj al-Din Yalduz the ruler of Ghaznah.

*"Bia la pasa Shamsudin da da palaq wo
Chi pa Hind ki ye nazeer da sakhawwat wo"*

After the death of Aybeg, Delhi invited Aybeg's slave and son-in-law, Shams al-Din son of Feroz Shah, who defeated Aram Shah and ascended the throne in 1211. Shams al-Din is considered the real founder of the Sultanate. He is famous for changing capital from Lahore to Delhi. He suppressed Qutbi nobles. As Khushal says, *"he was very just to his people"*. He particularly paid attention to the administration of justice. He made water shortage tank in Delhi. He was kind to scholars, Ulema and Sufis even some of the Sufis were his friends.²³ Shams-al-Din with the passage of time turned to enjoy the power and preferred spending lavish lifestyle. This led him to neglect state affairs and resulted in the decline of his rule and was succeeded by his daughter.

*"Bia la pasa Razi lord a Shamsudin wa
Chi razi jindi sapa aw roeyat wo"*²⁴

Iltutmish was succeeded by Raziya Sultan. She ascended the throne in 1236. History commemorates her as the only woman to sit on throne as few others in Sultanate time period. She was very sympathetic towards women. Women during her reign enjoyed great freedom. As an old tradition in the emperor system, Raziya's mother, Shah Turkan conspired against her, strengthening Malik Iqtiyar's forces and he rebelled against Raziya. She was defeated, imprisoned and later on was killed in 1240.

*"Bia la pasa Mazudin da Shamsudin wo
Chi har gora da ghaleem jindi hebat wo"*

Then there was Mazudin, Khushal in addition clarifies that Mazudin was succeeded by Nasirudin, who was a practicing Muslim ruling Delhi for 20 years. He was the son-in-law of Balban. Balban was the slave of Iltutmish later on became part of nobility due to his ability. Balban afterward ascended the throne at the age of 60. At that time Iltutmish's government had grown weak. So, Balban made a strong standing

²³ Khalil Ahmed Rana, *MUSLIM IN INDIA 711-1526* (Islamabad: Allama Iqbal Open University Press, 2013), 31.

²⁴ Dr. Saeed Anwar-ul-Haq, trans., *Muntakhabat-e-Khushal Khan Khattak*, 128.

army. He was strict to rebellions giving harsh punishments to the opponents. He suppressed those people who were plundering and established department of intelligence.

*"Bia sultan Jalaludin pa sareer kinast
Chi pa asal ki ghilji de wilayat wo"*²⁵

Then there was Sultan Jalaludin Khilji, who was Sulaiman Khail. Suliman Khail, a tribe living in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some of them traditionally used to migrate from one area to another due to socio-economic and weather conditions. Jalal ud- Din Khilji ascended the throne after the demise of Balban. Due to Balban weak successors incompetency, who were unable to manage state affairs affectively. Malik Jalaluddin Feroz Khilji, a military general in Balban army successfully led Khilji revolution in Delhi sultanate in 1290 and stood victorious by putting end to Ilbari clan. Khilji dynasty is the second dynasty that ruled Delhi for three decades 1290-1320. Due to their great time in Delhi Pashtun language, custom, and culture became known to people of Delhi.

*"Bia nimasee da Ferozshah Ala-ud-din wo
Chi pa khalq aw pa karam da do shehrat wo"*

According Khushal Khan Khattak then there was Alaudin Khilji, the nephew of Jalal-u-din Khilji. He is considered the most capable ruler because of his rigorous policies. For instance, after the assuming power he put great efforts to overcome rebellious activities and other difficulties faced to his regime? Therefore, he ordered to make a strong standing army by introducing two kinds of practices, 1st was the "training of horses" and made them different from ordinary horses. The second was "huliah" it means that he recorded the physical appearance of soldiers. Allaudin also followed the policy of expansion rather than consolidation. Where he made many attack on neighboring regions, conquered them and expanded his empire. The included regions were Gujarat, Ranthambor, Chitor, and Malwa. He also reformed the society where he curtailed the power of Ulema. He asserted that there are four causes of revolt. The first is excessive use of wine. The second is social alliances among nobilities. The third is sultans less interest in state affairs. And the fourth is the abundance of wealth. Therefore, all of these activities were strictly measured and regulated in order to halt any possible revolt.²⁶

*"Bia la pasa Tughlaq shah chi amara wo
Parwarish ye da Khilgioo pa dolat wo"*

Tughlaq is also discussed in Khushal's verses. He says that "Tughlaq belong to Amir family" ethnically Tughlaq belonged to Qarnah clan and ruled for five years. Tughlaq was famous as a ghazi because he had fought 29 battles. After coming into power, he followed the policy of expansion in Bengal and Deccan. Moreover, he gave special attention to agriculture where he reduced agricultural tax to 1/10th. He established poor relief program. He made hospitals for poor.

*"Bia sultan Muhammad shah da tughlaq shah wo
Chi dad a pa ast khalq fraghat wo"*

Khushal khan is mentioning Junnah Khan, the son of Tughlaq, known as Muhammad ibn Tughlaq. He is famous for establishing second capital in Deccan. In 1326-27, he ordered Muslims Ulama and other

²⁵ Ibid., 128.

²⁶ Khalil Ahmed Rana, *MUSLIM IN INDIA 711-1526*, 54.

people to migrate to the new capital. He introduced token currency of silver in order to pay to his army because silver currency was resisted by people due to melting issue. He therefore revived his policy and exchanged silver coins with real coins. What happened was it adversely affected the state's economy.

*"Bia la pasa feroz shah chi dad a tra wo
Chi pa hind da da d chari khatimat wo"*

After Muhammad Ibn Tughlaq, the reign and work of Feroz shah is commemorated is highlighted. Feroz Shah ruled Delhi after the sudden death of Muhammad ibn Tughlaq. Feroz Shah was a very good administrator. He introduced number of reforms as Alaudin Khilji did. He abolished inhuman punishment and opened charity department for poor girls and dowry. He was very keen to poor class.

Hence, a similar and exact pattern appears in the transition from emperor to emperor. For instance, rulers like Timurlang, Khizar Khan, Sultan Muhammad Shah, Bahlul Lodhi, Sikandar Lodhi, Ibrahim Lodi, Babur, Hamayun, Sher Shah Sori and Islam Shah rules are highlighted. Khushal Khan views political succession as a process involving, both restoration and displacement rather than an uncomplicated transfer of authority from one Mughal emperor to another.²⁷

5. Rulers, Characterization, and the Interpretation of the Past

Khushal's account of Delhi deals with more things than that of rulers in chronological succession. Once the sequence is established, rulers become subject of both description and interpretation. This is an important distinction because it clarifies Khushal's historical consciousness and let the readers know that his consciousness was not confined to remembering only names and dynasties of rulers. Instead, he also tried to attach particular actions, qualities, and historical significance to selected rulers. The resulting account therefore combines chronology with that of characterization. The past is not simply presented as a succession of sovereigns; rather it is represented through judgments about political conduct, reputation, power, and historical consequence.

The verses itself provide evidence for this movement from chronology to characterization. Khushal introduces rulers and dynasties successively, but his treatment isn't like giving the same attention to every figure. Some rulers are only named within the succession, whereas some receive proper descriptive comments.²⁸ Methodologically this depiction is significant. If the poetic verses were intended merely as a chronological register, uniform treatment would be expected. Instead, Khushal creates distinctions among historical figures. His choices demonstrate that the significance of a ruler derives not simply from occupying the throne, but from what that ruler represents within the poet's understanding of political history. Moreover, the picture becomes clear when his work is viewed from political writing perspective. Khushal raises Question about governance, political conduct, authority and the responsibilities of rulers. These are articulated through Persianate literary tradition of the *"Mirror for Princes"*. When study his other work, *"Dastar Nama"* basically belongs to this tradition, although it adapts the genre to the social and political world of Pashtun chieftaincy.²⁹ In a nutshell, the description of all these doesn't mean that Khushal constructed a systematic theory of historical causation in the

²⁷ Anwar-ul-Haq, *Muntakhabat-e-Khushal Khan Khattak*, 127–28.

²⁸ Saeed Anwar-ul-Haq, trans., *Muntakhabat-e-Khushal Khan Khattak*, 127–28.

²⁹ Mikhail Pelevin, "The Art of Chieftaincy in the Writings of Pashtun Tribal Rulers, 485–504.

passage. The poem does not explain the transition between dynasties or provide sustained analyses of institutional change. Nor does it attempt to establish a comprehensive explanation for the rise and fall of each ruling house. Instead, its characterization operates through brief interventions within a compressed narrative. The economy of the poem is important here. A small descriptive statement can carry considerable interpretive weight precisely because it appears within an otherwise rapid succession of rulers.

6. Pashto, Persianate Culture, and the Mughal Intellectual World

One cannot understand Khushal's representation of Delhi if Pashto literary culture is treated as an isolated regional tradition. The seventeenth century was a period in which Pashto literary production evolved within a wider Persianate intellectual environment extending across South and Central Asia. Being a Pashtun, Khushal wrote in Pashto, but his literary work was shaped by concepts, genres, forms, and intellectual practices that circulated through Persian and Islamic literary cultures. His representation of Delhi's political past should therefore be situated within this multilingual environment rather than interpretation simply as an autonomous Pashto response to Mughal history.

Pelevin's study of early-modern Pashto writing provides important evidence for this context. He argues that Pashtun authors in seventeenth century consciously articulated the emerging Pashto literary tradition within the broader "*Persophone cultural space of Mughal India*".³⁰ This formulation is incredible because it challenges binary distinction between indigenous Pashto literature and Persian literary culture. Pashtu writers could develop a distinctive literary language while participating in intellectual conventions that circulated through Persian. Khushal's work elucidates this interaction clearly. He has employed poetic forms and stylistic devices associated with classical Arabic and Persian poetry while adapting them to Pashto. His literary practice involved both appropriation and transformation.³¹ This does not mean that Pashto poetry was derived from Persian literature. Rather, Persianate literary conventions provided a repertoire through which Pashto writers could participate in a wider intellectual culture while developing their own linguistic and cultural modes of expression. The emergence of sophisticated Pashto writing in this environment was consequently part of a larger process of vernacular literary development.

Discussion

7. Historical Consciousness, Political Memory, and the Vernacular Past

Khushal Khan Khattak's representation of Delhi demonstrates his historical consciousness in which literary forms, political memory, and vernacular expression intersect. The sequence of the rulers is not comprehensively chronicle but is a selective organization of the past: political history centuries are compressed into recognizable rulers and dynastic transitions, while particular figures receive greater descriptive attention. The poem should therefore needs to be read as an evidence not of what Khushal knew about Delhi but of how he organized knowledge systematically. This approach aligns with Busch argument that vernacular poetry provide important evidence for Mughal-era historical cultures, even

³⁰ Mikhail Pelevin, "The Inception of Literary Criticism in Early Modern Pashto Writings, 947–76.

³¹ Sergei Andreyev, "KOŠHĀL KHAN KATṬAK," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, April 20, 2026.

though literary sources require methods different from those used for documentary chronicles.³² Khushal's choice to recount Delhi's political past in Pashto is equally significant. The Delhi passage consequently highlights that historical knowledge could circulate across linguistic and cultural boundaries: a political past associated with Delhi and successive imperial regimes could be reorganized as Pashto poetic memory without becoming detached from the wider intellectual world of early-modern South Asia.

Khushal's historical representation, therefore should be distinguished from modern professional historiography. His poem does not provide exhaustive chronology, systematic source criticism, or sustained causal explanation; nor does its selective character justify describing it as an "objective." Instead, its historical value lies in the choices through which the past is remembered: rulers are selected; dynasties are compressed and highlighted into succession; political figures acquire significance through poetic characterization.³³ Khushal's own concluding reflection on his decision to recount earlier rulers rather than merely praise as a contemporary sovereign further indicates an awareness of the distinctive purpose of the composition.³⁴ His position as a Mughal *mansabdar*, Pashtun chief, and later opponent of Mughal authority highlight important political context, but the poem itself remains the primary evidence for interpreting its historical meaning.³⁵ Thus, Khushal is better understood only as poet but also as a "historian" in the modern disciplinary sense. His poetic work reveals a developed vernacular historical consciousness. His poetry shows how political history could be selected, interpreted, compressed, and incorporated into Pashto literary culture, thereby expanding our understanding of the plural ways in which the early-modern South Asian past was remembered.

Conclusion

Khushal Khan Khattak's poetic representation of Delhi and its rulers highlight that historical knowledge in early-modern Pashto literature was not confined to formal chronicles or court histories. His poetic account organizes long political past through dynastic succession, place, compressed narrative movement, and selected rulers. Delhi functions not as a geographical setting but as a historical space through which political transformations and successive regimes can be remembered. By presenting rulers in sequence and attaching brief characterizations to them, Khushal transforms inherited knowledge of the past through Pashto literary expression. His work therefore is clear evidence of historical consciousness that classifies him both as a poet and a historian.

The significance of his work lies in the relationship between chronology and interpretation. He does not attempt to reproduce a comprehensive dynastic chronicle. Instead, he selects, compresses, and poetically arranges material concerning Delhi's political past. This process shows that historical representation is shaped by both literary form, and factual knowledge. His concluding statement, in which he distinguishes his historical account from mere praise of a contemporary ruler, further indicates awareness of the difference between recounting the past and performing conventional poetic praise. At

³² Allison Busch, "The Poetry of History in Early Modern India," in *How the Past Was Used: Historical Cultures, c. 750–2000*, ed. Peter Lambert and Björn Weiler (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2017), 161–80.

³³ Saeed Anwar-ul-Haq, trans., *Muntakhabat-e-Khushal Khan*, 127–28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁵ Himayat Ullah Yaqubi and Shahbaz Khan Khattak, "Tribal Politics, Mughal mansab and the sons of Khushal Khan, 117–31.

the same time, the verses cannot be described as wholly “objective”: selection and characterization necessarily shape the representation of the past. The value of the poem therefore lies not in its conformity to modern standards of historical neutrality, but in what it reveals how historical knowledge could be organized and communicated in an early-modern Pashto literary environment.

Furthermore, Khushal’s historical consciousness also needs to be studied within a wider intellectual world. Recent scholarly produced work demonstrated that early modern Pashto writers participated in a broader Persophone literary culture while developing Pashto as a language of intellectual expression and literary production. While Khushal’s engagement with Persianate literary conventions, political thought, and Mughal-era cultural forms did not contain his thoughts or prevented him from using Pashto to preserve and communicate knowledge about political history. Consequently, his poetry occupies an important position between literary expression and historical memory.

Thus, the study of Kushal poetry highlight his constructed historical consciousness, political knowledge, and his vision of connecting the past to political and intellectual concerns of his own world. His Delhi-based accounts illustrate how chronology, dynastic memory, place, and poetic characterization could operate together as a mode of historical representation. Studying in this way, his poetry expands the source base for studying early modern South Asia and demonstrates the importance of Pashto literary materials for understanding vernacular historical consciousness. It also clarifies that the history of historical writing in South Asia should be understood not only through formal chronicles but through diverse literary forms communities interpreted, remembered, and transmitted their pasts.

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