
**REVIEW OF GHANI KHAN'S POEM *CHENGI* (INSECTS)
AND RACHEL CARSON'S SILENT SPRING: AN ECO-
CENTRIC ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the eco-centric approach of Ghani Khan with the objective to create awareness among the public in general and young poets in particular. For this purpose his famous book “*De Ghani Kuluyat*” (Ghani’s Collection) was reviewed. This collection comprises 447 poems, taken from three books namely *Da Panjray Chagghar* (Cry of Cage), *Plawashay* (light beam) and *Panoos* (sky lantern). The review of his *Kuluyat* revealed that Ghani-khan was very much inspired from nature and cared for it. A total of 53, out of 447 poems addresses environment out of which 10 speak on wild animals/birds and its importance. A significant number of 30 poems are indirectly mentioning various flora and fauna by comparing its characteristic and behaviors with that of human beings. 20 poems are talking about the ecological cycle and can used to motivate young generation to respect each other and invite them toward love and affection. The novel “silent spring” published in 1962 and is called the first book in the field of public awareness. Ghani Khan wrote a poem “*Chingi* (The insects)” which is on pesticides and its associated health and environmental problems with no date on it. Therefore history of pesticides mentioned in his poem was searched out and reviewed. The review revealed that the poem “*Chinji*” appeared after 1962 and was the first in the Asian sub-continent regions. Hence, it is very important to review this poem and translate it in various local and national languages and interpret it into various shapes and forms such as painting, fictions and dramas. It will strengthen environmental education and awareness programs in Pakistan in general and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular.

Key words: Pesticides, hazard, Environmental Awareness,

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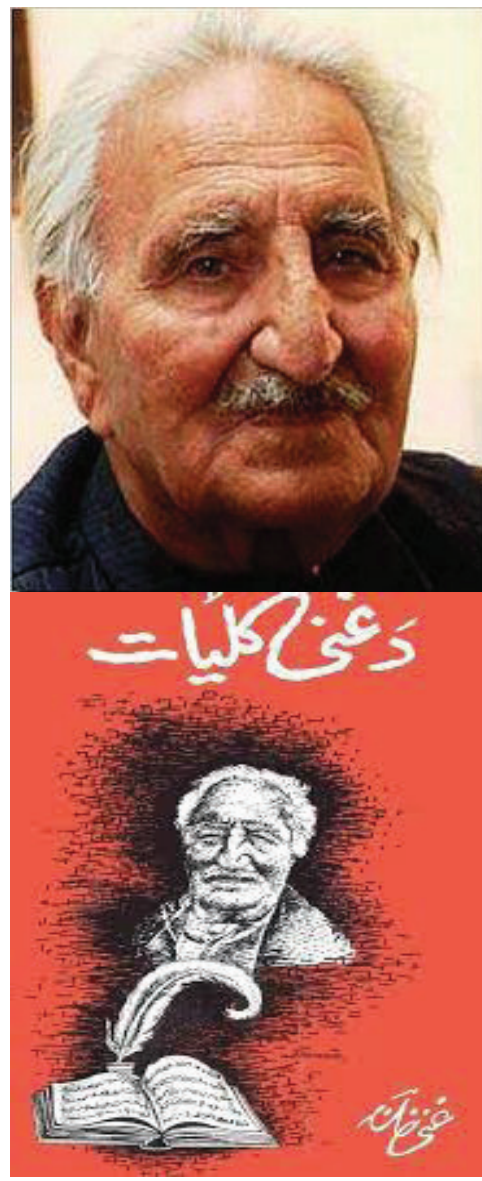
Introduction:

Awareness is one of the key factors in initiating any movement for environmental protection and resource conservation, where poets have their role (Hynes, 1985). Writers, particularly poets, are considered the sensitive part of a society and assets of a nation. Their writings are always working as stimuli, which are in response to external stimuli in the form of natural hazards and environmental problems. The consequences of some hazards and problems are not visible to a common person; even if it is visible to a common person they pay no heed to that (Henighan, 1982). Poet highlights those hazards/problems to sensitize public and reroute their attention towards a problem. The same aroma evolves from the poetry of Ghani Khan. He touched different aspects of life and as also discussed by different writers and researchers (Imtiaz, 2015). The ecological aspects of Ghani Khan's (Fig. 1) poetry were never highlighted and were made part of the national curriculum.

For specific analysis, his poem *chinji* (insects) was reviewed where he is talking about the pest and pesticides and associated hazards. In early sixties, Rachel Carson's wrote a ground breaking novel "silent spring" (Fig. 2). On the bases of this novel, Rachel Carson was considered the first lady to draw world's attention towards pesticides-use and the related hazards. But it is still not verified, when the poem "*Chenji*" appeared in ink.

In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the eco-centric thinking of Ghani-Khan's poetry and bring its important aspects for the contemporary poets, researchers and a common public with the objective to think about environment and its protection. To analyze and compare timing of "silent spring" and "*Chenji*", the historical development of pesticides was reviewed for those pesticides, mentioned in the poem "*Chenji*".

Fig. 1: Picture of Ghani Khan and Front page of his Collection



An over view of the Book “*Da Ghani Kulyat*”

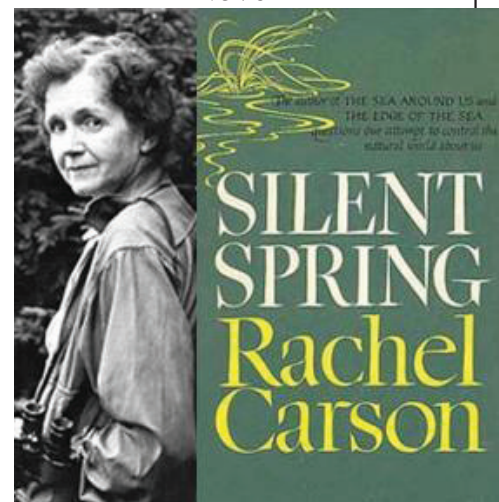
Poetry of Ghani

The literary journey of Ghani Khan is very long and full of highs and lows. He was born in 1914 and wrote his first poem “Tasali” (consolation), at the age of fourteen in July 1929. This is the very first poem in his famous book “Plawashay” (light beam). In this poem he encouraged himself while on the voyage to London. Later on he wrote about the beauty of London as well. In 1950 he started writing his first book *Da Panjray Chaghar* (cry of cage) He produced this collection during his imprisonment. The dates on the poems indicate that he stayed in various jails during 1949 and 1952. This collection is mainly talking about political activities and situation in the sub-continent. During his stay in jail he observed different animals like frog, rat, pigeon, Kochay (his dog whom he missed in jail), toranai (black birds), Mulachargak (Hud Hud), bora (beetle type insects setting on flowers), taro (bird), Karkorai (dove), and Mach (house fly). Other important topics that reflect his eco-centric approach include Dand-kay (in the pond), sparaly (spring), sahra (desert), sepia (sap), qanoon (the Law of nature), and da bodai taal (rainbow).

Part II of *Palwashay* (light beam) is mostly romantic poetry. As mentioned earlier, the first poem in the book is *Tasali* (consolation). There are some other poems worth mentioning, i.e. *Bahar* (spring), *Insan oo Fithrat* (human and nature), *Da Faqirano Ghazal* (poetry of the friar). These poems are mainly describing ecological cycle. The various birds discussed in this part include *crow* and *bulbul*, and animals including *Kharoo* (his dog), *jawari* (leeches), *lolakai* (butter fly). Poems related to environment include *bahar* (spring), *da sparli shapa* (a night in spring), *dunya-gai* (the small world), *da jami makaham* (an evening in winter), *jwa-nd* (life) *Jwandoon* (way of life) and *da ilam totyan* (parrots of Ilam mountain).

Panoos is the largest part of *da Ghani kulyat* and mostly consists of long poems. One of the various poems, that can be related to environment include *Taqseem* (natural distribution). In this poem distributions of various floras and its position and importance have been discussed. The poem *da sparli shapa* (a night of spring), *da bodi tal* (rainbow), *da ghutai tapoos* (query of the bud), *janat aw dunya* (Heaven and the planet earth), *ridi- Gul* (poppy flower) *dunya* (the world), *goollona da war-khari* (flower of warkhari), *sparlay* (spring), *gogoshgtoo* (lion ant), *sparly khlasaygi* (the spring is ending) *ookh* (camel), *kamtara* (peogon), *maygay* (ant), *mashay* (mosquito),

Fig. 2: Picture of Rachel Carson and Front page of his Novel



aas (horse), *kar-gha* (crow), and cha-rag (cock). The poem *chenji* (insects) is part of *Panoos*.

A brief overview of “*Chenji*” (Insects) and Silent Spring

The poem ‘*Chenji*’ described his real life events. Ghani grew a garden in his front-yard with the aim to make his front-yard more hospitable and beautiful. He grew various fruit and flowering plants in it. It took him several years to grow the garden.

He was very happy while experiencing the first flowering season, and sprouting flowers and production afterward. Meanwhile, the garden was attacked by various insects. He approached agriculture department for help, and got appointment of the officer concerned after continuous efforts. Initially, the officer presented various excuses as this area was heavily sprayed during winter. However, Ghani made him realized that the spray at that time was unnecessary and un-justified as it killed domestic birds and animals. Also in another event of uncontrolled and untargeted spray, fodder crop was sprayed that resulted in the deaths of cattle, cows and buffalo.

The irregular spray even caused death of dogs and cats which increased in rat population and destroyed stored food stock. Besides that Ghani Khan’s two lovely pet dogs (*Bochay* and *Landay*) were also killed due to heavy pesticides (aldrine and malathion) spray. He even sarcastically commented that due to massive cattle deaths our barns are cleaner and free of animal manure, there is no cattle noise in the barns anymore and we enjoy the silence. He asked the officer if the unmanaged spray continued, soon he will lose the remaining livestock and pets.

He has very nicely portrayed how the ecological balance gets disrupted and leads to a whole food chain disturbance, when he talked about the deaths of cats, the consequent abundance of rats on farms, this ultimately damaged the grain stock with negative effects on local farmers.

Carson starts her novel by first describing the ecosystem and a community where all living and nonliving things lived in harmony with each other. She then goes on explaining how this harmony was disrupted by the introduction of pesticides and led to the silent spring. She talks about the pesticides its possible hazards on human health. She specifically describes in great detail the DDT pesticides and criticizes its use. She explains how the uncontrolled spraying operations proved useless for the target insects, yet caused a disaster by killing the non-target birds and animals. She criticizes the use of weed killers as it resulted in massive bird kills. She also describes how the untargeted spray against gypsy moth resulted in human and other species to the same spray. Being a biologist she also goes into further details and elaborates the possibility of pesticides being human carcinogens. She also suggests alternative ways to control insects.

Analysis with Reference to Rachel Carson

Looking into the historical perspective the novel of Rachel Carson “silent spring” published in 1962 (Perrin, 1997). Ghani Khan wrote his poem in almost the same era but the exact date is unknown. In the foot note of this poem, it is mentioned that this

poem is written during the era of Nawab of Kalabagh when he was governor of Sharhd (present Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) during 1960-1966. Ghani Khan also mentioned two pesticides, Aldrine and Malathion which killed his two pet dogs *bochay* and *landay*. These pesticides were introduced in the market after DDT which Carson mentioned in her novel “silent spring”. It can be claimed that this poem appeared after 1962. But the background presented before this is of 1960 when the heavy spray killed the livestock. So the date of appearance is quite near to each other. But it is difficult to say which one appeared first. But this is a fact that the novel of Carson got international fame while that of Ghani Khan is still unveiled.

Ghani Khan in his poem pointed at an unfortunate event in which an officer of agriculture department was also killed, it indicates that probably the people were not properly trained and equipped for pesticide use and safety (Germany and US only provided the chemical not training) This maximized the exposure to pesticides, similarly the killing of cows and other cattle as mentioned revealed un-targeted use of pesticides. He condemned the aerial spray (Fig. 3) which affected other crops used as fodder instead of the targeted sugarcane crop. Carson too seems to be concerned about this type of practice (massive untargeted spray) in the US. She has also pointed out the same problems where humans and other non-targeted animals and plants got exposure to a massive pesticide spray event against gypsy moth. Both of them criticized the use of DDT however Carson being a biologist explained it in length. It indicates that how severe the DDT problem was back in those days both in the developed as well as developing world.

Fig. 3. Picture of aerial spray



Ghani Khan also highlighted the corrupt behavior of the agriculture department officers (quite typical of the developing countries). There was an apparent monopoly of the Agriculture department over the use of pesticides which developed their corrupt behavior.

Besides romanticism and environmentalism, the flavor of comedy and sarcasm can also be seen in Ghani’s poem “*Chingi*”, whereas Carson went more towards the scientific and biological aspects in her novel. Ghani Khan was chemical engineer and was not that equipped to describe such biological aspect in his poem.

It’s quite amazing how two literary people living in two very distinct parts of the world were thinking alike (almost at the same time). Both of them had tried to divert world’s attention towards a very serious, yet hidden environmental threats. The other mesmerizing aspect is that this entire thinking process happened when the world was devoid of the modern day fast means of communication (e.g. internet and phone). Contrary to the fact that Ghani belonged to a 3rd world country (which faced a whole set of new problems than those of the developed world), still he was thinking along

the same lines as a developed country's novelist (who also happened to be a biologist and a frequent writer on Nature). One has to give him credit for his scientific thinking. Moreover, the way he connected the various links of the food chain is quiet impressive. After detail review of the poem *Chenji* it can be said that Ghani Khan deserves more credit (although belated) than Rachel Carson.

Although the poem that Ghani wrote, published after 1962, but the various events mentioned in the poem date back to 1960 (i.e. heavy and untargeted pesticide spray that killed his livestock). So there is quite strong evidence that both write-ups (Ghani's *Chengi* and Rachel's *silent spring*) emerged in same period of time in history. We however not debating who presented this idea first. Given the fact that both were living in very separate worlds, most probably unaware of each other, it is appreciable that both did a wonderful job in terms of attracting world's attention towards a serious issue. Unlike Rachel Carson's book, Ghani Khan's work did not gain any international or even national recognition and just lost in his literary book.

Ghani Khan in the modern world has always been portrayed as a romantic poet, a poet whose characteristic is to describe and talk about a woman's face, her beauty and height and her overall demeanor. His love for nature (as evident from his poems highlighted earlier) was never discussed. His eco-centric approach and his in-depth knowledge about ecosystem and environmental phenomenon have always been overshadowed by his otherwise dominant poetry character (i.e. romanticism).

This is probably the first time that we have has endeavored to pen the important aspect of Ghani Khan's poetry. Given the intensity of the environmental problems in the country as well as in the world, it is very important to analyze his environmental approach from academic perspective which would facilitate publick, especially the youth about the eco-centric aspect of his poetry.

Conclusion

The poetry of Ghani Khan is a message of love, peace and harmony. According to him, this world demands peace and prosperity. Let us share shoulders, love and respect each others and make this world peaceful and productive place to live.

The various poems on nature and its importance in human life shows that he was one of the pioneers in initiating the lesson and spread of eco-centrism in Pakistan. The historical analysis shows that the novel of Rachel Carson and the poem of Ghani Khan appeared in the same years. Carson's work got international fame whereas Ghani Khan's work remained unexplored. This reflects our lack of interest in local literature at academic and litrary levels. The gaps include translation and projection at proper forums. We may focus on ensuring that these poems get translated interpreted in other languages and programs like painting, story, writing, dramas competetation may be arranged, where various diverse aspects of his poetry are highlighted. The poem *chenji* is a great contribution in the field of environmental awareness.

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