

CRITICAL VISION OF KHUSHAL KHAN KHATTAK

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Abstract: Khushal Khan Khattak is a genius and multidimensional personality of the eastern literary domain. He was a great poet, prose writer, philosopher, thinker, politician, hunter, expert of medical science and a warrior at a time. Among all these dimensions he also emerged as a critic in his time.

Modern schools of criticism mostly introduced in the 20th century especially in European literature and very soon impacted the literature of oriental languages. But Khushal Khan Khattak was the man who expressed his critical thoughts in the earlier decades of 17th century A.D. The primary source of Khushal's critical thoughts is his prose book *Dastar Nama* and his poetry. In this paper the upcoming critic and writer has tried to elaborate and analyzed these scattered critical thoughts of the great Khushal Khan Khattak, and to present this great genius as a perfect and complete critic of his time. Apart from this he has shown that the critical thought of Khushal Khan Khattak are very valuable and useful even in today's critical phenomenon.

Khushal Khan Khattak is the versatile genius of his age. Such great personages are born barely in centuries. He was a poet, prose writer, Philosopher, thinker, physician, politician, psychologist, soldier, tacticism, and a hunter. The single side of being a literary artist of Khushal Khan Khattak too, is so comprehensive that it requires great effort to explore it fully. To this day, every facet of his personality has still to offer newness, freshness, modern outlook and thrill. Besides his multifarious traits, attempt is being made to high light critical outlook and vision of this great Pashto genius in this study.

Modern definitions of criticism have been presented by the 20th century scholars and critics in their own way but the realm of criticism equally belongs to the by gone ages. A look at world literature would reveal that Greek writers have especially treated the genre of criticism.

How ever the European scholars of other tongues have touched the subject too. A survey of the history of criticism shows Plato, Aristotle

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and Lon Ginos to be the leading and famous figures in the field of criticism. Dryden and Dr. Johnson are some of the critics of classical literary movements. The present day critics of repute include Wordsworth, Coleridge, Arnold, Ruskin, Walter Peter, Eliot and Hudson.

Urdu, Pashto and other oriental literatures have gained color and taste from the western giants of criticism. One aspect of Pashto criticism is such that can be compared with the critical notions of the classical artists in this field of study. A figure of note in the field of Pashto criticism stands dazzling in the person of Khushal Khan Khattak. He did display his keen sense of criticism as early as four hundred years ago. Today that is 400 years on, his critical vision resembles the critical view of great modern scholars of the west. Before exploring the critical vision of Khushal Khan Khattak a briefly definition of criticism given by the modern western critic Hudson, is presented. In the light of the said definition attempt is being made to get an estimate of Khushal Khan Khattak as a critic. Hudson defines criticism as follows:

"In its strict sense the word criticism means judgment, and this sense commonly colors our use of it even when it is most broadly employed. The literary critic is therefore regarded primarily as an expert who brings a special faculty and training to bear upon a piece of literary art or the work of a given author examines its merits and defects, and pronounces a verdict upon it. Yet when we speak of the literature of criticism we evidently include under the term more than the literature which records judgment. We comprehend under it the whole mass of literature which is written about literature, whether the object be analysis, interpretation, or valuation, or all these combined. Poetry, the drama, the novel, even with criticism itself. If creative literature may be defined as an interpretation of life under the various forms of literary art, critical literature may be defined as an interpretation of that interpretation and of the forms of art through which it is given" (**Hudson 1944**)

The holistic definition of criticism demonstrates that a comprehensive assessment of a work of art or a creative work, thereby, extracting both the positive and negative sides is known as criticism. Broadly speaking, criticism encompasses all the literary genres and their related technical elements. The criticism is multifaceted in its form. Aesthetic criticism, expository criticism, comparative criticism, historical criticism, psychological criticism, scientific criticism, and others, to

estimate Khushal Khan Khattak as a critic of Pashto literature, the collective forms of criticism have to be kept in mind. Thus the comprehensive and all pervading personality of Khushal Khan Khattak of his own age as a critical giant would come to the fore.

The study of Khushal Khan Khattak from the angle of criticism shows that he had handled both theoretical and practical criticism successfully. His critical work can be judged as a comparative criticism or as a historical criticism which reveal his acumen as a critic. There are two sources of Khushal Khan Khattak in the field of criticism, One in the field of prose entitled “*DASTAAR NAMA*” and the second belongs to the domain of his poetry especially “*SWAT NAMA*” basically a travelogue in verse. It can not be said with certainty whether the roots of his critical vision lies in prose or poetry. Nevertheless, it is for sure that he produced his celebrated work entitled, “*DASTAAR NAMA*” at Ranthanmboor fortress while in captivity during the years 1074-1076 AH. It is the poet critic Khushal Khan Khattak who himself has recorded the date of his book in one of his verses.

“This book has been created by Khushal Khan Khattak The type of which was unavailable in Pashto literature.

I hereby announce the date of its production in Abjad which is 1076 AH.” (Khattak 1991)

The study of his creative works reveals that he started writing poetry after he had attained the age of twenty (1042 AH) and continued it till 1100 AH, the year of his death.

The verses containing critical views seem to belong to the last phase of celebrated poet critics life. The reason being that such type of poetry possesses eulogies; Ghazzals (lyrical poems) contain some of his political and social aspects of his times, which reflect the critical vision of the poet.

Nonetheless, attempt is being made to gather an estimate of his critical vision from both of his sources: prose and poetry.

There is the fourth skill in “*DASTAAR NAMA*” which has been devoted to poetry. Khushal Khan Khattak has given his views about the art of versification. As stated before that Khushal Khan Khattak had given his viewpoints both about theoretical and practical criticism in “*DASTAAR NAMA*” so while giving the fourth skill he has defined “verse” which therefore falls in theoretical criticism. Theoretical criticism provides principles and rules governing the creative process used for various

branches of literature where as practical criticism evaluates a work of art in the light of the principles of criticism.

Khushal Khan Khattak displaying the skill of theoretical criticism writes about a verse in these words:

“The art of versification belongs to the higher order of craft and the word “verse” is the offspring of “Shaor” i.e. cognition. Poetical aptitude alone can make one a poet and the skill comes from learning the art. Learning the craft of poetry never ever enables a person to create a verse. Versifying necessitates instinctive passion with a well developed knowledge of the art of poetry. Besides these qualifications, sweetness or sublimity in poetry depends on a highly sensitive human heart.

Maturity however comes with the age and experience.”(Khattak 1991)

In this text, aptitude has been termed as vital for versification and the modern critics attribute this quality of the poets with poetical intuition. According to the Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib:

“The thoughts cross our imagination from unknown quarters; it is nothing but voice of angels indeed.”

Altaf Hussain Hali, the contemporary of Ghalib, too, considers background study, Observation, experience and sensitivity of human heart along with the poetical acumen necessary while discussing the difference between “creativity” and “constructiveness” in poetry. He writes that:

“Most of the people have the opinion that a poetic piece of poetry issued from the pen of a poet spontaneously is more effective and sweeter than which takes long hours of thinking and meditation. The first piece of versification has been named as “creativity” and the other as “constructivity”... Besides exceptional cases, a verse produced after long hours of deliberation is always popular, delicate, entertaining, serious and a lot more effective in actual practice... There are two components in a verse: thought and form.

It is just possible that the thought generates in the mind of the poet in no time but it is always time consuming to seek suitable phraseology for the right expression. By way of illustration, the idea of a grand building comes to the mind of an architect in an instant but it is not possible to erect it with the same swiftness. It is not easy to master the craft of rhyme and rhythm and diction. If some one accomplishes the work of a day in a single hour, then, it would be a mess. (Hali N.D.)

In “*DASTAAR NAMA*” Khushal Khan Khattak while commenting on the technical aspects of poetry and genres of literature, writes that: “In dictionary, metrical composition is known as verse. There will be two parts of a verse the words of it will have been pruned: it would be complete if judged by the parameter of rhyme and “Urooz” (Rhetorical devices). Every form of poetry including Qaseeda (Eulogy), Ghazal (Lyric), Rubaie (Quatrain), Qittah, Mokhamas and Musaddas has got its own special craft and technical requirements.

Qaseeda is that form of poetry which contains lines from 14 to 100 or more. Anything under the sum can be the topic of Qaseeda. It expresses a piece of advice, praise or admiration, or condemnation. Ghazal has lines ranging from five to fourteen. It is used as a vehicle of personal expression about the attractive features of the beloved discussion of physical beauty, the pang of separation in a sensitive way, and the like.

The constitution of Qittah is different in that it does not have the opening line as such and the number of its verses may be two, seven, eight, twenty, or more.

In Rubaie, there are two verses. In Mokhamas there are five lines where as in Musaddas there are six lines.

The ancient bards have also composed (devised) poems like Tarjee Band and Tarkeeb Band etc. (**Khattak 1991**)

Expanding the discourse of Khushal Khan Khattak’s theoretical criticism he comments on the historical perspective of poetry on the one hand, and through reference to various works of different poets he presents the internal stimuli and the craft of poetry on the other.

“The art of poetry and the sense of perceiving the meaning of verse are a hard nut to crack: therefore, it is not the province of any one and every one. Only a naturally gifted man of poetical mind can deal with this art. Indeed it sometimes drives away sleep of a whole night to choose the proper word for the right place.

After having examined a lot of fields of knowledge I have arrived at the conclusion that the art of poetry is the most difficult. The beauty of poetry lies in hyperbole (exaggeration): the greater hyperbolic a poetical composition be the higher the pleasure it gives. However, the hyperbole used should be as near reality as possible. A born poet is like a deep-rooted tree that can withstand fierce wind while a poetaster can be easily swept

even by a light gust of wind. The foundation of knowledge should be firm and strong. Otherwise, danger is likely to follow.

Poetry without knowledge is lacking in maturity. An ignorant versifier can not produce correct verse in the first place: and if such a one tries his hand at writing one, it would not be without fault and the world is full of (cruel) critics who would ridicule the stuff. **(Khattak 1991)**

The discourse reveals that his theoretical criticism reflects the critical vision of Khushal Khan Khattak. It also suggests that he followed the oriental tradition in criticism which also betrays deep knowledge of Persian and Arabic literature of the critic poet. Though Khushal Khan Khattak had no information of western literature, yet Alexander Pope, an English poet of the 18th century, coincides with Khushal Khan Khattak when he says in “An Essay on Man” A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

It shows that the two literary artists (figure), unaware of one another’s views of criticism, shared the same thoughts. Great minds, thinks alike they say.

Khushal Khan Khattak throws light on the theoretical and practical criticism from both the angles in his prose work, “*DASTAAR NAMA*” while analyzing the craft of writing and comprehending poetry. He has also shown his critical vision in his poetry here and there “Kuliyat” in general, but especially in his famous long eulogy (Qaseeda), he has shown this vision in a more comprehensive manner. His style in this piece of poetry is very egotistic.

He offers his comments on his own poetry and then examines the whole stock of Pashto poetry. He moves on to compare Pashto poetry with that of Persian while touching the technical side of writing poetry. In the first part of this piece of poetry he considers his own poetry to be a new ground broken. He writes that:

“When I stepped in the field of poetry, I subdued every one. My predecessors were reduced to the status of a fire-fly at night while I began to dazzle on the firmament of poetry like northern star. I found none belonging to either past or present who offered any sweetness or pleasure in their poetry.” **(Khattak 2009)**

He draws comparison between the works of the bygone poets and those of his day and announces that as substandard. He says, “The poetical works of Mirza Khan were soon forgotten and the works of Arzani, too,

were held to ridicule. Be that, Daulat, Wasil or others, all were badly beaten through the instrument of my poetical accomplishments.

I served those unfortunate ones with sugar candies who were used to eating barley bread.

I prepared the garland of pearls and gems thereby, browbeating the hawkers of beads. (**Khattak 2009**)

And then he goes on to highlight in the 3rd and last part of this poem, the critical aspects of poetry with reference to his own poetry, he expounds the machinations of heart and the poetical intuition. He deems them necessary for good and standard poetry. The same come under discussion in modern critical talks shows too.

After wards he mentions the figurative language which upon entering the domain of Pashto poetry equates it with that of Persian. Capable of writing poetry in Persian, Khushal Khan Khattak claims command there, too. However, in practice, he composes poetry in his mother tongue. The last part of the poem shows a critic and sensible person who can appreciate poetry.

He thinks that understanding his poetry requires one to be sentient and intelligent enough to know the art of poetry thoroughly. He plumes himself on his capability of composing verse. That part of the poem is presented for reference here which reflects such critical vision of Khushal Khan Khattak.

“Each verse of mine is nothing but institution and I have only chiseled the words for them to create musicality. Whether it be simile, metaphor, or delicacy of thought, all have contributed towards increasing the sweetness of my poetry. I explored new and fresh areas for my poetical expression which elevated it as equal to Persian poetry.

I have blended fiction with facts in such a way that has enhanced the value of my verse.

I do not care a fig for any body’s praise or otherwise and I do not say verse simply to impress upon others.

I enjoy equal command of poetical expression in Persian but I benefited however, the reading public with Pashto poetry.

The ignorant only nod their heads upon hearing my sweet and powerful verses while the connoisseur gives due credit to them by showering fulsome praise on my poetry.

Those who disapprove of my verses would either be jealous or complete duffers.” (Khattak 2009)

The poems mentioned in Khushal’s poetry has touched various angles of the craft of versification. However, by way of summarization we can say that there are generally two characteristics in the writings of poetry to which the poet gives due importance. One is the thought and the other is diction and style. Therefore to judge the worth of any poet’s style, we have to take into account the two elements. Khushal Khan Khattak also has expressed these two characteristics in his poetry between the lines. And whenever he touches the thought poetry he means imagination, the novelty of his themes. By mentioning the various figures of speech like simile, metaphor, imagery, or personification he means diction and style. Even today critics consider these two characteristics as vital for versification/ poetical expression.

Regarding this point the Urdu critic Altaf Hussain Hali has to say that : “ At the time of writing a verse a poet needs to select suitable words and then arrange them in such a manner which not only delight the reader but also makes the meaning explicit to them... If this quality is absent in a piece of poetry, and then it is better not to have created it at all. The power of imagination of a poet must enable him to give order and symmetry not only to his word but also his thoughts until and unless the poet enjoys complete command of words as tools of expression, he can not impress the readers with his poetry. (Hali N.D.)

His above mentioned poem reflects the critical vision of Khushal Khan Khattak besides he has also highlighted other schools of thought in criticism in his poems. For example, in one of his Ghazzals, he highlights comparative criticism of his contemporaries and his predecessors in the light of his poetry.

“Braggards of being poets are many today,
God forbid that I reduce or increase the literary stature of anyone.
Some one is a quarter; some is half, while Qalandar is two quarters. Only
a poet names Wasil can claim equality in verse with me.
Daulat, another contemporary poet, is admittedly three quarters
Whereas I am superior to him by several degrees. (Khattak 2009)

In the above verses, Khushal Khan Khattak has given his estimate of the poets before him. He says that claimants of poetry in this age are many but poets in reality are only few in number. He refers to the various

weights in vogue of his time simply to assign value equivalent to the actual poetical stature of a poet concerned. So whenever he brands a certain versifier as equal to a quarter or a half, he means to say that poet is below the accepted standard of poetry. And by so doing he has ventured to present before the readers a comparative criticism. Comparative criticism continues to be in fashion even to this day. Though it has not gained full status of a school of thought, yet in all critical discourses, the relevance of comparative criticism can never be over emphasized. Dr. Saleem Akhtar also seconds these submissions in the following words:

“Before studying comparative criticism, one clarification is necessary to be made. It is one mode of criticism but it certainly is not a definite school of thought in criticism. The other schools of thought in criticism possess characteristics either good or bad due to which a particular school enjoys a shortened or prolonged period of popularity. The function of comparative criticism is nothing but to draw comparison between two works of creation and establish their respective value and worth.

Besides, the discourses relating to academic study of comparative criticism, an ordinary reader either consciously or unconsciously relies on comparative criticism in his personal decision regarding the worth and value of a number of creative work to give preference and then declaring a certain literary piece on the same topic or artist a favorite is example of comparative criticism in ordinary life. (Saleem N.D.)

The same comparative criticism is then part of practical criticism. The other schools of criticism fall in the category of practical criticism out of which expository criticism and criticism of judgment are very famous. Khushal Khan Khattak has also demonstrated the two school of criticism in his poetical expression.

Before Khushal Khan Khattak, there were two classical Pashto writers named Bayazeed Ansari and Akhond Darveza. Bayazeed Ansari has *Khair-Ul-Bayan* to his credit and Akhond Darveza was author of *Makhzan-Ul-Islam*. Both these books were religious in nature. Khushal Khan Khattak in his book “*SWAT NAMĀ*”, has criticized the books not from the angles of religion but from technical point of view as well. Khushal writes:

“Darveza has compiled book which has satiated all the people of Swat from acquiring knowledge. There are out of place, redundant and ambiguous statements where in he talks of Yazid.” (Khattak 1986)

Khushal Khan Khattak offers criticism on “Makhzan” with regard to Darveza’s art as a writer in addition to exploring the contents of the book in question in these verses.



The efforts made by Darveza has been named as “Makhzan-Ul-Islam”⁴³,

and its style and diction are not free from faults. The metrical structures of the lines are far from balanced: If one part of a line is 20 syllables then the other is 100. Therefore, while reading it one does not have the impression of flow and rhythm. Furthermore, its rhyme scheme is not smooth i.e. the whole text is disharmonious.

He has highlighted various issues in Pashto language and what to tell you whether that is readable stuff at all such a book can not be



☞ It seems to be mistakenly composed Makhzan-Ul-Israr while actually it is Makhzan-



Ul-Islam.

categorized into any class at all while the boastful author deems it above Jaami's "Haft-O-Rung" (A Persian work) (**Khattak 1986**)

Along with Akhond Darveza, Khushal Khan Khattak also criticizes sheikh Mian Noor's thoughts (who was a disciple of Darveza) in his account "*DASTAAR NAMAH*" Khushal Khan Khattak offers his estimate of Pir Roshan, the author of *Khair-Ul-Bayan*, in this verse:

"At the time when Pir Roshan initiated this trouble, the Pashtoon took side with him. (**Khattak 1986**)

According to Khushal Khan Khattak, Darveza was the least knowledgeable and highly superficial person so much so that he could not understand Pir Roshan's *Khair-Ul-Bayan*. The moment he realized that education and literacy among Pashtoons was not available worth its name, so he began versification because the field was open and unoccupied. In this regard Khushal Khan Khattak writes:

"At this stage Akhond Darveza appeared with his little knowledge and became a letter of man in this country but actually not. After having judged people and the prevailing conditions, he pen down a book. When he found the field open for himself, he started expressing his speeches but with least observations and impunity. He had read *Khair-Ul-Bayan* of Pir Roshan but not understood its contents properly. Pashtoons of that time were ignorant, hence Akhond Darveza was as if a Mujtahid. (**Khattak 1986**)

Conclusion: In this paper light has been thrown on the critical vision of Khushal Khan Khattak. However his prodigiously vast vision could not be given justice in this limited space. On the basis of this study it can be safely said that Khushal Khan Khattak was not only a great prose writer and poet, he was also a sensible critic. He has presented his critical views in both prose and poetry four hundred years ago, out of which benefit can be gained even today. Modern trends in literature especially criticism have been introduced into the oriental literature from the west but we discern the signs of modern criticism, be that theoretical or practical, in the views of Khushal Khan Khattak, a literary giant of 400 years ago.

The modern schools of thought in criticism including historical expository, comparative, judgmental- all have their clue discernable in the critical views of Khushal Khan Khattak. We could brand this vision of the great personage as the model of eastern mode of criticism. Nonetheless,

both the eastern and western critical views taken together tend to shape universal values which are applicable any where in the world.

On the basis of the above mentioned research Khushal Khan Khattak can be considered a critic of full stature of his age. His critical vision occupies a vantage point and this vision of him be known as the milestone in the academic journey. Therefore he may be deemed as a visionary and sensible critic of his age.

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