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ḴOŠḤĀL KHAN ḴAṬṬAK

ḴOŠḤĀL KHAN ḴAṬṬAK, Pashtun warrior-poet and tribal chief (1613-89). Apart from being a towering figure in Pashto literature, Ḵošḥāl Khan Ḵaṭṭak (1613–89) was chief of the powerful Pashtun tribe of the Ḵaṭṭaks and one of the most famous men of Afghan history and culture, who expounded supra-tribal Pashtun ethnic sentiments and was the first Pashtun leader to oversee embryonic state formation in the Pashtun lands, albeit in opposition to the Mughal imperial framework.

During the Pashtun expansion to the south in the 14th– 17th centuries, the Ḵaṭṭak tribe settled between the Indus River and Peshawar. With their 30,000 fighting men they controlled the vitally important Khyber Pass, which connects India with what is now Afghanistan. Thus, they became one of the few Pashtun tribes to be integrated into the Mughal imperial structures, however superficially. In Emperor Akbar's (r. 1556-1605) time, Ḵošḥāl Khan Ḵaṭṭak's great-grandfather Mālek Aku or Akurāy received the *jāgir* (a piece of land given as compensation to a favorite, often for services rendered, so that he could use its product and administer it) of the plain from Khairabad to Nowshera in return for providing protection of the road from India to Afghanistan (Ḥayāt Khan, 1867, 321). This arrangement implied little imperial interference into Ḵaṭṭak affairs.

As a hereditary chief of the Ḵaṭṭaks since 1641, confirmed to this position by the tribe and endorsed by Emperor Šāh Jahān (r. 1628-57) after his father was killed in battle, Ḵošḥāl Khan at first continued to cooperate with the Great Mughals, fighting many wars at their service and enjoying honors and the

company of Šāh Jahān.

However, as a result of the intrigues of the governors of Peshawar and Kabul and his own uncles, he was arrested in April 1664 by Emperor Aurangzib (r. 1658-1707), who set out a centralizing drive targeting not only religious dissenters but semi-independent rulers as well. Ḵošḥāl Khan was sent in chains to India, where he spent more than two years in custody pleading for his freedom and prolifically writing poetry. This captivity is vividly described in many of his poems. When he was released from jail, he only nominally remained in the imperial service until 1672 when, annoyed by the intrigues of the governor of Kabul Mahābat Khan, he resigned his Mughal position (*manṣab*), passed his chieftaincy to his son Ašraf, and engaged in the fight against the Mughalallied Pashtuns by joining the rebel confederacy of the Pashtun Afridi and Mōhmand tribes (Sarkar, 1921, 233-4). While it appeared a trivial inter-tribal conflict where the Mughals always played a role, in his poetry Ḵošḥāl Khan resorted to inflammatory rhetoric rallying the Pashtuns to the anti-imperial cause, e.g. *da Afghān pa nang me wūtarala tūra* ("I drew up the sword for the honor of Afghans") (Pelevin, 2010, 145-6). Since the hostilities disrupted communications through the Khyber Pass, Emperor Aurangzib considered this tribal rebellion serious enough to take personal control of affairs and remained encamped in Attock for two years.

Until 1676, Ḵošḥāl Khan Ḵaṭṭak fought the powerful Mughal Empire, at times as leader of a tribal confederacy and towards the end with a mere handful of his comrades-in-arms. As usual in their dealings with the Pashtuns, the Mughals succeeded in bribing some clans, and Ḵošḥāl Khan Ḵaṭṭak lost the tribal support. In 1677, he reluctantly made peace with the Mughals but refused being reinstated in the *manṣab* of commander of 2,000 men. In 1680, he defeated the Bangaš Pashtuns, who had earlier fought against him for the Mughals. In 1681, after the arrest of his elder son Ašraf, his other son Bahrām became the chief of the Ḵaṭṭaks. That sparked Ḵošḥāl Khan's confrontation with him that eventually drove the elderly warrior-poet into exile in the Ḵaṭṭak-Afridi borderland (Pelevin, 2010, 156-7).

Unlike many other Pashtuns who limited their rebellions against the Mughal Empire to a single-tribe endeavor, Ḵošḥāl Khan promoted supra-tribal unity of the Pashtuns and appealed to their ethnic identity as opposed to the tribal one. That was the first ever recorded case of embryonic secular state-building activities as opposed to those inspired by Islamic considerations as had been the case with the 16-17th-century Rowšāni (Ravshāni) movement. That was

hardly surprising considering Ḵošḥāl Khan's personal and institutional, as a powerful tribal chief, dislike of Islamic faith actors of both conventional and Sufi persuasion, who intrinsically undermined tribal social and political organization.

The life of Ḵošḥāl Khan is well documented in his detailed biography compiled by his grandson Afżal Khan (d. ca. 1769), who seemingly relied in his *Tāriḵ-e moraṣṣaʿ* on Ḵošḥāl Khan's own memoirs, while Ḵošḥāl Khan's religious and social views, as well as his ethics, pastimes, and literary tastes are exposed in his own poetry.

Though Ḵošḥāl Khan depreciates himself for being a negligent student who preferred hunting to learning, his education included book-learning, handwriting, poetry, bow shooting, swimming, riding and hunting, family life, bringing up of children, teaching servants, housekeeping, farming, trade, genealogy, music, chess, and painting. His long sojourns at the court of the Great Mughals, especially at the time of Šāh Jahān, either voluntary or involuntary, broadened his interests. That translated into his introduction of schooling for the members of the princely clan (*ḵānḵeyl*).

Besides his military fame, Ḵošḥāl Khan is known to every Pashtun for his literary work. According to the Pashtun tradition, he wrote 350 books in addition to poems included in his *divān*. The figure is no doubt an exaggeration. Nevertheless, he is the author of numerous works, both in Persian and Pashto, on a wide range of subjects such as war and statecraft, medicine, divination, falconry, house-building, childrearing, theology, and ethics. He left an account of his checkered life and his family history as well as some translations from Arabic. Although he ferociously refuted the Rowšāni movement, he was still proud to claim that as a master of the pen he was the equal of the famous Rowšāni poets. Like the Rowšāni poet Mirzā Khan Anṣāri (d. ca. 1630) before him, Ḵošḥāl Khan adapted the natural meters of popular Pashto songs to the verse forms inherited from Persian. His meter is still syllabic, but the rhythm is created by stress, which is not fixed in Pashto. The stress usually recurs on every fourth syllable (MacKenzie, 1958, 319–20; MacKenzie, 1965, 13). He made full use of the stylistic devices of various genres of classical Arabic and Persian poetry. His only undoubtedly extant Pashto prosaic work *Dastār-nāma* is a typical Fürstenspiegel (Pelevin, 2019).

Until his arrest in 1664, Ḵošḥāl Khan considered writing poetry as an aristocratic pastime and tried to imitate classical Persian poetry though he

could not compete with the great Persian poets in poetical mastery and depth of thought, as he himself admitted while boasting about his unparalleled mastery of Pashto. His poetry is courageous, harsh, and straightforward. As a proud and warlike Pashtun chief, he is quite distinct from the sophisticated and elegant Persian poets. Unlike the latter, he was not compelled to resort to poetry to earn his living by catering to the aesthetic tastes or political views of his princely patrons. His poetry is equally devoid of any mystical or aesthetic devotion; thus, making him a quintessential gentleman-poet. While in captivity, Ḵošḥāl Khan broke the Persian poetical mold and grew personalistic in his writings, where he commented on his various experiences and thoughts including those on his own self and his poetic gift. In a similar vein, he never dwelled on Iranian legends. Many of his poems describe his own experience and begin with "When I saw . . ." He particularly favored the verb "to see" and made little use of "to hear" (Morgenstierne, 1960, 55). Falconry provided vocabulary and metaphors for his verses. Characteristically, while immersing into mystical reflection he never wished to be freed from the bonds of Self, which was too interesting for him; though he often lamented the torments of life and sarcastically contemplated his personality and persona. Nevertheless, he remained grateful to God for being a Pashtun and Ḵošḥāl Khan (Morgenstierne, 1960, 52).

He wrote consciously as a national poet, the first to express ethnic sentiment for uniting all Pashtuns. Motivated by a strong desire to liberate his fellow countrymen from the Mughals, he used his poetical gift as a political weapon. He kept emphasizing the importance of the Pashtun tribal code of honor (*Paṣhtunwali*). Despite his ethnic fervor, he frequently resorted to a harsh reproach (*hajw*) of his fellow Pashtuns' misdeeds and social traits.

In his voluminous *divān*, Ḵošḥāl Khan covers all the subjects that preoccupied him during his long and active life. He wrote about religious problems, national hopes, personal ambitions and failures, erotic experience, and everyday business.

Some of Ḵošḥāl Khan Ḵaṭṭak's verses are devoted to the refutation of the Rowšāni "heresy" and praise of the "piety" of the movement's opponents, as well as to the derogatory description of the way of life of the tribes associated with the Rowšāniyya. Ḵošḥāl Khan's description of the social conditions of these tribes and their expulsion of traditional Muslim scholars constitutes unique information not found in any other source. Of similar historical interest is Ḵošḥāl Khan's harsh and disparaging critique of Muslim figures of

authority acting in the midst of Pashtun tribes but not associated with their kinship-based structures (Andreyev, 2021).

Since Ķošḥāl Khan's divān is very popular among the Pashtuns, it exists in numerous manuscript copies as well as printed editions. Quotations from Ķošḥāl Khan's poetry are often used to promote various political causes. Poems of the famous Pashtun poet have been translated into English and Russian several times; recently comprehensive and thorough studies of Ķošḥāl Khan's legacy have appeared (Pelevin, 2001; Pelevin, 2010), to which those interested in more details should refer.

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