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## CHALLENGING GENDER ROLES: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF GHANI KHAN'S *THE PATHANS*

Author 1:	AMIR HAMZA, BS, Department of English, NUML, Islamabad, Email: <a href="mailto:hamzajanwazir@gmail.com">hamzajanwazir@gmail.com</a>
Co-Author 2:	SIDRA NAWAZ, BS, Department of English, NUML, Islamabad, Email: <a href="mailto:sidranawaz078@gmail.com">sidranawaz078@gmail.com</a>
Corresponding & Author 3:	KASHIF ALI, M.Phil Scholar, Department of English, NUML, Islamabad, Email: <a href="mailto:kashif.wa32@gmail.com">kashif.wa32@gmail.com</a>

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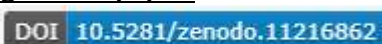
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### Abstract

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The present research aims to analyse the representation of gender dynamics in Ghani Khan's *The Pathans* who is also known as Lewanai Phalsafi (The Lunatic Philosopher), is a towering literary figure in Pashto literature. He is commonly known for his poetry and art. Ghani Khan strived to unveil the atrocities of the tribal system and the usurpation of women's rights at the hands of the Pashtoon male-dominant society. Using a feminist theoretical framework and conducting textual analysis, this study endeavours to examine the ways prominent Pashto poet Khan challenges the traditional gender roles of Pashtuns. Specifically, this analysis will focus on the respective representation of masculinity and femininity and the power dynamics, and social norms that define both Pashtun women and Kaftar. The author has used strong female characters, increased the question of masculinity, and created a broader discussion on gender views. Therefore, all aspects of writing are from a feminist perspective. Hence, *The Pathans* emerges as a dominant text in creating and changing gender roles. The study reveals the ambiguous view of the author on the question of gender roles and shows how these views are expressed through the characters of women and men of Kurdish nationality. The study has shown that Khan's place of birth strongly influences his views on the distribution of rights and obligations between people of different genders. Khan's novel focuses on how power relations are pivotal in a particular society.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender, Patriarchy, Pashtun, Pashto, Rights

## Introduction

Feminism as a movement started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the endeavours of different personalities. Among them, Simone de Beauvoir, a French novelist and philosopher, made substantial efforts to put forward the idea of women's equality. She conveyed her ideas in her book *The Second Sex*, written in 1949. She started by pointing out the dominant role of men in that cutting-edge society. She tried to define what a woman was and how she should be treated (Thurman, 2010). Hekman (2015) argued that Beauvoir contested an idealistic approach to women's rights. She went on to say that Beauvoir repudiated the sense of 'otherness' extended to women by the patriarchal social constraints. Feminism in general seeks to have equal opportunities and rights for both male and female members of society. It is a social movement. Feminism as a literary theory tries to analyze the literary text concerning gender roles in society. Woolf argues that women must reject the social construct of femaleness and establish and define their own identity for themselves (Bressler, 2011). Safa et al. (2022) disclosed the fact after laborious research on Ghani Khan's poetry that Khan was the only poet who inculcated philosophical thoughts in Pashto poetry. Abdul Ghani Khan is also known as the Pushtun Renaissance Man of poetry, art, and philosophy. Abdul Ghani Khan's verse is well-established in Pashtun culture and customs. His work investigates subjects of love, nature, spirituality, and social justice, and his utilization of metaphors and imagery is frequently contrasted with that of the incomparable Persian writer, Rumi. He likewise wrote in English; his most memorable book was *The Pathans* (1947). His main distributed work in Urdu was his book *Khan Sahib* (1994). *The Pathans* is an important work of prose by Ghani Khan. According to Sardar Ali, Ghani Khan expounds on the culture, customs, traditions, norms, politics, and laws of a specific cast, *The Pathans*. He additionally reveals insight into

their people's tunes, customs, unbridled religiosity in wizardry and priests, and their temperament of getting Payback. He carefully depicts Pathan's personality in three words: the most complex simplicity. He likewise expounds on Pathan's tendency, saying that he adores music but despises artists, sings love songs yet executes his little girl's sweetheart. (Hussain, Rubab et. al., 2023), He is the person who tries to be a contender yet doesn't wish to serve in the military. He is the kind of individual who can only be crushed if you make him your companion. This work of art is intended for people who have a powerful urge to find out about the attributes of the Pashtun public. (Ali, p. 2) Yousafzai sums up the text of *The Pathans* in exceptionally straightforward language. He examined each part of the book and presumed that Ghani Khan had provided the perusers with an image of Pathan identity that he could grasp. (Yousafzai, 2018). Bacha et al. (2010) discussed Ghani Khan's poetry's resemblance to that of John Keats. They further wrote that Ghani Khan was born as Abdul Ghani Khan in 1914 Ghani Khan has written on many aspects of life. Being highly educated, his works are more philosophical and fuller of worldly wisdom. He could speak and understand 5 languages: Pashto, English, Arabic, Urdu, and Persian. Though most of his works are in Pashto; yet, he has also written in English and Urdu. Ali et al. (2022) researched *The Pathans* written by Ghani Khan. They concluded that Ghani Baba used a decent style to foreground the miseries of the Pashtoon society; women are the most vulnerable in this regard. Feministic discourse is very limited in Pashto literature. Momand & Firky (2022) posited that women were not allowed to write in the Pashtoon patriarchal society. They showed evidence from the poetry of some of the female poets hailing from the society of Pashtoon. Ghani Khan Baba has keenly observed the Pashtoon patriarchal society and was of course sensitive towards the women's cause. This is evident from his poetry for his

wife. Khan also showed his concern for women in his fairy tales' compendium *The Pathan*- a famous work of him written in English altogether. He satirizes the Pashtoon for being rude towards women. Regarding feminism, we can again refer to Ali's interview with Mashriq TV. Sardar Ali quotes, "Ghani Khan bravely spoke in favour of giving rights to women especially the right to education" (Takkar, 2019). Ghani Khan has written poetry and holds a significant position in Pashto Literature. "Nothing is more irritating than a piece of paper staring stupidly at you to write something on it but you can't make it", (Ghani, 1990, p 1). There are many aspects of Ghani Khan's Poetry. Ghani Khan is probably the most educated poet in Pashto literature. Therefore, a lot of work and criticism has been done on his poetry. Most of the critics are concerned with his philosophy and poetic theory. Among his contemporaries, he was regarded as the greatest poet of the 20th century of Pashto poetry (Ali, p 3). Khan (2022) researched Ghani's concept of God and held that the god of Ghani Khan is not the same as the God of clergy (Mula) rather he was more inclined towards Pantheism and Spinoza's philosophy. Sardar Ali researched *The Pathan* titled *The Stylistic Analysis of The Pathan*. Ali Argues "Ghani Khan provided the real Pathan ethnicity portrait and described from all perspectives *The Pathan* ethnicity" (Ali, 6). There is no doubt that Ghani Khan has a lot of readers and lovers from across the globe. Regarding feminism Qaiser Khan's work is very important. He argues "The world of Pashtun folk stories is predominantly masculine both in intent and content. They advocate a social setup and structure where men dominate at the cost of undermining the role of women", (Khan, 2017, p. 17). Shah also argues that the power structure leaves less space for women to display their talent. The previous studies on Ghani Khan have primarily focused on philosophy and poetic language. While some research has been conducted on Khan's prose

there is a need to explore Ghani's views about the role of women in society.

### Statement of the Problem

However, with all the progress that has been made towards gender equality in different societies, some of the traditional gender roles are still intact, mostly in culturally conservative societies such as the Pashtun. Even though Ghani Khan's story, *The Pathans*, has a profound depiction of the Pashtun culture, the paper will use a feminist critical analysis to determine the extent to which the book undermines traditional gender roles. In conclusion, the paper's statement of the problem is "the use of feminist critical theory allows for a feminist critical analysis of how Ghani Khan's *The Pathans* undermine traditional gender roles within the Pashtun culture." Thus, the study sets to explore different ways in which the text undermines patriarchal views and promotes alternative gender and sexuality identity, hence, the broader concept of gender equality.

### Research Questions

- How does Ghani Khan show his sympathy towards the females of the Pashtoon society?
- What are the attitudes of the male members of the Pashtoon society towards the female members in Ghani Khan's poems?

### Research Objective

- To find out the attitudes of the male members of the Pashtoon society towards the female members as per Ghani Khan.
- To find out how sympathetic Ghani Khan is towards the females of the Pashtoon society.

### Significance of the Study

The study is significant for several reasons. First, the research involves one of the most complicated societies – Pashtuns – gender and its role in this society with the help of literature, which can be a foundation to deconstruct traditional gender relations. This can lead to problems regarding gender sensitivity, where society with it can be fairer. Second, thanks to this study, culture actively criticizes patriarchy and its nests, and destroys

them, and the study of genders itself becomes more specified and can be approached as a field of science, and the field which interests not only the past but the future. Third, we can say that the research contributions can be found in feminist theory, which can be further developed in literature not only from the feminist perspective but others, as the basis can be the works of Ghani Khan. Thus, this research can be used to combat gender inequality, and it has just begun, as you can build more radical works based on this.

### Literature Review

Gender roles and their depiction in literature have been the focus of academic research for a long time and feminist literary criticism, in particular. (Ringel, Ribak, 2024) Indeed, the feminist reading of works of literature sheds light on gender relations, power dynamics, and social conventions by demonstrating the extent to which literature influences and reflects gender attitudes. Ghani Khan's *The Pathans* is one of the most prominent works of art in the Pashtun culture, which makes it a suitable piece of literature for feminist analysis. Ghani Khan, an outstanding Pashto poet, demonstrated great insight into the culture and society of the Pashtuns in his creation. While "The Pathans" is populated with several fully fleshed-out characters and intricate narratives, the text at the focus of this research is meaningful to this extent due to its treatment of gender. Therefore, scholars have already focused on the feminist reading of the book, thus analyzing and interpreting the work's portrayal of gender dynamics. First published in 1962, "Gender Trouble" by Judith Butler introduced the concept of gender performativity, suggesting that gender was not a natural category but rather a result of repeated performances. Hence, Butler's theory engendered feminist scholars' inquiry into text, scrutinizing and deconstructing the traditional gender norms that a character performs. In other words, theoreticians, exploring "The Pathans," use Butler's conceptual framework

to evaluate the mechanisms by which central theme actors maneuver or undermine traditional gender norms using actions and interactions. Additionally, intersectionality – or the interconnected nature of various conceptual categorizations such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, and so on – is also a cornerstone of the feminist literature. This theoretical approach was originally proposed by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 as an examination of gender and race issues. Examining the text, Jones theorized which influences the text's characters most – gender or their status in the tribe. Similarly, representations of women in literature also attracted feminist scholars' attention. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar explored the polarity of women's representation in 1979, coining the concept of "The Angel in the House" and "The Madwoman in the Attic". Applicants described the angel as the highly idealized representation of women in the text's society, while a madwoman represented women who did not fit the angel's pre-set boundaries. Brown argues that women in *The Pathans* do not fit the "angel" archetype because they constantly demonstrate an active position regarding their lot. (Zhang, Schroeder, 2024) Finally, several scholars explore text within the framework of postcolonial theory, particularly by applying Homi Bhabha's 1994 concept of mimicry to text. Instead, Chowdhury exemplifies that characters in the book regard mimicry as a technique of survival. Therefore, one can observe that feminist literary critique offers multiple lenses through which to view texts. Each of the theories adds to the scholar's own interpretation and theoretical deployment, creating a web of empirical analysis and speculative inquiry. Gender roles and the associated norms are one of the most explored and seriously debated topics in literary theory and literature in general. A lot of interested parties dedicated their work, time, and efforts to studying gender problems from different fronts. The paper is a review of literature on

feminist readings of the Pathans from the perspective of when the traditional gender role and their model are pushed back to the author. Traditional gender issues when it comes to literature refer to masculinity versus femininity character interrelations. Showalter notes that classical gender writing reflects chauvinist or violent societies and is a storehouse of gender caricatures. In this regard, Shahrour's statement is justified. De Beauvoir draws attention to the fact that literature is one of the means to distribute the image of coequals – including equal gender. (Dad, Shabbir, Sultan, et. al. 2023) , Analogously, one might assume that even the oldest archaeological texts could include explicit manifestations of equal gender. The issue of gender neutrality according to feminist theory should all aspects of equality when it came to The Pathans be counteracted. Ghani Khan's perspective on the role of gender in the reading is notable. A published fighter, civil rights militant, and Pashto literature poet and Da'i Ghani Khan handed down a different visible understanding and stance on sovereign male-female duty, which the current effort to investigate in this exploration dissertation Ghani Khan's book *The Pathan* would be a feminist novel to delve into the role of gender-neutral in times of integrative order approached Pashtun culture. (Batool, Faqir, et. al. 2024) The poet produced revealed female figures, and he conveyed misconceptions concerning the male character positively.

### Research Methodology

This paper used Simon de Beauvoir's theory of feminism. The data is analyzed qualitatively. Simon de Beauvoir believed that French society and Western societies in general were patriarchal, and controlled by males. *The Second Sex* by Beauvoir is a foundational work for all feminist theorists. Virginia Woolf held the view same as Beauvoir; Beauvoir believed that the male defines what it means to be human, including what it means to be female. Since the female is not male, Beauvoir

maintains, she becomes *the other*, an object whose existence is defined and interpreted by the dominant male." Being subordinate to a male, the female discovers that she is a secondary or non-existent player in the major social institutions of her culture, such as the church, government, and educational systems." (Bressler, 1949, p.149). We can now understand why, from ancient Greece to today, there are so many common features in the indictments against women; her condition has remained the same throughout superficial changes, and this condition defines what is called the woman's "character": she "wallows in immanence," she is argumentative, she is cautious and petty, she does not have the sense either of truth or accuracy, she lacks morality, she is vulgarly self-serving, selfish, she is a liar and an actress. (Garcia, Angel, Rodriguez, et. al. 2024) There is some truth in all these affirmations. But the types of behaviors denounced are not dictated to a woman by her hormones or predestined in her brain's compartments: they are suggested in negative form by her situation.

### Data Analysis

In this part, the data is analyzed by taking different lines from the short story, *The Folktale*, from the writings of Ghani Khan. In the story, a boy named Meher gets ill. As per the customs, his family calls a faith healer, named Shah Sahib. When Shah Sahib comes to treat Meher, he has the appearance of a saint; "He wears a white turban of the priest and is dressed in dignified white robes to suggest purity" (Khan, p. 35 ). It can be inferred from the description that even religion is used as a tool to influence other individuals, especially women, in a society described by Ghani Khan which resonates with the concept of suppression of women given by Simone de Beauvoir. Furthermore, when Shah Sahib approaches the village, he goes straight into a place, "Zenana", segregated for women only; "He went straight into the Zenana. . . ." (Ghani, p. 11 ). This shows that the males defined

freedom of the women of that Pashtoon society. Women are kept separate from the men who are considered dominant over them. With the progression of the story, more elements reveal the exploitation of the women and their violent subjugation by the male. "Shah Sahib is always happy among women" (Khan, p. 5). Shah Sahib is a male who has religious authority over the laymen. He is allowed to enter the place where women are gathered around the sick Meher. If there was a woman or a lady doctor in place of Shah Sahib, who was a male, she would have never been allowed to enter a place where men sat. This manifests how oppressive society treated women; they were not given the right to object to any decision of men. It was paradoxical as the society imposed the injunctions of the religion which prohibited men from seeing women without a veil and to enter their gathering. However, Shah Sahib enters Zenana, a place where women are present, without any hesitation, even if he feels happy in the company of the opposite gender. Ghani Khan criticizes the Pashtoon society in a very refined way. He writes, "They are sympathetic; they understand" (Khan, p. 7); this shows that men of that society know the emotional tendencies of women and how they are understood. However, the women are considered docile by the dominant male. After Shah Sahib starts conducting his procedure of faith healing, he goes near Meher, and after a while utters, "It is a girl" (Khan, p. 18). Shah Sahib deduces that someone has done black magic on Meher and that someone is a "girl". Ghani Khan wants to assert that illiteracy is prevalent in society and belief in superstitious practices is heavily common. In the first place, black magic is not provable, yet the society presented by Khan holds a staunch belief in it. In the second place, Shah Sahib names a girl and not a boy. It is evident from the behaviour of the faith healer that the girls are susceptible to the patriarchal inclinations of society. In the next few lines, it is disclosed that Meher's mother felt proud

about her son getting bewitched by an 'evil girl'. The bleakness of the society and the gullibility, docility, and submissiveness of the women are lucid in this. Instead of questioning the healer or being gloomy, Meher's mother felt a sense of pride in this mishap. Ghani writes, "Did I not tell you that it was some evil woman who loved my handsome Meher" (Khan, p. 27). Meher's mother's attitude depicts societal barbarism. The dilemma is not that the women of the Pashtoon society do not object to the suppression, but they do not even acknowledge their exploitation, instead, they feel proud of it. The old women in the story are also tools for disseminating the objectifying ideology of the dominant males. Ghani writes, "All the old women looked sharply at the young and unmarried ones, which made them feel hot and confused" (Khan, p. 11). With the passage of the story, Meher's mother relayed this to his father. Who downplays the emotions of Meher's mother by saying, "black magic, 'Woman's talk'" (Khan, p. 16). Meher's father shows disdain towards his mother by calling his concerns delirium and blabber. Khan wanted to assert that it is a common practice in the Pashtoon society to disregard the feelings of women. The men constantly try to remind the women of their inferiority to the men through their actions and conversation. "And a curse on your mother for her sharp tongue" (Khan, p. 33). Meher's parents get into an altercation over his treatment. His mother is a strong proponent of Shah Sahib, while his father favoured both, allopathic treatment as well as faith healing. At last, his father is convinced by his mother to proceed with Shah Sahib. There is no doubt that most of the Pashtoons consider women as evil. Ghani Khan by using his stylistic qualities and artistic magic, satirizes not only the male members of the Pashtoon society but also the women who consider women inferior.

### Discussion

Ghani Khan's *The Pathans* provides a multi-layered narrative within which to interrogate

the complexities of gender-based dynamics within Pashtun society. (Wu, Robles, Thompson, 2024) Utilizing a feminist analysis of the novel, it is possible to extract several examples portraying the way it defies ant traditional gender roles and constructs surrounding ideal femininity and masculinity. The following textual examples illustrate these acts of resistance against the male-dominated ideal by Khan: a reinterpretation of ideal masculinity that undermines the patriarchal views on male strength and power: First, in the poem Zama Ranra My Hands, Khan describes a man's hands not as the centre of power and authority but as instruments of love and caring: "These tender, loving hands of mine— / Oh! May they never suffer a wound". Such interpretation defies the traditional model of ideal masculinity that is heavy and brutal resistance against female submission: The short story Babo Badmaash Babo the Rebel portrays a young woman, Babo, who revolts against the arranged marriage and decides her fortune: "My fist flares into the air of infinity. / A rock of freedom strikes my cadenced chest". This literal interpretation suggests that female tasks are not passive submits to a man's will but independent agents with unique destinies decry a female role in the patriarchal society: in Zama Dunyia My World Khan mourns women who are imprisoned by the social system and join in their grief: "Oh! My world, / who can constrain these eagle-bits? / Why to complain of disintegrating nests / when the falcon is about to fly!" reimagine of general: Another poem, Khoyi Zameer Lost Conscience calls for the destruction of a gender division as they only limit understanding of each other: "those whom I savoured as women are turning male; / A valley obeys incline not gender rule.". All of these building posts for feminism from Khan's poetic work offer a multidimensional view of gender-based relationships.

### Conclusion

To conclude, the feminist reading of Ghani Khan's The Pathans provided valuable insights

into how gender roles operate within Pashtun society. The construction of Pashtun women's identity was analyzed to find how power is exercised and negotiated, what tradition is, and how the patriarchal context doesn't eliminate Pashtun women's ongoing resistance. Significantly, Ghani Khan helps to comprehend not only the plight of Pashtun women but also their opportunities for articulation and freedom. Ghani Khan challenges established gender norms and patriarchal values – and this is what makes his work a significant tool in creating a critical gender discourse. Thus, this literary work allows reading and interpreting those gender dynamics, promoting further thinking and reflective debate about it. Gender, culture, and power dynamics in literary works have to be further studied instead of adopting monolithic interpretations and views. Such an understanding of the importance of literature for encouraging a critical gender discourse emphasizes its role in promoting equality and fighting against restraining cultural phenomena. Ghani Khan's works especially The Pathan and poems truly reflect his concerns for women's empowerment and education. Although Khan is not feminist in the Western sense of feminism his works truly reflect the idea of women's empowerment and their rights. The Pathan reflects how harshly and rudely women are being treated in Pashtun's patriarchal society. Khan challenges the patriarchal mindset of Pashtun.

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