

## KHUSHAL KHAN KHATTAK: FROM A MUGHAL LOYAL TO AFGHAN NATIONALIST

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### Abstract

Khushal Khan Khattak was a Pashtun poet and warrior in the 17th century. He had a long history of ancestral loyalty to the Mughals. However, circumstances gradually transformed him into a rebel. This shift from Mughal loyalist to Afghan nationalist was not sudden but a complex evolutionary process. The present study examines his transformation into an Afghan nationalist as a process of evolution, investigating the circumstances that supported this change. A qualitative method was employed in this historical research. Primary data were sourced from Khushal Khan Khattak's own books, while secondary data were obtained from books and articles. Imprisonment sowed the seed of change in Khushal Khan Khattak, which eventually altered his political outlook and culminated in his revolt.

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### INTRODUCTION

Khushal Khan Khattak was a Pashtun poet and warrior in the 17th century. He belonged to the Khattak tribe. His great-grandfather, Malik Akorh, had settled in the district of Nowshehra, and the place Srai Akora was named after him. The Mughal King Akbar assigned Malik Akorh the task of collecting taxes from the people of the region. Khushal Khan's ancestors were loyal to the Mughal dynasty, and so was Khushal Khan until he was imprisoned by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb came to power after a violent struggle for succession among his family members. Upon assuming power, he implemented policies that abolished taxes collected by local chiefs. Although Khushal Khan Khattak was affected by these changes, he did not initially resent them. However, he was eventually imprisoned due to a conspiracy by Mughal officials.

Imprisonment marked a turning point in Khushal Khan Khattak's perspective on loyalty to the Mughal dynasty. It was the moment he began to view the Mughals differently. However, it was not easy for Khushal Khan to outright reject the Mughals after his release. After all, his family had a long history of loyalty to the Mughals, spanning decades. They were held in high esteem by the Mughal dynasty and had a glorified history from the Mughal perspective. Thus, his transformation into an Afghan nationalist was an evolutionary process that culminated in his becoming an exclusive nationalist.

Khushal Khan Khattak's evolution into an Afghan nationalist serves as a prime example of an individual with deep ancestral loyalties to a king who later redefines his allegiance. Such a transformation requires not only rejecting the legacy of one's ancestors but also confronting it in the future. This is

no easy feat, as it involves navigating a society deeply influenced by the king. In Khushal Khan Khattak's case, even his own family resisted his change. This research is a historical study that traces Khushal Khan Khattak's life, highlighting his ancestral loyalty to the Mughals, his imprisonment, and his evolution into an Afghan nationalist. The focus is to argue that his transformation was a gradual process. By analyzing existing literature, the study presents evidence to support this evolutionary perspective.

The narrative of Khushal Khan Khattak often emphasizes his evolution into a nationalist. However, a review of the literature reveals that this evolution is rarely discussed as a central topic of debate. For instance, some writers criticize him for not immediately embracing nationalism after his imprisonment, while others accuse him of adopting Afghan nationalism only after losing everything. Conversely, some writers celebrate his Afghan nationalism without acknowledging the evolutionary process behind it.

For this research, it was essential to highlight this process, as it opens a window for discussion and contributes to the discourse on Khushal Khan Khattak.

**Keywords:** Khushal Khan Khattak, Afghan, Mughal, Aurangzeb, resistance, evolution, nationalist, Khattak

### Significance of the Research

Khushal Khan Khattak is a significant historical figure. Studying Mughal history without mentioning him is impossible. For Pashtuns, he is a poet and warrior who fought against a tyrannical king and authored numerous works that enriched Pashto literature. Given Khushal Khan Khattak's stature, this research holds historical significance. It will be valuable for history students and those specifically interested in studying Khushal Khan Khattak's evolution into an Afghan nationalist. Moreover, as a Pashtun, I believe this research is academically significant for Pashtun scholarship, where rigorous academic discourse is often lacking.

### Literature Review

"Khushal Khattak and His Political Thoughts" explores the political ideology of Khushal Khan Khattak. Written by Hanif Khalil and Hamida Bibi,

this paper examines his life and political thoughts, emphasizing his themes of resistance, Afghan unity, mutual consultation, and democracy. Throughout his life, Khushal Khan employed both pen and sword (Khalil & Bibi, 2007).

Khushal Khan Khattak's own book, *Daastar Nama*, is a masterpiece that outlines the methods a ruler must employ to govern successfully and efficiently (Khattak, 2007).

Sowan-Hayat Khushal Khan Khattak, authored by Dost Muhammad Kamil Mohmand, is a comprehensive biography covering nearly his entire life. This book provided critical insights for answering the research questions (Mohmand, 1951).

*Life and Work of the Illustrious Khushal Khan Khattak (Chieftain of Khattak)* by Dr. Khadija Begum Feroziuddin is another thorough work. Divided into two parts, the first section details Khushal Khan Khattak's life, which was instrumental in addressing the research questions and evaluating arguments (Feroziuddin, 2007).

"Khushal Khan Khattak and Swat," a research article by Sultan-e-Rome, describes Khushal Khan Khattak's visit to Swat (Sultan-i-Rome, 2014).

Niaz Muhammad's PhD thesis discusses Khushal Khan Khattak's educational philosophy. According to the author, Khushal Khan viewed education as a hidden training within an individual, acquired through life experiences rather than formal schooling. He considered the universe a school and the world a teacher, aligning his philosophy with renowned educationists (Muhammad, 2009).

Abubakar Siddique's *The Pashtuns* highlights Khushal Khan Khattak's struggle against the Mughals and his efforts to unite Afghan tribes, sparking a national liberation movement. His political thought portrays him as a visionary poet who served the Afghans with both pen and sword (Siddique, 2014).

*Khushal Khan Khattak* by Zandani Naghmy, a research article by Noor ul Basar Aman, examines Khushal Khan Khattak's literary works during imprisonment. This article was highly relevant to the research (Aman, 2012).

*Baz Nama of Khushal Khan Khattak* Translated in English is a translation of Khushal Khan Khattak's renowned book *BAAZ NAAMA* by Prof. Arif Naseem. The book is a detailed study on falconry (Khattak, 2007).

Khushal Khan Kay Afkar translates Khushal Khan Khattak's poetry and thoughts into Urdu. The book is authored by Raza Hamdani and Farigh Bukhari (Bukhari & Hamdani, 1952).

Swat Nama of Khushal Khan Khattak translates his famous work Swat Nama, which narrates his visit to Swat Valley to seek support against the Mughals. The work describes Swat's beauty and Pashtun society (Khattak, 2005).

Armaghan e Khushal by Syed Rasool Rasa comprehensively covers Khushal Khan Khattak's struggle against the Mughals, his literary and historical persona, teachings, philosophy, and poetry. This book was pivotal for answering research questions (Rasa, 2001).

## Methodology

The research employs qualitative, historical, and descriptive methods. Primary sources, such as Khushal Khan Khattak's poetry and diaries, were analyzed thematically. Secondary sources included books and research papers available in both hard and soft formats.

## Khushal Khan Khattak Before Imprisonment

Khushal Khan Khattak, born in 1613 A.D. and died in 1689 A.D., was not only a poet and warrior but also a philosopher, thinker, politician, hunter, educationist, and physician. He was the chieftain of the Khattak tribe. His great-grandfather, Malik Akorh, had conflicts with his relatives, leading him to settle in Nowshehra. The place Srail Akora was named after him. Khushal Khan Khattak mentions this in a couplet:

"Blessing over Akore Khan that he got the place of Srail / If you understand and think well, it's a worth-seeing place" (Muhammad, 2009, p. 2).

The loyalty of Khushal Khan Khattak's family began with King Akbar, who visited Nowshehra following his brother Muhammad Hakim Mirza. Akbar assigned Malik Akore the responsibility of protecting royal roads, collecting taxes on livestock imports and exports, and granted him property from Khairabad to Nowshehra. Malik Akore was killed in a conflict with the Bolak Khattaks. His son, Yahya Khan, succeeded him as chieftain. At the time, the Khattak and Yousafzai tribes were embroiled in enmity due to the expulsion of Yousafzai from Misri Banda and their

historical rebellion against the Mughals since Akbar's reign (Mohmand, 1951, p. 58). When Yahya Khan and his son Alam Khan were killed by the Sini Khattaks, Shahbaz Khan, Khushal Khan's father, became the chieftain. Khushal Khan Khattak was born in May or June 1613 during the reign of Mughal Emperor Jahangir. He writes about his birth: "It was the year 1022 of the Hijra / that I entered the world" (Feroziuddin, 2007, p. 53).

Little is documented about Khushal Khan Khattak's early life, but it is evident that his childhood was marked by adversity. He narrowly escaped death in two accidents during his youth (Khalil & Bibi, 2007). There is no definitive account of his early education, but as his father, Shahbaz Khan, served as a Mansabdar for the Mughal government and Peshawar was an educational hub, it is likely he received formal schooling. His extensive writings and poetry attest to his profound knowledge across various fields. Two of his teachers, Maulana Abdul Hakim and Awais Multani, are mentioned in his poetry (Muhammad, 2009, p. 3).

As a boy, Khushal Khan Khattak was passionate about hunting, which often distracted him from his studies.

He admits:

"One hour was given to learning and twenty to hunting / when could I give up my game for acquisition of lore" (Feroziuddin, 2007, p. 58).

In another verse, he laments: "A whole world of knowledge would have been mine / If I was not involved in the occupation of hunting" (Feroziuddin, 2007, p. 63).

His intellectual prowess stemmed from self-study, learning from nature, and his innate brilliance. By the age of 13, Khushal Khan Khattak was already participating in battles alongside his father, experiencing the life of a soldier early on. On January 18, 1641, Shahbaz Khan was killed by an arrow during a conflict with the Akakhel tribe. At 28, Khushal Khan Khattak, as the eldest among his brothers, was unanimously chosen as the chieftain of his tribe (Mohmand, 1951).

## Khushal Khan Khattak as Chieftain of his Tribe

Upon becoming chieftain, Khushal Khan inherited not only the responsibility of leading his tribe but also the duty to avenge his father's death at the hands of the Yousafzai tribe. His first act was to mobilize an

army and attack the Yousafzai, seeking retribution for their rebellion and his father's death. According to Haq (2007), Khushal Khan Khattak "suddenly entered their area, burnt many villages, and massacred the Akakhel, fought on multiple fronts, and returned successfully."

Meanwhile, Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan recognized Khushal Khan's chieftainship and granted him a mansab (rank). Khushal Khan himself recounts:

Fifty years had he completed,  
When was martyred Shahbaz Khan.  
The emperor of his time was he,  
That discerning Shah Jahan.  
To me he gave my father's place,  
Of my tribe was I the chief.  
Were it war or gifts they wanted,  
Lacking they found not in me.  
As was my father's expenditure,  
Mine became double of that,  
Thirty thousand Khattaks mine,  
Each one to my word intent. (Feroziuddin, 2007, p. 68)

This poem illustrates that Khushal Khan received greater privileges and concessions than his father. Additionally, he was granted the territories of Yusafzai and Tari Bolaq as property, which his father had previously held on lease. Notably, Khushal Khan's responsibilities extended beyond those of his ancestors. While earlier chiefs were tasked with guarding highways, collecting taxes, and maintaining order in surrounding areas, Khushal Khan was also sent on military expeditions deep into Hindustan.

### Khushal Khan Khattak's Participation in Expeditions

Khushal Khan's first major expedition was the siege of Taragarh Fort, where he achieved significant success compared to other prominent Mughal chiefs. Pleased with his performance, Emperor Shah Jahan rewarded him with four lakh rupees in cash, property worth one and a half lakh rupees, and ordered him to maintain a force of five hundred cavalries and one thousand infantries for royal service (Mohmand, 1951).

Subsequently, Khushal Khan actively participated in Mughal campaigns, including expeditions to Iran, Balkh, Badakhshan, and Kandahar under the command of Princes Dara Shikoh and Murad Bakhsh (Mohmand, 1951). Each successful campaign earned

him further rewards and incremental promotions, solidifying his reputation as a loyal and capable Mughal ally. Khushal Khan's loyalty to Shah Jahan is evident in his poetry:

After him was Babar, King of Delhi,  
He was indebted to Pathan for his place.  
After him Humayun, Babar's son,  
Whose armies and wealth were without bound.  
After him came Akbar, son of Humayun,  
Whom victory accompanied wherever he went.  
After him Jahangir, son of Akbar,  
During whose time Hind was like Paradise.  
Now the king is Shah Jahan, son of Jahangir,  
Who had been formerly in Balkh and Badakhshan,  
When Shah Jahan had open audience of his subjects,  
In his Darbar were seventy-two people represented.  
Had it but the breezes of Iraq and Khorasan,  
Jealous indeed, would paradise have been of Delhi's rivalry.

That glory which Shah Jahan gave to Delhi,  
When had any other sovereign bestowed on it such glory? (Biddulph, 2013, p. 58)

Khushal Khan Khattak was highly regarded by the Mughals for his loyalty and dedication. He was among the few Afghans who enforced Mughal laws and suppressed rebellions among his own people. He acknowledges this in his verse:

In the design I had upon the faithless and the rebellious,  
Filled my heart with anger at the enemies of the Emperor.

Passed as had been my life in loyalty and honour,  
In no one action of mine was any treachery to the Mughal.

My father and grandfather had sacrificed for the sake of their honour,  
No other Pathan was there whose honour was equal to mine. (Feroziuddin, 2007, p. 80)

### An Analysis

During this period, Khushal Khan Khattak was entirely detached from the concept of Afghan nationalism or national unity. Instead, he was driven by religious sentiment and unwavering loyalty to the Muslim emperor. According to Feroziuddin (2007), Khushal Khan Khattak "used Afghans for his personal gains in distant wars for the Mughals" (p. 77). As previously noted, Khushal Khan inherited his rivalry

with the Yousafzai tribe. Rasa (2001) explains that this enmity dated back to Malik Akore's time. When Malik Akore settled in Srail, his territory lacked water and was mountainous, prompting him to expand into Yousafzai and Mundanr lands, sparking perpetual tribal conflicts (p. 22).

When Emperor Akbar recognized Malik Akore's position, he sought to use the Khattaks against their old enemies, the Yousafzai. The Khattaks, in turn, relied on Mughal support to counter the Yousafzai, forging a lasting alliance between Khushal Khan's family and the Mughals.

A critical question arises: Was Khushal Khan Khattak's loyalty to the Mughals purely self-serving, or was it genuine? Khan (1867) argues that Khushal Khan fought the Yousafzai out of personal and tribal enmity, masking it as service to the emperor. However, there is no doubt that Khushal Khan harbored personal grievances against the Yousafzai, as he admits:

I had burnt Yousafzai in fire.

Yet this does not negate his loyalty to the emperor. Mohmand (1951) counters Khan's argument, asserting that Khushal Khan's forefathers were loyal to the Mughals, so his loyalty was equally genuine. If his allegiance were solely self-interested, why would he participate in distant campaigns where he had no personal stakes (Mohmand, 1951)? Khushal Khan himself states:

I was sincerely an accompanier of the King,  
And was never agreeable to his fall.  
My service was sincere,  
My heart and intention was clear. (Khattak, 1983)

In another verse, he reflects on his service to the Mughals:

Sometimes you ask me for service,  
And get the heart of Shah Jahan through service.  
And for this reason, kill Muslims unjustly,  
And cause them trouble in every possible way. (Khattak, 2016)

Khushal Khan Khattak's loyalty to the Mughals was intertwined with his self-interest. His personal ambitions and allegiance reinforced each other. Afghan society at the time was deeply divided, with tribal rifts exploited by the Mughals. A prime example is the conflict between the Khattak and Bangesh tribes from December 21, 1652, to November 10, 1654.

### Khushal Khan Khattak's Standpoint in the War of Succession

When Emperor Shah Jahan fell ill, a brutal war of succession erupted among his sons. Aurangzeb emerged victorious and proclaimed himself emperor on July 31, 1658. According to Mohmand (1951), during the conflict, Khushal Khan did not openly support any claimant but subtly favored Aurangzeb over Dara Shikoh. He references Afzal Khan, noting that after Dara Shikoh's defeat at Samogarh, Dara sought Khushal Khan's assistance to flee to Kabul. Khushal Khan dissuaded him, warning that local landlords were hostile toward him. Furthermore, Khushal Khan dispatched troops to counter Bhako Khan, who was rallying forces for Dara Shikoh near Attock. Bhako Khan was subsequently defeated (Mohmand, 1951).

Khushal Khan's opposition to Dara Shikoh stemmed from religious differences and personal grievances. Dara Shikoh had revoked Khushal Khan's jagir (land grant) in Yousafzai territory and awarded it to Bhako Khan.

### Khushal Khan Khattak's Wars Against Afghans Under Aurangzeb

In 1659, Khushal Khan fought for the Mughals in the Tirah Valley, where the Afridi and Orakzai tribes had rebelled. Kabul's governor, Mahabat Khan, sent an army under Mir Yaqub, the diwan of Peshawar, to suppress the uprising. Khushal Khan joined Mir Yaqub due to their amicable relations. The Mughals prevailed, and in subsequent years, Khushal Khan continued to combat Yousafzai rebels and Bhako Khan, achieving further victories (Mohmand, 1951). This phase of Khushal Khan's life reveals the fragmented state of Afghan society, which the Mughals exploited. Khushal Khan upheld the loyalty inherited from his ancestors while benefiting from it. He even fought against his fellow Afghans in service to the Mughals, as in the case of his opposition to Dara Shikoh, which was motivated by personal enmity. According to Feroziuddin (2007), "The first twenty-four years of Khushal's chieftainship were years of loyal service to the Mughals" (p. 77). However, a pivotal event was about to alter his political trajectory irrevocably.

### Evolution of Khushal Khan Khattak into an Afghan Nationalist

Khushal Khan Khattak's transformation from Mughal loyalist to Afghan nationalist represents a complex sociopolitical metamorphosis that requires careful contextualization. This study posits that his ideological evolution followed an incremental trajectory rather than constituting an immediate conversion. Even after his imprisonment - the seminal event that planted the seeds of dissent - Khattak continued serving the Mughal administration during his exile in Hindustan. This paradox underscores the gradual nature of his political awakening (Sultan-i-Rome, 2014).

Contrasting scholarly interpretations emerge regarding the timing and motivations behind Khattak's nationalist turn. Khalil and Bibi (2007) argue his incarceration precipitated an immediate and irrevocable rupture with Mughal authority, rendering subsequent reconciliation attempts futile (p. 120). Conversely, this research aligns with Sultan-i-Rome's (2014) contention that personal survival rather than ideological conviction initially drove Khattak's resistance (p. 114). The evolutionary framework accommodates both perspectives by recognizing imprisonment as the catalyst while acknowledging the protracted development of his nationalist consciousness.

### The Imprisonment Catalyst

The watershed moment occurred in 1664 when Governor Amir Khan and Diwan Abdur Rahim conspired to arrest Khattak under Aurangzeb's new taxation policies. The fifty-one-year-old chieftain described his shock at being shackled despite lifelong service:

"I thought that in the job of a Mughal, I would make gold hooves for a horse but my feet were shackled though I was innocent. What a reward for my hopes and services" (Mohmand, 1951).

His poetic account of the journey to Delhi reveals profound cognitive dissonance - maintaining faith in imperial justice while witnessing popular anguish at his arrest:

"I came to Noushehr in the morning in the same fashion

Weeping were the people all struck with horror at the sight...

I came to sarai, in a moment was sarai deserted,  
Though wouldst have said that never had been  
dwelling there mankind" (Biddulph, 2013, p. 47).

### Prison Literature and Ideological Foundations

During his two-and-a-half-year confinement across Peshawar, Delhi, and Ranthambore Fort, Khattak composed seminal works like Faraq Nama and Dastar Nama that articulated nascent nationalist themes. His prison poetry oscillates between personal grievance and proto-nationalist sentiment:

"Unjustly have I become Aurangzeb's captive in prison,

God is alone who knows what was my charge or crime...

As I was firm and honest in deeds and in good intentions,

No other Afghan was there in the service of the Mughal" (Biddulph, 2013, p. 60).

Approximately twenty poems directly criticize Aurangzeb's tyranny (Rasa, 2001, p. 24), yet their significance lies less in personal vendetta than in their articulation of collective oppression. Khattak's nostalgic verses about Kabul and Peshawar demonstrate how spatial alienation fostered territorial consciousness:

"The wind that comes from Kabul is no less than musk and amber for me.

When someone mentions Peshawar, my heart is enlightened" (Khattak, 2011).

### The Paradox of Post-Imprisonment Service

Released in May 1666 yet remaining in exile, Khattak's continued Mughal employment appears contradictory. However, this period proves crucial for understanding his evolving ideology. When the Yusufzai rebellion erupted in 1667, Aurangzeb summoned Khattak for counsel. His testimony against Amir Khan and Abdur Rahim (Khan & Himayatullah, 2020, p. 71) reveals strategic thinking - using his position to undermine adversaries while avoiding open rebellion.

The Langarkot Fort incident (1668) marked his first overt defiance. As newly appointed Kabul governor Mahabat Khan sought to construct a fort against the Yusufzai, Khattak refused cooperation:

"For a very long time I was committed worker of the government and Yusufzais were rebels...Now with

what face should I begin hostilities against them?" (Khattak, 2017, p. 346).

His poetic justification transcends tribal animus, embracing pan-Afghan solidarity: "The Mughal constructed the fort of Langar Kot; I stood by the honour of the Afghans" (Khan & Himayatullah, 2020, p. 74).

### The Great Battle of Khaibar (1672)

This watershed conflict demonstrated Khattak's strategic ambiguity. Officially accompanying Mughal commander Muhammad Amin Khan against the Safi tribe, Khattak allegedly secretly aided Afghan resistance (Rasa, 2001). The Mughals' catastrophic defeat - losing thousands of soldiers and their entire treasury - became celebrated in Khattak's poetry as an Afghan victory:

"The first fight was at the higher back of Mount Tatarah,  
When forty thousand Mughals were scattered like chaff" (Raverty, 1899, p. 151).

### Final Rupture with Mughal Authority

The decisive break occurred when Mahabat Khan manipulated Khattak's son Bahram Khan into challenging his father's leadership. This familial betrayal catalyzed Khattak's complete ideological transformation:

"By shedding Afghan blood and striking the sword in the Mughal cause, I cherished a hope of becoming a Mughal, but all to no purpose. In the End I remained the self-same Afghan. Alas! For the vain effort" (Feroziuddin, 2007, p. 167).

His subsequent guerrilla campaigns (1673-1689) and refusal of Aurangzeb's peace offers (1677) demonstrated unwavering commitment to Afghan autonomy. The dying warrior's final wish - burial where "the dust of Mughal horses' hoofs may not fall on my grave" (Feroziuddin, 2007, p. 231) - epitomized his nationalist conviction.

### Conclusion

Khushal Khan Khattak's ideological evolution from Mughal loyalist to Afghan nationalist constitutes a paradigm of political identity formation under colonial duress. His transformation was neither

immediate nor linear, but rather an accretive process shaped by:

1. **Structural Disillusionment:** The betrayal of ancestral loyalty through imprisonment shattered his feudal worldview.

2. **Spatial Alienation:** Physical displacement fostered territorial consciousness and cultural nationalism.

3. **Social Reciprocity:** Yusufzai protection of his family during exile transcended tribal divisions.

4. **Institutional Breakdown:** Mughal manipulation of kinship structures (via Bahram Khan) necessitated ideological clarity.

This study challenges reductionist interpretations of Khattak's resistance as either purely personal or immediately ideological. His prison writings and post-release actions reveal an evolving consciousness that gradually synthesized personal grievance with collective liberation doctrine. The evolutionary framework explains apparent contradictions - like post-imprisonment Mughal service - as necessary phases in ideological development.

Future research could explore comparative cases of nationalist awakening among colonized elites, or apply postcolonial theory to Khattak's literary construction of Afghan identity. His legacy endures as both a historical figure and a symbolic representation of anti-colonial resistance in the Pashtun collective memory.

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