



RESEARCH PAPER

A Pioneering New Form of Balochi poetry in Karim Dashti's *Ghazal*

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the paper is to explore a distinct poetic tradition within Balochi literature – one that pays homage to culture and homeland through a unique synthesis of ancient Balochi balladry and the Sufi-infused sensibilities of the Persian ghazal. While the Persian ghazal often centers on divine or romantic love, this Balochi tradition redirects those emotional and spiritual energies toward the land itself. The study has used a method of textual analysis and close reading to obtain results. Rooted in the classical dastan – a narrative and epic poetic form – this tradition simultaneously absorbs the lyrical intensity and mystic devotion characteristic of Persian literary aesthetics. This paper focuses specifically on the poetry of Karim Dashti, analyzing how his verses exemplify and advance this powerful form of cultural and emotional expression. The study can be further expanded to include a close reading of Zahoor Shah Hashmi and Atta Shad's poetry.

KEYWORDS Balochi Literature, Poetic Tradition, Culture, Homeland, Karim Dashti, Textual Analysis

Introduction

Dashti's poetry characteristically broadens two popular ancient poetic forms in Balochi literature or two distinct *tabb*, also called *marishth* (feelings or emotions) in Balochi poetry: These two *tabb* express the feeling of pathos and happiness, but in both cases, there is a sense of belonging. Pathos is expressed in a distinct poetic form called *zaheeronk*. *zaheeronk* (literal meaning yearning) is a poetic or more appropriately a song usually related to the person of *shwaanag* (shepherd). This pastoral poetic form is always accompanied with musical instrument of *donali* (Balochi flute) and *suroz* (Balochi violin or fiddle). This poetic form of longing, desire and loneliness is rich with musicality and a celebration of a life of separation and particularly it celebrates the landscape, as Balochistan's landscape is often considered unforgiving, it required a particular kind of strength, strength of a lover to withstand its *liwaar* (warm wind or desert's winds) and *hushkawag* (dryness, drought). Therefore, landscape in this particular poetic sense is a romance with this paradoxical generous but harsh land. This poetic mood expresses a peculiar pride of a Baloch person in his desert lifestyle, which is incidentally also indicated in Karim's surname meaning someone who belong to desert. Other *tabb* or *marishth* in the ancient Balochi poetry, which Dashti incorporates and enlarges its meaning in his work is *nazenk* (literal meaning praise). The *nazenk* expresses many types of feelings of happiness and mirth. A Balochi *nazenk* can be a wedding song where the bridegroom is praised for his bearing of Balochi culture and for his courage. This type of *nazenk* also celebrates Balochi *divan* or *maragash* (highly culturized get together for an occasion). Similarly, another kind of *nazenk*, such as *leelo* (lullaby), is also coloured in this typical celebration of Balochi culture of courage and upholding the tradition of protection of ancestral land. The Balochi *nazenk* is also a typical way of celebrating those who die in wars and those who go

to fight for a just cause. Hence, in all those occasions a Balochi poet traditionally, whether it is *zaheronk* or *nazenk*, expresses a particular kind of relation with her or his culture and land. In both sadness and happiness there is an expression of pride in this heritage in these traditional poetic moods in Balochi literature. In Dashti's poetry one can find an expression of these moods into a modern language and in the shape of a new developing but distinct Balochi *Ghazal* (Yusuf, 2009). In the following paragraphs I will try to explore and analyse Dashti's poetry keeping in view these romantic connections and colours of Balochi culture in his writings.

Dashti's poetry

Before analysing his poetry, I would like to begin with an anecdote which can help understanding Dashti's attitude towards culture and life. Somebody who new Dashti well and travelled with him on many occasions shared with me Dashti's views on the traditional pastoral lifestyle exist in Balochistan. He told me that Dashti once advised him that while travelling in Balochistan when you need to stay somewhere for a night or a meal always choose a Baloch house where you can see some rustic roots of Balochi culture. In other words, he prefers what is called Baloch *maragash* and a traditional *Mehmanjalli* (welcoming a guest). However, he is not, as we well see in his poetry, a traditionalist in many other things. He was one of the leading intellectuals of the post-colonial progressive politics in Balochistan. Writing in the post-colonial Balochistan in 1950s and 1960s, he played a pivotal role in spreading views related to the European Enlightenment about secular and progressive politics. In his many writings one can also see a moderniser of rustic culture. However, he seems to distinguish between materialistic or consumeristic version of modern life and rationalistic views of secular and progressive thought. In some respects, he can be seen as a Voltaire figure in Balochi literature particularly the way he uses his wit regarding religious traditions. According to another anecdote, he once accompanied a group of transgenders in the city of Turbat and went to the bookshop of his friend and told him that he and his friends had come for tea. This friend was not only a very religious person, but he sold mainly religious books. He uses his wit to create laughter in the expense of Mulla, for example, he says:

It is a sin to indulge in sensual love,

I pray to God that Mulla (priest) never taste it (234).

It is said that when Voltaire was on his death bed a priest advised him that to save your soul it is time to condemn the devil, to which Voltaire replied that it is no time to make any more enemies. At the end of his life Dashti poses as a certain Voltairean figure in Balochi literature. When terminally ill and knew that he is going to die, Dashti did not turn to faith for his soul but remained on the side of culture. How he manages to be paradoxically fascinated by both rustic cultural heritage of Baloch land and progressive modern thought is an interesting question.

Literature Review

Many modern literary theorists and scholars have pointed out that, after European Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and the later bourgeois revolutions in Europe, culture and particularly a high culture of the academia and the elite classes has replaced divine authority and idea of faith in general and consequently the modern national states have adopted this transcended view of culture and aesthetic as their national pride and call for unity (Eagleton, 2014). In the post-colonial world in the twentieth century many national liberation movements have taken to these ideas and promoted their national

cultures as their supreme ideals. Dashti was from that generation of Baloch intellectual and poets who were very prominent in positioning their national aspiration into their national cultural context and fought for political and cultural freedom. Many poets took to ancient heroic song writing and traditional *dastan* style poetry to celebrate the Baloch past and heroic battles. Dashti among other poets such as Atta Shad and Hashmi were uniquely gifted in modernising the ancient poetic form in Balochi literature and in doing so, they maintained the nationalistic aspiration of progress. Therefore, we have witnessed the transformation of Balochi poetry from its century's old oral traditions into modern poetic forms. One can notice this change of form and tone during the middle of 20th century (Badal khan, 2003).

Material and Methods

The study has used textual analysis methods and close reading to obtain results. Textual analysis is a key methodological approach in literary studies. It involves the close reading and interpretation of literary texts to uncover deeper meanings, structures, themes, and cultural significance.

Textual analysis in literature is the detailed examination of the structure, content, and meaning of a text. The goal is to understand how language, form, and context contribute to its meaning and effect. The purpose of textual analysis is to interpret the meaning of the text, to explore themes, symbols, and motifs, understand how style and form shape meaning, to examine the relationship between text and context such historical, social, and cultural of a particular writer.

The key step in textual analysis involves selection of a text such a novel, poem etc. and considering the genre and author, period and relevance to one objective closely read the text.

Results and Discussion

Dashti's romance with rustic roots, however, presents him a romantic figure alongside his Voltairean wit directed against religious conventionalism. Therefore, he is both a romantic poet of Baloch land and rustic lifestyle and also bearer of the ideals of European Enlightenment. In the following Ghazal not only the colours of Balochi zaheronk and nazenk are brought together but also a new idea of national aspiration is added to the rustic idea of belonging.

Heart aches for Bolan.
 When Bolan becomes like a spring tree.
 Oh heart, like a lover for the love of his beloved,
 Bolan becomes like beautiful Shari
 Like a mother's heart yearns for her children,
 There won't be a Bolan without Balochistan.
 There seems to be no more throbbing heart,
 Bolan won't exist without a loving heart.
 I won't share your (Bolan) secrets to anybody,
 Only to people who know (spiritually) Bolan.
 As I have told you Karim Dashti,
 The days of Bolan will remain of despair (226).

The mood changes from celebration to pathos. Written in Persian *Ghazal* form, the poem presents a theme characteristically ingrained in Balochi culture: celebration of a

mountain or a stream or a valley which symbolises the national character of strong will, honour and freedom. The vast desert and arid mountains have a double effect of freedom and hardship in Balochi poetry which is also part of rustic Baloch culture. Dashti is aware of the cost of freedom of the rustic life in the desert, the cost of this freedom is hardship and loneliness which is expressed in a different mood at the end of the poem. The reference to Shari representing sensual love is a characteristic of Persian *Ghazal* which Dashti uses to express his hope and aspiration for a new future.

Dashti gives a new political but not less romantic meaning to ancient Baloch's pride in his isolated rugged abode. Bolan takes a new significance of a nationalistic character in the reference to Balochistan which is a modern bourgeois concept of state nationalism. This is a new sensibility in the rustic consciousness, a larger perspective of belonging and nationhood. Balochi poetry broadly lacks this larger consciousness, it operates, like the nomadic lifestyle of ordinary Baloch, in a localised perspective and in a geographically uncertain manner. One can always find the idea of Baloch people with distinct tribal and local identities but the concept of country or a state in its modern sense is not something within the grasp of Baloch consciousness. For instance, the word for country and state is either *Dheih* or *Mulk* which has a much-localised meaning than let us say the meaning of country as in the case of country of India or USA. Dashti and many other poets of his generation add a new sensibility of nationhood which Baloch culture has always resisted and of which Dashti is aware of, as he laments the despair of Bolan. Atta Shad, probably the most prominent poet of the modern Balochi poetry, expresses a similar mixture of anguish. Shad in his supreme talent of representing the general anxiety into the language of individual emotions places the national question in a form of a fading hope of sensual encounter.

Here set in a blazing winter, the anguish of my land has no end,
Where haven't I looked for the warmth of your body in this darkness?

There is a lack of concrete relatedness, a lack of real tangible connection. The *Deih* (land) has become this idea, this deceptive and remote conception of nation. The paradoxical association of the lack of warmth and blazing winter shows the real dilemma in Shad's metaphor. Shad is a much more sophisticated craftsman and a greater poet, but he is not as close to rustic culture as Dashti. Shad's *Ghazal* form has the colours of Balochi culture, it also expresses the anguish and tone of barren desert, but it lacks the rustic simplicity. It lacks the *Laiko* (a distinct type of *zaheronk*) which is the spirit of life in a rugged landscape. When you come out on *domag* (a small hilltop) and look at far deep into a valley the first thing come to one's mind is this wistful distance and happiness of panorama. Therefore, Dashti's poetry is much closer to the spirit of Balochi culture, the rustic localised identity, but also aspirational in a poignant way. As in this particularly "*Laikoicized*" Balochi *Ghazal*:

Spring breeze has quickened me ('*chad*' – burning desires, quick),
The gentle wind has brought some memories.
My yearning heart is like a wine glass, and it can contain all the pains,
I will suffer for your woes (leaving you pain free).
Flowers take me to the memories of your company,
The songs of laughing dove (*Shantul*) brings your news.
Oh, the centre of love and affection,
Come to the *Kul* (house) of my longings for you.
The time travels in its own pace,
The moment of broken promise will remain.
The time is ripe for a bountiful spring,

Longing for a friendship to develop.
 I am looking around,
 The path I have travelled.
 Hurrah! For those glorious moments,
 When the moon-faced beloved will come to visit me (227).

The pain, the wistfulness, the distance and the longing are characteristic of *zaheeronk*. Dashti, however, adopts a distinct Balochi form of *Ghazal* to sing the song of the *Shwanag*. The difference of form and tone can be seen in comparison to a traditional Balochi *shair* (a long poem with a persistently single tone) in this *tabb* or *zaheeronk* mood. For instance, the following *shair* by Mulla Qasim, famous eighteenth century Balochi poet, has a similar rustic theme as Dashti's poem written in traditional form of a Balochi *shair*.

Hey, laughing dove come and set here with your beautiful voice,
 You are the pretty bird with a parrot-like tongue,
 Be my messenger and take my greetings to somebody far.

Qasim's wistful pleading to *Shantul* (laughing dove) has all the colours and tone of sensual desires of the proud lover. The lover is remote and lonely, but he never becomes miserable. He has all the haughtiness and pride of a mountain man. The *shair* has the heroic epic characteristic, it runs with same length and line for a dozen stanzas. It is monotonous and dull while reading because it is always composed for singing by the traditional Balochi ballad singers. The ballad singer called *Pahlwan* makes the monotonous *shair* alive by the sheer power of his *dapgal* (vocal). The *shair* does lack the sharpness of the *Ghazal*, the changing rhythm and tone. However, the concept of love which emerges in both the ancient *shair* form of Balochi poetry and in the modern forms has the same features of pride, purity and a very distinct type of romance which can be compared to some extent with what is called courtly love in medieval English romance. The English translator and commentator of Balochi poetry M. Longworth Dames (1902) says of Baloch romance that 'Love among the Baloches is, I believe, more spiritual and less gross in its manifestations than among most Oriental races, and the tone of the numerous love-poems is often of a genuinely romantic character' (Dames, p. 268). Dames is obviously talking about the Baloch *shair* and *Dastan* tradition and the *zaheeronk tabb*, as until then modern poetic forms had not taken shape in Balochi poetry. But by and large Balochi *Ghazal* retains the romantic connection of old poetry with significant changes of form and with a new national vision, as we can see in Dashti's poetry in more delicate terms.

Dashti's poetry reminisces the past, the purity of desire of the pastoral life, and also very consciously see the anxiety of the impending modernity. This looking back and forward is not only expressed in words in his poetry, but Dashti adopts this as the very formation of his poetry. While retaining the mood of the *zaheeronk* in his modern poetic form he records the long-held resistance of Baloch culture to embrace the outer world. He is self-conscious of his modern technique and broader vision. He knows that Balochi poetic mood has resisted the Persian and Urdu *Ghazal* and linguistic variation for centuries. As he expresses his uncertain future in a new day light:

You stay the dark night of my nerve-racking pains,
 The day light will bring disquiets of the strange worlds.
 The day light will take away the tormenting recollections of my beloved,
 You stay the dark night of my nerve-racking pains.
 Twilight is like my dearest has just unfurl her dark hair,
 The line between the hairs is like the Milky Way.
 The flower on her hair is like a burning star,

Her face looks like a star at dawn (119).
 Moreover,
 I welcome the gentle clouds of the future (*Wahag*) in my breezing memory of the past (*Tranag*),
 So that I can drink and forget my pains.
 If the friend (here meaning the imagined beloved) takes the first step and comes to me,
 I will break the strong wall of Balochi resolve (232).

The first poem shows the anxiety of a coming age. Although there is hope of a new light and progress, the uncertainty of waking up in a strange world is troubling. The second poem again presents the resistance, resolve and an uncertain hope. By romanticising the dark night of the pastoral past Dashti confronts question of change and progress with apprehension and irony. In the second poem he strikes a deal with himself. The recurring tendency of looking backward and forward in Dashti's poetry takes a definitive form here. Again, he resolves his dilemma with a well-known *Laiko* mood, which is present throughout his poetry in the expression of two pastoral lingos of *Wahag* and *Tranag*. These two expressions summarise the mood of *zaheronk* and pastoral poetry of Balochi. *Wahag* is the expression of a future desire which is not definite and is unreal, it defies any planning and real wish and that is why it is full of pathos. *Tranag* is also full of sorrowful memories of the past, memory can be good and bad but *Tranag* in pastoral poetry creates a mood of sadness. Dashti uses these expressions to present the mood of anxiety for a future which has suspended on the face of the hard to overcome memory of the past.

There is no end to our unfulfilled desires and longings for some indulgence in love,
 Your gloomy unadorned face is due to your attachment to my name.
 I had forsaken the garden of paradise and wanted pleasure in the world,
 Look at my fate, life has passed, and destitution has no end.
 Those who travelled to Medina and got the reward of pleasure with Houris,

It is my fate that I couldn't break my faithfulness to the sweet water of *Dokurm* But look at the dignified honour of Karim that he is dead but still on his feet,

Head is in the dust but still thinks himself master of his fate (257).

In this beautiful *Ghazal* Dashti's creativity is at its peak. It is hard to convey the sublimity of expression and all-encompassing niceties of cultural decorum of Dashti's Kechi language here into my rather dull translation. He adopts the refined diction of the lover in Persian and Urdu *Ghazal* with a distinct Balochi ironical tone. He admonishes and celebrates at the same time, the ironical tone and the diction of *Ghazal* gives him the freedom of expression required here to bring together whatever is going on in the cultural context. The remarkable achievement of Dashti's use of Persian *Ghazal* form is that he not only introduces the mood of Baloch *zaheronk* and traditional context of Balochi *Nazenk*, but he also includes a cultural and political critique which unlike many is consciously progressive. Progressive in the sense that he does not just celebrate the tradition, which is the dominant mood of the post-colonial Balochi poetry, he looks at the tradition with admiration but also with apprehension and anxiety. This level of poetic consciousness is very rare in Balochi and also in Urdu poetry.

Conclusion

In this article through a critical analysis of Dashti's poetry I have tried to introduce the cultural context to modern Balochi poetry and in this context try to understand the

progress it has made recently. Dashti is one of the founding members of a group of intellectuals and literary writers who are mainly responsible for modern Balochi literary awakening in a post-colonial political and cultural setting. This group include people like Gul Khan Naseer, Syed Zahoor Shah Hashmi, Atta Shad and many others, who have transformed and raised the level of poetic consciousness of Balochi literature. Dashti's contribution is manifold in the broader literary and cultural discussion, which I realised would be impossible to capture in one article. However, if we look back at this period of Balochi literature one thing which stands out is the development of *Ghazal* form and its distinct Balochi mood. In this regard, Dashti's very refined understanding of culture and his close observation of rustic sensibility in Baloch society give his voice a unique strength to present a broader and meaningful perspective to radical cultural change.

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