



# **Program for Culture & Conflict Studies**

## **Understanding Afghan Culture**

Occasional Paper Series

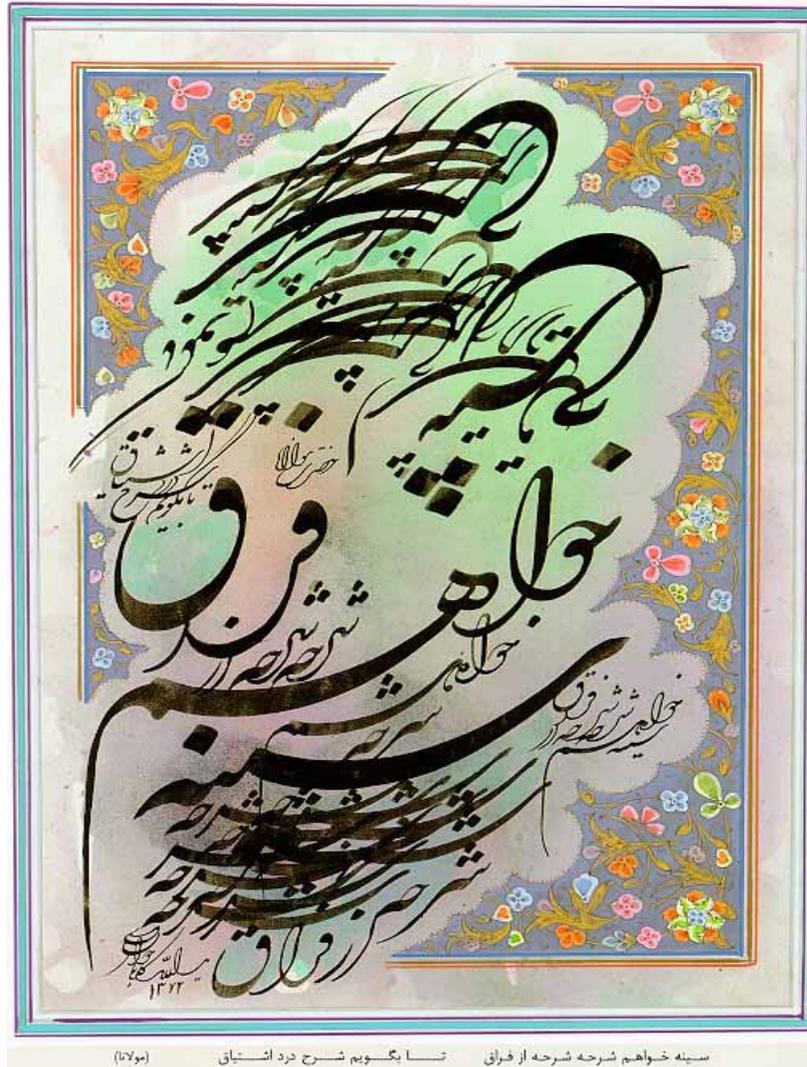
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Monterey, CA

# Poetry:

## Why it Matters to Afghans?



**Program for Culture and Conflict Studies (CCS)**  
**Department of National Security Affairs**  
**Naval Postgraduate School**

September, 2009

<sup>1</sup> See: <<http://nayeshkaste.blogfa.com/>>.

## **Program for Culture & Conflict Studies at Naval Postgraduate School**

The Naval Postgraduate School's Program for Culture and Conflict Studies (CCS) supports the mission of Combined Joint Task Force Afghanistan commands and the International Security Assistance Force. CCS serves as a reference and provides a feedback/vetting loop for information operations products via our team of American and Afghan experts. The program provides detailed analyses of insurgent propaganda, narratives, and methods. Through field research and analysis, CCS provides a framework, and recommends methodology that utilizes culturally appropriate forms of communication in support of the mission.

This paper on Afghan poetry will offer IO practitioners and analysts valuable insight into the power of poetry within the Afghan battle space. Efforts have been made to include both historical and cultural explanations indicating why poetry is important within Afghan society and the current conflict environment in Afghanistan. The intention of this paper is to help operationalize the many facets poetry offers U.S. and Coalition forces engaging and communicating with Afghans on a regular basis. Understanding enemy "narratives" requires further knowledge of cultural tropes and values, such as poetry, which will inevitably help western forces compete with or counterbalance the insurgent domination of the IO battleground. Operational examples of analyzed poetry are given throughout this document, including pertinent uses within the counter-IED and counternarcotics realm. Additionally, a primer into how Afghan insurgent forces such as the Taliban and the Tora Bora Military Front operationalize poetry and create narratives that resonate with Afghan society is also included. It is with this approach that the CCS hopes to provide the necessary tools and analysis to stimulate US and Coalition forces' attempt to dislodge the insurgent stranglehold on the IO realm and to better enhance allied communication with our Afghan counterparts and citizens.

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# An Effective Communication Tool



1

زه يم زمري په دى نړى له مائل نسته      په هندو سندو په تخار او په كابل نسته  
بل په زابل نسته      له ما اتل نسته  
امير كروړ (جهان پهلوان)

I am the lion, in this world there is no one braver than me.  
In India, in Sindh, in Takkhar, in Kabul, nor in Zabul.  
There is no one braver than me!

*Amir Kror (The world's best wrestler)*

“A nation of poets” is how Louis Dupree has described the Afghans.<sup>2</sup> Poetry is one of the main pillars of Afghan literature entailing realistic social and political implications. Afghans use poetry as a tool to communicate feelings and thoughts on a daily and customary basis. Due to the minimal presence of print media and the publishing industry, literature in general and folk literature in particular is shared in oral form. Inability to read and write among the majority of the population is also believed to have reinforced the spoken form of literature. Prior to 1978 Marxist coup, Afghanistan’s literacy rate was estimated at 11.4 percent.<sup>3</sup> According to Human Development Reports, this figure has improved only marginally to 28 percent in 2008.<sup>4</sup> These figures suggest that literacy

<sup>1</sup> See: <<http://www.jahromchalipa.blogfa.com/cat-6.aspx>>.

<sup>2</sup> Dupree. Louis, *The Afghans Honor a Muslim Saint* Hanover, NH (1976) p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Peter R. Blood, ed. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> For further information see “Human Development Reports.” <<http://hdr.undp.org/en/>>.

continues to remain limited to a minute proportion of the population. Thus, written literature has been confined within the boundaries of a few literary circles, primarily in a few urban cultural centers and educational organizations (i.e. Kabul University, The Writers Society of Afghanistan). An undeveloped print media in addition to a low level of literacy has given way to poetry as an oral tradition, conducive to a highly rural and tribal Afghan society. Therefore, the importance of poetry as a widely used instrument of communication among Afghans can not be underestimated. Realizing that poetry is critical to the process of communication among Afghans we will need to take further action in incorporating poetry in our communication efforts with Afghans. For example, with help from Afghan intellectuals and cultural advisers we could use poetry to add to the resonating impact of our Pashtu and Dari IO messages.

As in most other languages, the types of sentiments that are expressed and shared with others through poems are comprised of love towards *Khoda*, God, as well as fond emotion for a family member (mother, father, son, daughter), and a friend. Of course, other types of feelings, such as hatred, happiness, grief; patriotism, vulnerability, pride, loneliness, etc. are also expressed in a poem—examples of which will be discussed in this paper.

Additionally, poetry has been used as an instrument to reason, to communicate deep thoughts, make or support an argument, and draw attention to the importance of an issue. Perhaps, this is because it allows one to express complex ideas and deep feelings in short verses and only with a few words. The utility of poetry in this manner has been ubiquitous within both, written and oral (folk) literature. A comparative glance at the Afghan versus Western literature reveals that poetry plays as deep and expansive a role in shaping the Afghan literature as essay, drama, and novel<sup>5</sup> do in the West. Professor Wasef Bakhtari maintains that while there is an abundance of poetry books, there exists a serious shortage of novel writers in Afghanistan. He points out, “You can not even compare the quality and quantity of novels produced in the West with the level of its production in Afghanistan.”<sup>6</sup> This is not to suggest that westerners do not appreciate poetry; or Afghans are unaware of the value of essay, drama, and novel. Just as novel and essay constitute the dominant literary forms in the West, poetry serves the needs of the society best in Afghanistan.

The question then arises: Why poetry has been the genre of choice—why not essay or drama? Relative to most other literary forms a poem is easy to memorize. This literary form is distinguished by rhyme and rhythm, and also it carries a deep and or complicated thought in a compressed structure. Studies have shown that as mnemonics devices, generally, rhythm and rhyme facilitate learning and memorization.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as a reflection of thoughts and emotions, poetry is widely used, and plays an eminent role in the communication process among Afghans.

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<sup>5</sup> This includes novella and short story.

<sup>6</sup> Discussion with the author during a presentation at Defense Language Institute: Summer (2007).

<sup>7</sup> To read more about the connection between rhythm, rhyme and memorization, see the following: Danny and Kim, Why Nursery Rhymes. <<http://www.dannyandkim.com/WhyNurseryRhymes.html>>. Yate, Donnalyn. Memory Tips for Math, Memorization and Learning Styles Memory Joggers, Irvine, CA (2006); Ruben, C. David. Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes Oxford University Press, USA (1998) p. 175-227.

Within the past three decades of war and political turmoil, poetry has been greatly politicized<sup>8</sup>. Numerous collections of poetry concerning political issues have been published either in Afghanistan, or abroad (Iran, Pakistan, Europe, the U.S. and Canada). Subsequently, it has played a prominent role in shaping and the expression of political views among Afghans. This paper examines the intertwined relationship between politics and poetry. Additionally,, a few examples of Pashtu poetry by Rahman Baba, a historic Sufi Pashtun poet whose work is not only highly regarded among Pashtuns, but also among all segments of Afghan society, will be used as a contextual and analytical guide to help examine the relationship between politics and poetry. Rahman Baba's poetry will help serve as a reflection of Pashtuns' worldview and their general attitude on moral and social issues.

Moreover, this paper presents Pashtu poems written by the Taliban, as well as moderate and progressive contemporary poets, all of which are translated and analyzed. This could help analysts and Coalition IO personnel to gain a better understanding of the way westerners and Afghans perceive current socio-political realities of Afghanistan. A comparative glance enables us to understand the manner in which each group differs from (or is similar to) the other in reaction certain issues and events. The main purpose of this document is to shed some light on the way poetry shapes and mirrors Afghan's outlook; it is to familiarize the reader with the manner in and the extent to which feelings and thoughts are expressed in poetry among Afghans. This condense study aims to initiate an understanding of poetry to better understand the Afghans' psyche, in order to help facilitate an effective and fruitful communication process between Americans and the Afghans.

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<sup>8</sup> Examples of Taliban's poetry is translated and analyzed in this paper.

## Rhythm and Rhyme



*Na shabam, na shab-parastam, ke hadis e khaab goyam  
Cho ghulam e aaftaabam, ham a z aaftaab goyam*

Neither am I the night, nor the worshiper of the night  
As I am the slave of the sun, all I say is about the sun

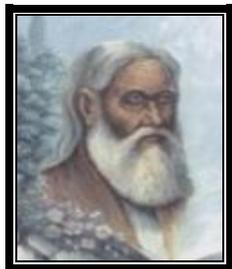
*Balkhi (Rumi)*

Wrapped in deep emotions and thought, the language of poetry in Afghanistan is the language of *wazn*, balance or rhythm, and *qafia*, rhyme. Abiding by the many other rules of poetry, *badee*, rules of creating a poem, and *arooz*, the art creating balance and flow in poem, each verse of a poem must maintain a specific *wazn*, and continuity in *qafia*. The combination of the two adds a melodic effect to the lyrics. This melody, as a direct result of the combined effects of rhyme and rhythm, makes the poem more pleasant to read and easier to memorize.

For example, in the following *bait*, or verse, by Rahman Baba, the number (11) of the *heja(s)*, syllables of the first *masra* or half of the verse is equal to the number of *heja(s)* of the second *masra*. This equality in the quantity of syllables between two *masra(s)*, adds unity of sound and rhythm to the poem.

*Badsha-hano ka qasrona krel abad  
Maa de eshq emaratona krel bonyad<sup>10</sup>*

**Though Kings have built palaces  
I have laid the foundation of the buildings of love**



*Rahman Baba*

<sup>9</sup> See: <[www.atlasofpluckedinstruments.com](http://www.atlasofpluckedinstruments.com)>.

<sup>10</sup> Sampson, Robert and Khan, Momin. The poetry of Rahman Baba: Poet of the Pukhtuns University Book Agency, Peshawar. (2005) p. 163.

<sup>11</sup> See: <[www.poetry-chaikhana.com](http://www.poetry-chaikhana.com)>.

Furthermore, in this verse, “*abad*” and “*bonyad*” rhyme with each other. Among other factors rhyme and rhythm adds to the flow, harmony and therefore, ease of memorization. Hence, the fact that a poem is easy to remember makes it an ideal tool for transformation of knowledge and exchange of ideas *sina ba sina*, from chest to chest.

The widespread usage of the poetry in Afghanistan has led to its development and its proliferation in kind and quantity. It has manifested itself in various forms. *Ghazal, Qasida, Masnawi, Robaee, Landdai, Mokhmmas, Mossadas, Tak-baiti, and Do-baiti*, in most if not all spoken languages, are among the various structures within which Afghans write poems.

Utilizing such structures, philosopher-poets have addressed various social, political, ethical, religious, and historical issues and narratives in a vast number of lyrics throughout history. Beside philosophical discussions, Afghan writers have also used poetry to write narratives of major historical events as well as other types of narratives such as epic, love story, religious, folklore, and children stories. Narratives have been mainly manifested in the *Masnawi*<sup>12</sup> form.

Afghans have also converted many commonly used proverbs into one-liner poems and vice versa:

*Kaasa e chini ke sada mekonad  
Khod sefat e khash ada mekonad*

**When a China bowl makes a loud noise  
It describes its own qualities [fragility and vulnerability]**

Clearly, the above *tak-baiti*, verse is a poem *and* a proverb Afghans continually use such one-liners, and proverbs, or a combination of two, in order to give an example, make a point, defend a position, or to emphasize the importance of an issue.

Classical poets have expressed their religious sentiments and love for God and a desire for seeking truth through poetry. They have also endeavored to teach their disciples, as well as the public, moral values in accordance with Islamic teachings. They have framed various lessons of morality within short and long story/narrative format. Currently, Taliban are incorporating similar messages mainly within the classical form of poetry in their Jihadi literature.

To achieve this, Sufi poets have also written long epic and love stories, equivalent to modern version of novels. For example, Jami is the author of “*Yosof o Zulaikha*”<sup>13</sup>, Nezami is the author of “*Laili o Majnon*”<sup>14</sup>, and “*Makhzan ul Asrar*,” “The Treasure of Secrets,” Ferdawsi wrote the “*Shahnama*,” “The Book of Kings,” a collection of epic stories, Mawlana Jalaludin Balkhi wrote the “*Masnawi e Manawi*,” Khosh'hal Khan Khatak is the author of “*Fazal Nama*,” “The Book of Blessing.” These books exemplify a vast number of literary works that serve as the foundation for the contemporary writers and poets to build upon.

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<sup>12</sup> A type of poetry in which all verses are constituted of equal number of syllables, but each verse rhymes differently. *Masnawi* is predominantly used to tell a story.

<sup>13</sup> A love story parallel to Romeo and Juliet.

<sup>14</sup> A love story parallel to Romeo and Juliet.

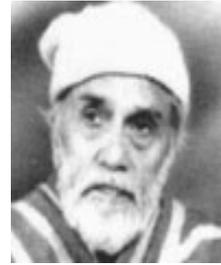
Cultural values, social norms, opinions, facts, and emotions are all embedded in a vast number of poems and narratives in Pashtu, Dari and other Afghan languages. Through poetry we can learn the way Afghans use symbolism, metaphors, and other indirect expressions used in the communication process. A careful study and analysis of this genre could prove helpful in understanding the Afghan mind. As a result, we could utilize poetry when designing I.O. products, during meetings with Afghan authorities, or even having a casual conversation with an Afghan. In short, as an effective channel of communication, poetry can help us strengthen our relationship and achieve success with our Afghan partners.



Khosh'hal Khan Khatak



Ahmad Shah Baba



Khalilullah Khalili

## Poetry in Politics

څو چې دا جهان ودان وي  
څو چې پاتې يو افغان وي

Until there is this earth and sky  
Until there is life on earth

تل به دا افغانستان وي

There will always be an Afghanistan

څو چې دا ځمکه آسمان وي  
څو چې ژوند په دې جهان وي

Until there is this universe  
Until there remains one Afghan

Put simple, a political poem is one in which political opinion and or patriotic sentiments are expressed. Throughout Afghan history, political activists, politicians, army officers, and journalists have used poetry to convey their opinions and theories on social, political, and economic issues. Statesmen, tribal leaders, and army generals such as Ahmad Shah Baba, and Khoshal Khan Khatak, journalists and philosophers such as Mahmud Tarzi, and Khalilullah Khalili are some of the prominent individuals who used poetry to express political opinion and patriotic sentiments. Among them, Khoshal Khan Khatak, who lead a strong Afghan opposition against the Mughol Empire, and Ahmad Shah Baba, who is known as the founder and the father of the nation, are referred to as the *warrior poets*. Being a poet confirmed their intellectual legitimacy, which inturn reinforced their authority as capable leaders. Thus, expressing political opinion and patriotic feelings has been a long lasting tradition which has continued to thrive and develop throughout the tumultuous history of the country. In other words, in Afghanistan politics and poetry are highly intertwined.

Since Afghanistan transformed into the main stage on which the Cold War, regional rivalries, and civil war took place over the past three decades, the political poet has occupied the center-stage in the Afghan literary arena. An explosive number of political poems written by exiled Afghan poets from all around the world surfaced in print and electronic media. In other words, poetry became politicized.

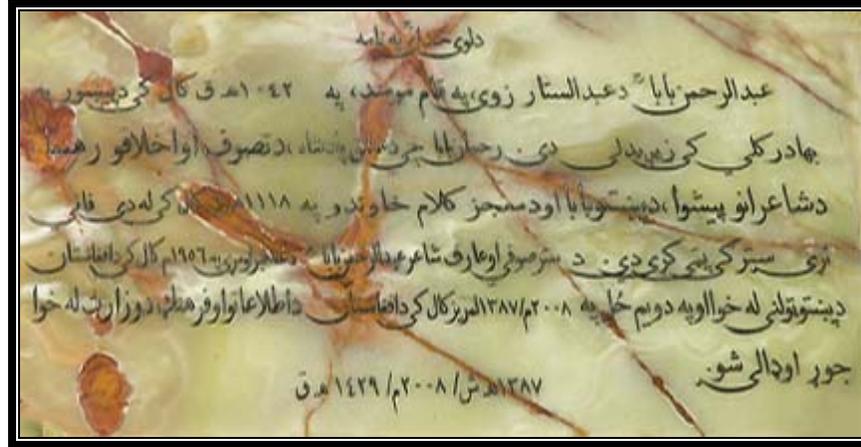
This politicization seems to be the result of many social and political transformations within this period. As politics became intertwined with armed conflict, persecution, and violence, those writers who expressed their political opinions in a direct and emphatic manner became susceptible to imprisonment, torture, and even death. The indirect nature of expression in poetry provided the writer with a relatively less dangerous venue to express discontent with the establishment.

Moreover, poetry has served as a suitable instrument with which to appeal to the readers' religious and patriotic sentiments. Proponents of various social and political movements have attempted to arouse the public's emotions through poetry, and sought to persuade them to take action in support of their cause.

Precision and conciseness is another general characteristic that, if written thoughtfully, could make poetry an efficient and effective tool for communicating deep thought and emotions. The sweet language of a good poem could add to the effectiveness of the implicit message embedded within it.

It is also critical to recognize that decades of warfare have emotionally scarred almost all Afghans. Politically motivated killings, unjust treatment of the general public, and a foray of persecutions by various warring factions have emotionally wounded most, if not all Afghans. Furthermore, an extended period of involuntary migration has taken a toll on the Afghan psyche. Therefore, it can be assumed that the therapeutic nature of this literary genre has made poetry the instrument of choice for grappling with decades of psychological aches and torments ensuing conflict, destruction and violence.

## Pashtun Poems of Rahman Baba: A Few Examples



<http://www.farda.org/>

Rahman Baba is believed to have lived between A.D. 1650 and 1715<sup>15</sup>. Unlike the two other famous Pashtun poets, Ahmad Shah Baba, and Khosh'hal Khan Khatak, Baba is not a *warrior* poet. He is a Sufi poet and philosopher. Predominantly, using the romantic traditional *Ghazal* structure, his poetry has focused on expressing his views on moral, religious, and social issues. Baba shows no hesitation in challenging the political establishment of his time, tradition, and even the commonly shared views of his contemporaries on religion. He is famous and revered for promoting social and economic justice, and expressing his views with elegance, simplicity and sincerity. It is for these reasons that Afghans refer to him as *Baba*, the grandfather. The following are a few from among the thousands of lyrics that he composed throughout his life.

که د عشق لاره اغزنه وي هر گور  
د عاشق په پښو څپلی دي د اور

**However thorny the path of love  
The lover wears flaming sandals<sup>16</sup>**

Rahman Baba emphasizes the importance of resolve, consistency, and hard work while trying to accomplish an objective.

### Symbolism

“Thorn” in this lyric is the symbol of an obstacle, and hardship. “Flame” or “fire,” symbolizes a strong will and determination for success.

<sup>15</sup> Sampson, Robert and Khan, Momin. The poetry of Rahman Baba: Poet of the Pukhtuns University Book Agency, Peshawar. (2005) p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid: p. 182-183.

### Operational Use

When working with an Afghan counterpart to solve a problem, or discussing the importance of strong resolve, and persistence in achieving goals, the use of this particular lyric would certainly be effective. One could begin a sentence with:  
As Rahman Baba says:

کار همه په اراده د خدای موقوف دی  
هیڅ موقوف نه دی د چا په انتظار

**Everything is dependent on God's will  
Dependency on others gets you nowhere<sup>17</sup>**

The emphasis of this poem is on faith. It encourages one to achieve psychological independence by depending on no other entity but God.

### Operational Use

It is extremely important to let Afghans know that Americans as Christians share a mutual sense of respect and belief for many religious values that they hold as Muslims. It must be communicated to the Afghans that Americans are not merely “the people of cross,” as the enemy would like to portray them—but they are rather the people of “faith,” or the people of “the book.” “Cross” serves as the symbol that highlights disparity between Muslims and Christians, while “faith” in God is the common ground between them.

ناکرده سودونه ډیر دی په جهان کښی  
سود هغه دی چي د خیر وي نه د شر

**Unlawful profits are many in the world  
But true profit is beneficial, not harmful**

This poem is about the importance of ethical behavior. It condemns profiting or promoting one's self interest at someone else's expense.

### Operational Use

It is difficult to think of any other context but the campaign against narcotics and poppy cultivation. One could open a speech with this poem at a meeting relating to the issue of narcotics. This could also be printed on the literature aiming to raise awareness among Afghans about the ills of drugs and corruption.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid: p. 182-183.

زه عاشق یم سرو کار می دی له عشقه  
نه خلیل نه داود زی یم نه مومند

**I am a lover and my business is love  
I am not Khalil, Daoud-Zai, or Momand<sup>18</sup>**

Baba essentially stresses that it is our humanity that matters, not our ethnic or tribal origin. The universality of *Eshq*, love is a critical aspect of our identity as humans. Sufi poets argue that, among other virtues, it is love for God that elevates the stance and value of humans relative to all other creatures. Baba is against tribalism and disunity based on tribal affiliations, believing that all humans are created equal.

### Operational Use

This line could be utilized to promote cooperation and unity among Afghans, especially when there are disagreements among members of different tribes.

عالمان دي روښنايي د دي دنيا  
عالمان دي د تمام جهان پيشوا  
په مجلس د عالمانو به سره زر شي  
که څوک کاني وي يا بوټي د صحرا

**People of knowledge are the light of the world  
People of knowledge are the leaders of the world  
In the presence of the intellectuals will turn into red-gold  
If someone is a rock or a weed from the desert<sup>19</sup>**

Many Afghan poets have emphasized the importance of learning and knowledge. In this poem, Baba is indirectly encouraging people to learn and become knowledgeable.

### Symbolism

The symbolism used here creates a contrast between one who is learned and one who is ignorant. This is to highlight the importance of knowledge. In essence, this lyric's point is that knowledge will "turn dust into gold."

### Operational Use

In a meeting about the state of education, or constructing a school, it would be appropriate to allude to this poem, or the jest of it. This could also be written on posters and leaflets aimed at encouraging people to learn.

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<sup>18</sup> Hosseini, Abdul Razaq. Ghafouri. Abdul Sattar. Essays From the Seminar on Rahman Baba  
Azadi Matabe, Kabul (2005) p. 21

<sup>19</sup> Ibid: p. 143.

ورک شه، ورک شه بد کرداره بد سری  
که دي ورور که دی عزیز دی که پردی

**The bad person may get lost, he may get lost  
If he is a brother, a dear one, or a stranger<sup>20</sup>**

One must not show deference to a criminal because of one's kinship or family ties to him. The justice system must treat everyone fair regardless of individuals' social or economic status. A criminal with personal or family ties to one, must not be treated favorably; he has to be treated just as anyone else who does not abide by the law.

### **Operational Use**

This verse of Baba could be used in leaflets soliciting cooperation from the public in providing information about the insurgents. Of course, it is imperative that Rahman Baba's name be mentioned under the lyric. This will validate and legitimize the message embedded in this line, and thus make it acceptable to the reader.

په بڼه خوی له بدخواهانو بی پروایم  
به نرمی لکه اوبه د اور سزایم

**With good attitude I don't let those with menace to bother me  
I am like soft water the punishment for fire**

Baba is trying to invite the reader to use patience and tolerance dealing with people who have ominous intentions. He encourages one to, while dealing with unkind people, be kind. This idea is based on the nonviolence philosophy--a path followed by M. Gandhi of India, and M. L. King Jr. of the U.S.

### **Symbolism**

The softness of water is an analogy to patience, understanding, and serenity of mind and soul. Fire, on the other hand is the symbol of anger, sharp temper, cruelty and rude behavior. Baba claims that one must not let an angry or rude person succeed in forcing one to behave/react in the same manner.

### **Operational Use**

With this one line, we can remind the Afghans that we also value tolerance and prefer peaceful solutions to problems—that we are in Afghanistan to promote peace and tolerance, not to instigate war and aggression.

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<sup>20</sup> Ebbed: p. 304.

لکه ونه مستقیم پخپل مکان یم  
که خزان را باندي راشي که بهار

**Like a tree I stand straight in my place  
Whether fall or spring befalls on me<sup>21</sup>**

This line reminds one of the significance of strong resolve during a difficult time. Tree is the symbol of strength, and spring and fall seasons symbolize the “ups” and “downs” of life.

کر د گلو کره چه سیمه دي گلزار شي  
اغزي مه کره په پښو کښي به دي خار شي

**Sow flowers so your surroundings become a garden  
Don't sow thorns; for they will prick your own feet**

Through good deeds one could not only help others but also contribute to improving the society in which one lives. This will ultimately be beneficial to himself as he has helped create a better environment in which he lives. In other words, working toward attaining collective good will eventually help one’s self-interest.

### Operational Use

This lyric could be used when encouraging Afghans to play an active role in improving their communities. To promote activism and positive action among Afghans, Baba’s line could prove effective. The potential this specific verse may have for C-IED IO campaigns is also worth considering.

ته چه بل په غشيو ولي هسي پوه شه  
چه هم دا غشي به ستا په لور گذار شي

**If you shoot arrows at others, understand  
That the same arrow will be thrown at you**

کوهي مه کنه د بل سري په لار کښي  
چري ستا به د کوهی په غاره لار شي

**Don't dig a ditch in another's path  
In case you come to the ditch edge<sup>22</sup>**

These lines are based on the ethics of reciprocity. The point is that a certain way of treating others will spawn a similar response. Some refer to this action-reaction phenomenon as Karma.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid: p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Ebbled: p. 778.

### Operational Use

When taking a position in favor of peaceful and kind treatment of others, the use of this line could certainly be appropriate. “Do unto others as they would do unto you,” is a phrase commonly used in the U.S. that essentially makes the same point. This ethical golden rule, structured in the positive form, underlines the importance of care for others with fairness, and empathy. While the Pashtu lyric warns one of the undesirable result, the line in English focuses on the benefit of fair treatment of others.

آدم زاد په معنی واره یو صورت دي  
هر چې بل آزاروی هغه آزار شي

**Essentially, humans are all as one body  
Whoever tortures another, wounds himself<sup>23</sup>**

Human society itself is a body comprised of human beings. The suffering of one member could negatively affect others. Note that this line is based on the premise that the entire humanity, all societies collectively constitute one single body—one human society which crosses all boundaries.

### Operational Use

Recite or write this poem to highlight all the shared values, principles, desires, aspirations, and sentiments among people not merely as members of any particular society, but as members of the human society.

نن چې صبح ده روښانه لار صحیح کړه  
ناکھانه به دا صبحه شب تار شي

**Make your path straight now that the morning is bright  
For all the sudden, the morning will turn into a pitch dark night<sup>24</sup>**

The message that Baba conveys here is this: take advantage of an opportunity while you can; don't waste time and don't procrastinate.

### Operational Use

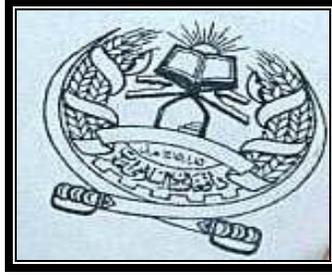
It would be perfectly appropriate to mention this poem discussing the urgency of taking action. If you wish to encourage an Afghan to begin a project immediately, or finish one within a certain time period, with this line you can remind him that this window of opportunity will eventually close.

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<sup>23</sup> Ebbled: p. 780.

<sup>24</sup> Ebbled: p. 780

## Pashtu Poems by Talib Poets and Poets Sympathetic to Taliban's Cause



The following poems are expressed within the boundaries of *Ghazal*, which is arguably the most popular classical form of poetry. This structure is arguably the most popular form of poetry in Pashtu and Dari languages. Judging by the types of messages, the lexicon, and other techniques, such as references to historic figures, they are presumed to be written by Taliban or poets sharing a belief in Taliban's cause<sup>25</sup>.

### Oblivious Muslim

**By: Zaheb**

Do you have any love and affection in your heart or not?

Do you have any hope for forgiveness<sup>26</sup> or not?

O! Muslim, you are in the sleep of oblivion.

Do you have the desire for martyrdom or not?

When you call Mohammad as your beloved,

Do you have the characteristics of Belal<sup>27</sup>?

You are proud of the Usman's<sup>28</sup> generosity.

Do you have a generous hand yourself?

Like Omar<sup>29</sup> who got rightfully angry,

Do you have that kind of bravery in you or not?

The victims look forward to his coming

Do you have the habit of Khaled<sup>30</sup> or not.

You spent your life with lying and deception.

Do you have any interest in truth or not?

Death does not care about anyone O! Zaheb<sup>31</sup>.

Do you have preparation for the day of judgment or not?

زړه کي مينه محبت لري که نه؟

څه اميددمغفرت لري که نه؟

دغفلت په خوب ويده يي مسلمانه!

تمنادشههادت لري که نه؟

خپل جانان چي محمدمحمدبولي

دبلال غوندي صفت لري که نه؟

دعثمان په سخاوت باندي خونازکړي

ته هم لاس دسخاوت لري که نه؟

دعمرغوندي په حقه چي غوسه شي

ځان کي داسي شجاعت لري که نه؟

مظلومان دي دراتلولاري ته گوري

دخالدغوندي عادت لري که نه؟

په دروغ اوپه دوکه دي ژوندون تېرکړ

چېرته باب دحقيقت لري که نه؟

مرگ دهیچاپروانه کوي ذاهبه!

تياري دقيامت لري که نه؟

<sup>25</sup> All of the poems written by Taliban and pro-Taliban poets in this section are taken from: <http://www.toorabora.com/>.

<sup>26</sup> Forgiveness from God.

<sup>27</sup> Belal lived 578-622. He was a slave from Abyssinia. Abubakr bought and released him from slavery. He joined the army of Prophet Mohammad and, as a committed Muslim and warrior, fought many wars. He was also the Mo'azen – the caller of prayers.

<sup>28</sup> The third *Khalifa* of Islam.

<sup>29</sup> The second *Khalifa* of Islam.

<sup>30</sup> Reference to Khaled Ebni Walid – the conqueror of Spain.

<sup>31</sup> The poet's last name.

## Analysis

This poem questions the reader as to whether he is a good Muslim. It also warns him that there eventually would be a day of judgment, and that he needs to be prepared for it. Each lyric asks a fundamental question – Do you believe in ---- or do you not? It reminds one of the manner in which an attorney would pose this question to a defendant: Did you *or did you not?* Questions as such are designed to appeal to the reader's emotions and encourage him to give a positive answer. Furthermore, what the poet indirectly asks the reader to do, without actually mentioning it, is to take an action. He dares the reader saying that if he subscribes to the same values that Osman, Omar and Belal did, and if he is a true Muslim, then he must prove it in practice. He must act in order to 1) prove that he is a believer, and 2) be saved on the Day of Judgment.

The poet mentions the names of historic figures that Muslims, especially Sunni Muslims, revere. His purpose is to inspire the reader in achieving the level of nobility that these men did, and to offer him a role-model whom he could relate to and emulate. Here is a brief description of each character used in this poem:

**Belal:** He was a slave from Abyssinia. Abubakr, one of the Prophet Mohammad's companions, bought and released him from slavery. He joined the army of Prophet Mohammad, and as a committed Muslim and warrior, fought many wars. He was also a prominent Mo'azen – the caller for prayers.

**Usman Ibn Affan:** Hazrat e Usman was the third *Khalifa* of Islam and a *Sahaba*, companion of Prophet Mohammad. During his reign the Rashedin Islamic Territory flourished economically.

**Omar ibn al-Khattāb:** Omar was also a *Sahaba*, and the second *Khalifa*. He expanded the Islamic empire, defeating the Sassanid Persian Empire and conquering more than two thirds of the Eastern Roman Empire. He is known as an astute politician and a brave warrior.

## Liberty

By: Mawlawi Mohammad Ghafoor Peroz

I have seen the color of your blood in the flowers.  
 I have seen the rock become colorful with your blood.  
 When the young men began to murmur the melody of freedom.  
 I have seen the bells ringing in the hearts of the slaves.  
 Those heads that were sacrificed for freedom.  
 I have seen beds made with them in the palaces.  
 Nations are alive with the spirit of liberty.  
 I have seen every nation in destitution<sup>32</sup> without this spirit.  
 If there are no wounds, hardships, and funerals in it.  
 Have you seen a movement of only a few [empty] talks?  
 O! Peroz, liberty is an adornment for the nations.  
 I have seen this beauty in the clank of the swords.

په گلو کي مي ستادوينورنگ ليدلي دي  
 رنگين چي مي داستاپه وينوسنگ ليدلي دي  
 زلموچي زمزمه کرله نغمه دحريتته  
 په زړودغلامانوکي مي زنگ ليدلي دي  
 نعره دازادي باندي قربان چي شول سرونه  
 دهغومي قصرونوکي پالننگ ليدلي دي  
 په روح دازادي باندي ژوندي وي ملتونه  
 بي دي روحه مي هرملت ملنگ ليدلي دي  
 زخمونه کړاوونه جنازي چي پکښي نه وي  
 دخولي په خوخيروتاغورخنک ليدلي دي ؟  
 پپروزه ! ازادي داوولسونوويوه گېزه ده  
 داحسن مي دتوروپه شرنک شرنک ليدلي دي

### Analysis

Peroz attempts to draw attention to the value of freedom. He also justifies paying the ultimate price – sacrificing one’s life for attaining it, or its protection. He equates a nation’s *liberty* to the human *soul*. Similar to a soul which keeps a body alive, a nation lives as long as it is free. Without liberty the nation dies. He warns that it is not an easy task to fight for and protect one’s freedom; it entails suffering and even death. To achieve or protect one’s independence, one has to make sacrifices. One may even have to die for this noble cause. As evident, this poem is nationalistic in nature. It rather appeals to the patriotic sentiments of the reader, than to his religious beliefs.

In Peroz’s opinion, freedom is absolutely worth sacrificing one’s life. This is because independence keeps a nation alive, just as a soul keeps a body alive. Therefore, sacrificing one’s life is fairly worth protecting or rescuing the life of a nation.

<sup>32</sup> The actual word is *Malang* referring to a hermit type of a person - poor.

## Complaint

By: Zaker

My beloved, why did you sold out your love with your beloved one.  
 You sold out your promise along with your confessions.  
 The person whom you have won [his heart] with your red blood.  
 You have sold out that pearl in return for the thread.  
 It wasn't as light as you have assumed.  
 You have sold out the sword of your father along with the strike.  
 Good, you showed the way to the spring [water] to your competitor.  
 You sold out our every street along the land.  
 You have stomped on all the big sacrifices.  
 You sold out the blood of the Martyred along with his grave.  
 The house in which I could hold my head up with pride.  
 You sold out the house of history along with your honor.  
 O! My disloyal friend, this was the pain and the complaint of Zaker.  
 You have sold our wounded chest along with the injury.

ياره! ولي مينه دي له ياره سره خرڅه كړه  
 تاكړي وعده دي له اقراره سره خرڅه كړه  
 چاچي د سرووینو په قیمت باندي گڼلي وه  
 هغه ملغلره دي له تاره سره خرڅه كړه  
 دومره سپكه نه وه لكه تاچي ورته وكتل  
 توره دبابادي له گوزاره سره خرڅه كړه  
 بڼه دي ورته وښودي رقيب ته دگودر غاړي  
 زموږ هره كوڅه دي له دياره سره خرڅه كړه  
 څومره ستري ستري قرباني دي ترپښولاندي كړي  
 وينه د شهيددي له مزاره سره خرڅه كړه  
 سترگي مي چي جگي وي دننگ او دغيرت په كور  
 خونگه دتاريخ دي له وقاره سره خرڅه كړه  
 دغه د" ذاكر" د دردگيلسه وه بي وفاشنا!  
 زموږ زخمي سينه دي له پرهاره سره خرڅه كړه

## Analysis

This poem is primarily addressing those who cooperate with the government and the ISAF; especially, those who used to be members of the Taliban insurgency. To provoke him, Zaker is accusing the reader of being a coward. Breaking one's promise is a sign of spinelessness among the Afghans. He also wants to convince the reader that his desertion of the Taliban has been a great mistake. This is because in return for cooperation with the government, he has lost his moral values. He is selling out the achievements that his ancestors made shedding their blood throughout the history. The main objective of Zaker in this piece is to make the reader feel guilty—ashamed of cooperating with the Afghan government.

## Traveler Martyred

By: Mafton

I am on my way to war, look after me.  
Then you will regret [if you don't look],  
watch me leaving.

هله جنگ ته يم روان راپسي گوره!  
بيا به وروسته کړي ارمان راپسي گوره!

Raise your hands to pray, and ask for my  
martyrdom.  
With tears filled eyes, look after me.

په دعا کړه لاس اوچت شهيدمي غواره  
له ژرانه ډک چشمان راپسي گوره!

I am the Majnon<sup>33</sup> of the love of religion  
and country.  
O, deserts, O, mountains, look after me.

زه ددين او د وطن عشق کي مجنون يم  
دبنتي غرونه او بيا بان راپسي گوره!

I am not a girl, and am a brave prince.  
Of the battleground of Jihad, look after me.

پېغله نه يم زه سر تېري شاه زلمي يم  
د جهاد د جنگ ميدان راپسي گوره!

If you want to see me, but of course.  
Look after me, either in the war front or in  
the prison.

خامخا که مي ديدن غواړي ملگريه!  
ياسنکر او يازندان راپسي گوره!

There is a revolution; these are the days  
and nights of war.  
Look after your warrior Afghanistan.

انقلاب دی د جنگونو ورځي شپي دي  
خپل جنگي افغانستان راپسي گوره!

Look for the traveler martyrs.  
In the dilapidated graveyard.

هلت به بيا د مسافر و شهيدانو  
هغه خړ پر قبرستان راپسي گوره!

A riddled shawl [with bullets] colored with  
blood. On every tomb look for this sign.

يوسوري سوري پټکي رنگين په وينو  
پر هر قبر د انبان راپسي گوره!

### Analysis

The poet, Mafton, is a journeyman, but not an ordinary one. He has made a decision to travel to the battleground. From there on, he is certain that he will, either be a martyr or a prisoner. He will eventually travel to the heaven. The poet is sure that he will not return from the war. He does not characterize victory in Jihad in a conventional sense—the defeat of the enemy. His goal is to become a martyr while defending his religion and country - that's how he defines victory.

<sup>33</sup> The lover of Laila from the Laila and Majnon love story.

## It is Time for Jihad

By: Mawlawi Mohammad Yonos Khales Nabi Khel<sup>34</sup>

The autumn's wind has arrived in the territory of  
red flowers.  
Vouchers have taken the place of the  
nightingales.

بيادخزان بادراغی په سیمې دسروگلو  
خکه نوکار غانوځاي نیولي دبلبلو

This is the territory of Islam and of Islam's  
followers.  
There is no place here for the coming of the  
strangers.

داداسلام سیمه داسلام دپیروانوده  
دې کې څه ځای نشته داغیارودراتللو

Now that the looters have placed their looting  
claws on it.  
O! Muslim, it is time to shed some red blood.

اوس چې غاصبانوپرې دغصب پنځي ايني دي  
وخت دی مسلمانان، دسرو وینو تویولو

Today if we be frightened by the real martyrdom.  
For God's sake, we will not be free from the  
claws of the foreigners.

نن که وېره ولرو، رینیتني شهادت څخه  
خدايروخلاص به نه شو، دپړديوله منگولو

Come on! Rise and turn your backs to them, and  
turn your faces toward religion.  
Placing even one step behind is not appropriate  
for the Muslim.

هلی راولار شئ دوی ته شاودين ته مخه کړئ  
نه بنایي مسلم ته یو قدم دشاته تللو

Pick up a sword and a shield, and jump in the  
battleground of Jihad.  
Don't be hesitant any more to bring death upon  
them.  
Today, the time of the test [of courage] for the  
Muslim has arrived. The Muslim does not have  
permission to procrastinate.

واخلئ توره اوسپراودجهادمېدان ته ودانگي  
مه کوي صرفه نوره، ددوی په مرگ وهلو  
نن په مسلمان دامتحن موقع راغلي ده  
نشته مسلمان ته اجازه دځنډولو

### Analysis

The poet's purpose analogizing the foreigner to a vulture is to demonize the enemy. This vulture has taken a hold of the Muslims' territory with his claws. This line of argument connects the Muslim with a specific space, offering a tangible reality to the existence of his reader who belongs to a Muslim nation.

He also refers to the foreigners as the robbers. For this reason, he deems the killing of the foreigner not only legitimate, but also necessary and urgent. Therefore, all

<sup>34</sup> Born in Khogyana district to Nangarhar, he was the leader of The Islamic Party-Khales—one of the Peshawar based resistant parties during the soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He died in 2003.

Muslims must take up arms immediately and free themselves from the claws of the foreigners. This poem appeals to the religious beliefs of the reader as much as it does to his nationalistic sentiments.

### سترگي پٽول

امانزوی

ماضي تي گوته ونيوه په حال يې سترگي پټي کړي  
ټول هيواد مي گرم شو په شمال يې سترگي پټي کړي

وي بابنه مجرم بيبي القاب ورپسي وتړل  
عدل انصاف گوره په پايمال يې سترگي پټي کړي

خواکي له صليب سره مي يار جامونه پورته کړل  
څه فکر يې ونه که په وبال يې سترگي پټي کړي

شيخ، مرشد مي کيناسته په صف کي اشغالگر سره  
د خوارلسو کلونو په جنجال؟ يې سترگي پټي کړي

پيغله د وطن مي اوس رنگينه شوه په نوي رنگ  
جوړ يې که پتلون، جاکټ په شال يې سترگي پټي کړي

له پيله داسي نه وه! موسيقي ټول حرامه وه  
نن نوي فتوي؟ راغله په سر، تال يې سترگي پټي کړي

رون اندي خو لاڅه کوي ملا مي ديمکرات شو  
په خپل پخواني قول او په قال يې سترگي پټي کړي

پام کړه امانزوی ه چې قلم دي منحرف نه شي  
دبمن دي جادوگر دی په ليکوال يې سترگي پټي کړي

## Closing One's Eyes

**By: Amanzoi**

You pointed to the past, you forgot the present.  
There is chaos all over the country; you have closed your eyes on  
the North.

You gave the criminal many titles.  
You closed your eyes on justice being trampled.

Next to and with the Cross you raised a drink.  
You didn't think about it, you closed your eyes on its sin.

The *Shaikh* and *Morshed*<sup>35</sup> sat on the rank of the invader.  
You closed your eyes to fourteen years of trouble.

The country's young girls are colorful with new colors.  
You have closed your eyes on their pants<sup>36</sup>, and jacket with a shawl.

From the beginning it wasn't like this, music was all *Haram*<sup>37</sup>.  
Today new *Fatwa*<sup>38</sup> has been imposed; forever you closed your  
eyes.

Not only blind and deaf, but also Mullah became a democrat.  
He closed his eyes on his old promises.

Watch out Amanzoy so your pen does not go astray.  
Your enemy is a sorcerer; he will close his eyes on your writing.

### Analysis

Amanzoi pretends to be speaking to a person such as a government official. However, he seems to explain the social and political situation the way he perceives it (dire) to the reader. He is having a monologue, not with a government's representative but with the ordinary Afghan. Amanzoy attempts to convince his reader that the state is a weak and unjust entity incapable of governance. He makes this claim based on two main factors: First, the government doesn't have the capacity to serve the public. Secondly, its actions are contrary to the moral and Islamic code of conduct.

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<sup>35</sup> People of religious authority and respect.

<sup>36</sup> Western attire.

<sup>37</sup> Not permissible according to the Islamic law.

<sup>38</sup> A cleric decree

## Pashtu Poems by Moderate and Progressive Contemporary Poets



### I have had a sweet dream

The country will be built, but with strong resolve and faith.  
It will be built with sacrificing one's self interest.

With one star there won't be light in the dark world.  
When many stars get together, then the sky will be brightened.

From only one hand no sound will arise, and nothing can be done.  
Put your hands together, unite, then the world will be built.

For every problem there is a way of solution.  
Every sick will be cured with the medicine of the doctors.

Taheri, my friend, last night I saw a sweet dream.  
Peace is coming, and our dear Afghanistan will be built.

Shokrullah Taheri

خواره خوب ليدلى

وطن جوړېږي خو په ټينگ عزم او ايمان جوړېږي  
په قرباني د شخصي گټو او د ځان جوړېږي

په يوه ستوري رڼا نه راځي تياره دنيا کي  
داډير ستوري چي يوځای شي روڼ آسمان جوړېږي

د تش يو لاس نه ټک نه خيژي اونه کيږي کوم کار  
لاسونه ورکړي سره يو شئ بيا جهان جوړېږي

هر يو مشکل ته پيدا شويدى يو لار د خلاصون  
هر يو بيمار په دوايي د طبيبان جوړېږي

طاهري ياره ما بياگه ډير خواره خوب ليدلى  
سوله راځي او زمونږ گران افغانستان جوړېږي

شکرالله طاهري

### Analysis

This poem is the bearer of a hopeful and optimistic message. The poet encourages the reader to focus on the reconstruction of Afghanistan. But he also reminds him that this is no easy task. Rebuilding the country requires a strong resolve, faith, and sacrifice. In addition, utilizing relevant examples, Taheri tries to convince the reader that without unity it will be impossible to reconstruct Afghanistan. He maintains that each and every

one of Afghans must work in unity and coherence in order to rebuild their country. Even though reconstruction of Afghanistan is a difficult task, there is no problem which doesn't have a solution. This assertion coincides with the saying in English: Where there is a will, there is a way. In short, Taheri's poem is a reflection of his optimistic and yet realistic views about the future of Afghanistan.

## Operational Use

Publishing of such inspirational pieces in the Afghan media would certainly support U.S. and Coalition IO missions, which is to instill a sense of hope and optimism among Afghans. We could also use such literary works to further solicit cooperation from the Afghans. Calls for unity and sacrifice could be more effectively articulated by Afghan writers, which could rather come from within the society, than from foreigners. Reading literary pieces as such could augment optimism among Afghans, and as a result, could lead to their active participation in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

It could also be useful to recognize poets such as Shokrullah Taheri and encourage them to produce more literary pieces. It is safe to assume that optimism motivates humans to establish a goal and struggle to reach it. Afghans, whom have not had much reason to be optimistic for the past three decades, could certainly benefit from writings with a positive message such as the one written by Shokrullah Taheri.

### O! my country, in your love

ای وطنه ستا په مینه کې

O! My country, in your love I sacrifice my life.

I am the kind of young man who wants your progress.

ای وطنه ستا په عشق کې زه تیر تر خپل ځانه یمه  
ستا چې ترقي غواړي زه هغسي ځوان یمه

O! My country, you are the graveyard of our mother and father.

I am the servant of a shrine like you.

ای وطنه ته یې هدیره د مور او پلار زمونږ  
ته لکه زیارت زه مجاور ستا د استان یمه

I will not give one speck of your soil in return for the whole world.

I sacrifice my life and belongings for one fistful of your soil.

یوه ذره د خاوري ستا په درست جهان ور نکړم  
یو موټی له خاوري ستا په سر او مال قربان یمه  
تیر به شم له سر لیکن نه ستا د یو کرښې نه  
ځکه چې دنیا کې مشهور شوی په افغان یمه

I will sacrifice my head but not a piece of you.

That is why I am famous by the name of Afghan in the world.

There is no other good fortune like the one that I, Malang Jaan, have seen myself.

I am happy and laughing in your embrace day and night.

*Malang Jaan*

نشته داسې بخت لکه چې ما ملنگ جان خپل ولید  
شپې ورځې دا ستا په غیر کې پروت خوشال خندان یمه

ملنگ جان

## Analysis

This is a poem about patriotism. In this piece there is no mention of Jihad or martyrdom, the inclusion of which is typical of the literature propagated by Taliban. This poem also demonstrates the poet's desire for progress and reconstruction of the country. Malang Jaan seems to be optimistic about the future. However, he emphasizes the importance of making sacrifices to achieve success. The nationalistic element of pride is also salient in this piece. Malang Jaan likens the country to a shrine – a sacred place. The public in general perceives the shrine with reverence, and it bears a special symbolic significance among the Suffi Islamic school of thought.

څوک غواړو مور؟

چې مو راتول په يوه کور کړي داسې څوک غواړو مور  
 چې موزخموڼه را ټکور کړي داسې څوک غواړو مور  
 يو بي وطنه بي کفنه بي وارته پښتون  
 که چېرې خلاص نور له پېغور کړي داسې څوک غواړو مور  
 چې يو له غره ، بل له سنگره ، درېم له ټانگه کوز کړي  
 چې مو راتول په يوه شکور کړي داسې څوک غواړو مور  
 چې مور تر منځه دا د جبر دېوال ونړوي  
 چې مي د ورور سره بيا ورور کړي داسې څوک غواړو مور  
 چې مي توپک او توره دواړه په قلم بدل کړي  
 چې مو له جنگه زرگی تور کړي داسې څوک غواړو مور  
 چې مو دا څيرې گربوانونه راپيوند کړي بېرته  
 چې مو بچي ديوي مور کړي داسې څوک غواړو مور  
 چې داغيار نه د اټک مظلوم زرگی وژغوري  
 چې نور اوبه د ظالم زور کړي داسې څوک غواړو مور

اجمل اټک يوسفزی

## Who do we want

We want the kind of person who would unite us in one room.  
 We want the kind of person who would heat our wounds.

The kind of person who would rescue a homeless, lonely, and cerement less Pashtun  
 From the taunting remarks of others.

The kind of person who would make one climb down the mountain, from the war front,  
 and from the tank, and gather us all in one basket.

The kind of person who would destroy the imposed wall which stands between us,  
 And to make me a brother with my brother.

The kind of person who could transform a gun and a sword into a pen  
And to discourage us from war.

The kind of person who would mend our torn collars,  
And make us all the children of one mother (motherland).

To rescue the victimized heart of *Attak* from the foreigners,  
And turn the power of the bully into water,  
That is the kind of person we want.

Ajmal Attak Yosofzai

## Analysis

This piece is not just about the criteria that the author sees necessary for selection of a leader. It is also about what Pashtuns need in order to restore the lost glory of the past. Yosofzai portrays the Pashtuns as the ethnic group which has been victimized throughout the years of war. In this poem, he is in search of a leader who could change the undignified social and political status of Pashtuns from its current state. Indirectly, he is asking the Pashtuns to refrain fighting against each other, and unite. Additionally, there is emphasis on the necessity to substitute the gun and sword with a pen – in other words the poet highlights the importance of knowledge and learning for restoring this lost identity. He maintains that Pashtuns are the sons of one mother (Afghanistan) and therefore, they are brothers. The conclusion that he draws is that they should not fight each other and become united. Yosofzai's poem entails a list of the essential values that play an important role in engendering peace and progress among Pashtuns.

Note that this poem focuses on the importance of national unity among Pashtuns as an ethnic group, not *all* Afghans. This is a clear example of how ethnic sentiments continue to remain pronounced among some, or perhaps many Afghans.

From Badakhshan to Kandahar  
From Herat to Nangarhar  
From Paktia to Mazar  
From Jawzjan to Asmar  
All together is my house  
Muslim is my brother  
From Bolan to Hairatan  
From Attak to Sher Khan  
From Torghondi to Chatral  
It is all the house of the Afghan  
Each one is the light of my eyes  
Its Muslim is my brother  
If it is Safari or Sori  
If it is Taheri or Lodi

بدخشان تر کند هاره  
له هرات تر ننگر هاره  
پکتیا نه تر مزاره  
له جوزجان تر اسماره  
همه واره زما کوردی  
مسلمان ئی زما ووردی  
له بولان تر حیرتانه  
له اټک نه تر شیرخانه  
تور غونډی نه تر چتراله  
همه کور دی دافغانه  
زما هر یوو دسترگوتوردی  
مسلمان ئی زما ووردی

If it is Hotaki or Abdali  
They are the power of the fist of Afghan  
Its Muslim is my brother

*Feda Muhammad Nowmir*

صفاري اوکه سوري دی  
طاهري اوکه لودي دی  
هوتکي، که ابدالي دي  
دافغان د متيو زور دی  
مسلمان ئي زما ورور دی

فدامحمد نومير

## Analysis

While Ajmal Yusufzai, addresses only Pashtuns as an ethnic group, this piece by Feda Nowmir focuses on the nationalistic notion of Afghanhood. He recognizes people from other parts of the country as his brothers. He argues that the fact that all Afghans are Muslims is reason good enough for all Afghans to be considered a nation. Nowmir sees Afghanistan as the home for one nation regardless of people's ethnicity or geographical location.

The following is another example of a Pashtu poem by Abdul-Bari Jahani that advocates nationhood among all Afghans. This piece gives precedence to nationality, rather than ethnicity as the main pillar of one's political identity. Born in Kandahar, Jahani is arguably the most famous contemporary (living) Pashtu poet among Pashtuns (South and East) in particular, and among Afghans in general.

If it is Kandahar or Laghman, it is my  
homeland.  
If it is Panjsher, if it is Wakhan, it is my  
homeland.  
Tajeks and Uzbaks are all Afghans  
This soil's Hazara and Turkman are all of  
my own.  
*Abdul Bari Jahani*

کندهار دی که لغمان دی وطن زما دی  
که پنجشیر دی که واخان دی وطن زما دی  
که تاجک دی که اوزبک دی یو افغان دی  
د دي خاوری هزاره ترکمن زما دی

عبدالباری جهانی

The following Dari poem by the author of this document expresses a similar view in regard to the issue of identity.

I am not a Pashtun, I am not a Tajek, I am  
not a Hazara, I am not an Uzbek.  
I am an Afghan, I am an Afghan, I am an  
Afghan, I am an Afghan.  
If in my country, there remain names of  
ethnicities.  
I am not from this, I am not from that, I am  
an Afghan, I am an Afghan.

پشتون نییم، تاجک نییم، هزاره نییم، ازبک نییم  
افغانی ام، افغانی ام، افغانی ام، افغانی ام  
در کشورم باشد اگر، از قومیت نامی دگر  
زین نیستم، از آن نییم، افغانی ام، افغانی ام

*Wali Ahmad Shaaker*

ولی احمد شاکر

Three decades of war has lead to social and political disintegration of Afghanistan. Among others, disunity is a product of foreign intervention as well as policy choices made by the Afghan political elites who exploited people's ethnic and linguistic rifts in order to promote their own self interests. In other words, it could easily be linked to the politics of divide and conquer during violent rivalries among various political movements. Ethnic hatred has lead to deadly wars among the militant members of various ethnic groups. The eruption of a bloody civil war that lead to deliberate killing of tens of thousands of innocent civilians is a prime example of ethnic nationalism's deadly outcome. Animosity and violence among racial and tribal groups has generally proved harmful not only to the involved parties but to the sovereignty and prosperity of Afghans as a nation. Therefore, it is empirical to support moderate and progressive writers to write and publish literary pieces that promote national solidarity among all Afghans regardless of their ethnic and linguistic background.

## Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of poems written by Taliban and those published by moderate and progressive poets reveals that there exist major differences in their perception of the political affairs in the country. Subsequently, each elects to follow a path different and even opposite to the other.

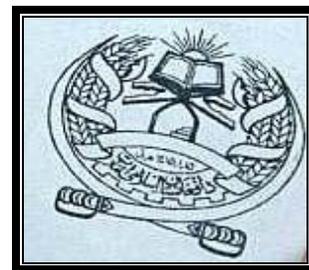
However, authors from both groups share a common ground within the boundaries of which the authors share their thoughts and feelings with the reader—hoping to entice him to subscribe to their view of the Afghan social and political realities. Each struggles to appeal to the reader for certain commonly accepted morals, i.e. religious beliefs, patriotic sentiments, desire for justice, etc.

The following are the main disparities between Taliban and the moderates' views expressed in the poems presented in this paper:



### Moderates

- 1 Tend to focus on *peace* as a theme, reminding the reader of its value and necessity for political unity and hard work in order to achieve and maintain it.
- 2 They emphasize the importance of working towards a future which is prosperous and peaceful.



### Taliban

- 1) Talib poets, on the other hand, portray their antigovernment efforts as an extension of the anti-Marxist regime that began in the early 1980s. Their main concern is changing the *current* state of affairs in the country, which predominantly revolves around the issue of foreign invasion.

- 3 Their poems possess a *nationalist* flavor. They often incorporate vocabulary such as “nation,” “Afghan,” and “unity.” In general, they look beyond the boundaries of religion and ethnicity. However, this is not to say that they ignore religion or ethnicity altogether.
  - 4 Although, they do not explicitly encourage people to cooperate with, or support foreigners’ presence in the country, they do not condemn their existence in Afghanistan either. Many do complain about the country’s “dependency,” (political, economic) on foreigners. However, they do not aim to instigate resistance against the “foreign occupation.”
  - 5 These poets in general convey a sense of hopefulness regarding the future. They seem to believe that with hard work, and a united nation; it is possible to achieve peace and prosperity.
  - 6 They see disorder and war as eminent dangers to Afghanistan’s future.
- 2) They make use of religious terminology and themes far more frequently than the moderates, i.e. Jihad, people of cross, martyr, paradise. In fact, they use religious doctrine to support their arguments in favor of political descent and military action against the government and coalition forces.
  - 3) Cooperation with state is *be-nangi*, a great shame. This is because the regime, in their view, is a puppet of the foreign powers--the infidel invaders. Cooperation with and support of such government means indirect support of the invaders and infidels. This qualifies the Afghan supporter of the state as a *Mulhed*, hypocrite. Some argue that being a hypocrite is a grievous sin then becoming a *Kafir*, infidel.
  - 4) Guilt and shame are two of the emotions that the Taliban authors use to influence the readers’ thoughts. The reader must feel shameful because not only he is not taking any action against foreign invaders, but he is also cooperating with the enemy. The reader must begin to act immediately, and participate in the Jihad against the infidel—similar to his ancestors who fought against and defeated the Greeks, the Mongols, the Persians, the British, and the Soviets.
  - 5) They instigate war and disorder to purify the country of immorality and irreligiosities of the imposed Western political and economic orders.

### A Cautionary Reminder

Due to a vast number of poets and diversity of opinions among the moderate poets, it could prove erroneous to categorize the moderates as pro or anti-government. That the moderates do not encourage people to take up arms against the government does not necessarily mean that they support the government. However, a vast number of poets, essayists, and novelists are highly critical of the state. They often criticize institutional corruption, and accuse the government of inefficiency and lack of competence in serving

the public. It seems that what they aim to accomplish is to generate awareness among the general public, and initiate a discourse on social, economic, and political issues within the intellectual community. However, this does not necessarily translate into an attempt to encourage a revolt against the government. What it does mean is that they are despondent regarding certain aspects of the current political and or economic state of affairs, and that they wish to contribute to positive social, political and economic change in Afghanistan.

The following is a poem written by a well-known contemporary Dari poet, Razeq Fani. In this piece, he is highly critical of the institutional corruption in the government, and the integrity of the character of its leaders.

Don't taunt the tired travelers.  
 Don't kiss the hand of the burglars.  
 An algae/pebble will never be a gem.  
 Don't throw dust at people's eyes.  
 Since you are one of the travelers of this caravan.  
 Don't join the robber and plunder the caravan.  
 If you drink wine with a friend in the open.  
 Don't eat with the enemy in secret.

*By: Razeq Fani*

طعنه بر خسته رهروان مزنید  
 بوسه بر دست رهنان مزنید  
 هیچ گاهی خزف گوهر نشود  
 خاک در چشم مردمان مزنید  
 چون خود از همروان قافله آید  
 همره دزد کاروان مزنید  
 باده با دوست در عیان چو خورید  
 لقمه با غیر در نهان مزنید  
 رازق فانی

It is easy to assume that Fani refers to the government officials as the “burglars,” warlords who participated in the civil war (1992-1996), leading to the murder of thousands of civilians. Warlords as well as former members of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) are believed to be involved in various criminal activities such as bribe taking, drug smuggling, extortion, and land grabbing while in power. Fani argues that these travelers of the caravan of democracy are looting their own caravan.

He is asking the reader not to “kiss their hands,” not to revere and follow their footsteps, for these leaders in reality do not possess any virtues and qualities of leaders. Fani equates them to nothing but pebbles attempting to appear as valuable jewels.

## Conclusion

Two particular aspects of poetry contribute to its widespread use in Afghan society. One is the rhythm and rhyme embedded in this genre that aids memorization. The other pertains to the unique quality of poetry which allows deep thoughts--sometimes difficult to comprehend, entrench within a few short lyrics. The political events of the past three decades have also tremendously contributed to the prevalence of poetry among all other literary genres. War, destruction and the loss of millions of lives has left deep psychological wounds in the hearts of almost all Afghans. This has given way to the use of poetry as an effective medium to express with feelings of sorrow, anger, pride, hope, desperation and patriotism. Conflict and political turmoil have tremendously contributed to the politicization of poetry in particular, and literature as a whole.

Poetry is a window through which one is able to understand the Afghan mind. Afghans memorize specific resonating lyrics reflective of their values, beliefs, and the socio-economic realities of their environment, which could then be used during daily conversations. To make a point, to offer an example, and even to prove a claim, Afghans often refer to and weave a *tak-baiti*, a one-liner, or a *do-baiti*, a two-liner within their speech. In fact, the use of poetry in daily conversation is so prevalent; many lines are synonymous with proverbs and axioms. Unfortunately, these are the critical pieces of communication that are often “lost in translation” during *shuras*, *jirgas*, and key-leader engagements between U.S. and Coalition forces and Afghan citizens.

Poetry has an exceptional place within the Afghan culture and society. Condensing deep thoughts and emotions within just a few words, and expressing them with elegance and flow has facilitated a poem’s use as a communication device. In the West, on the other hand, essay and novel have played a pivotal role in shaping literary discourse around philosophical issues. It is important to understand and appreciate why poetry occupies such a significant space in the psyche of the Afghans. With this knowledge, Coalition forces can use poetry as an effective tool in order to communicate with Afghans. Therefore, it is vital to realize the value of poetry among Afghans, as well as why and how it is utilized as a communication device. Learning about the Afghan literature will help Westerners comprehend the Afghans’ way of thinking. Through understanding poems, those in charge of IO operations could better recognize Afghan cultural and religious values— their collective moral identity. This understanding could help lead to a more fruitful communication process between Coalition forces and Afghans. Westerners will be able to choose their language carefully so that they are able to effectively convey messages to, and seek cooperation from the public. Likewise, through understanding their worldview, ISAF will better empathize with messages that the Afghans convey to them. This will add to the ease, speed, and effectiveness of communication between all parties. An efficient communication channel, in turn, could elevate the likelihood of ISAF’s IO, as well as military operations’ success in Afghanistan.