



Cultural Reflections: Exploring Themes of Grief and Resilience in the Selected Khowar Folk Poetry

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Abstract: This study explores the rich thematic layers embedded within Khowar folk poetry, focussing on three renowned poems: *Nano Begal*, *Nandoshi*, and *Ghoru*. The research employs thematic analysis, a qualitative research method, to uncover the underlying meanings and cultural significance of these poetic works. Khowar, an Indo-Aryan language spoken predominantly in Pakistan's Chitral region, boasts a vibrant oral tradition where folk poetry serves as a crucial vessel for preserving cultural identity, values, and collective memory. Through a detailed examination of these poems, this study reveals how they encapsulate universal human experiences such as love, loss, heroism, and the complexities of daily life. The thematic analysis uncovers the intricate relationship between the poems and the cultural context of the Khowar-speaking community, highlighting the role of folk poetry in both reflecting and shaping society's ethos. This research contributes to the broader understanding of folk literature as a vital component of cultural heritage, emphasizing the importance of preserving these oral traditions in the face of globalization and cultural homogenization.

Keywords: Chitral, Khowar Folk Poetry, Oral Tradition, Cultural Heritage, Indo-Aryan Language, Folk Poems, Nano Begal, Nandoshi, Ghoru, Cultural Identity, Folklore.

1. Introduction

Every culture depends on literature as a crucial medium for conveying societal values, historical narratives, and collective consciousness through generations. Folk poetry occupies a distinctive role among the diverse genres of literature, embodying the essence of a community's history and cultural values in a captivating and engaging manner. This genre, particularly prominent in oral traditions, serves to preserve linguistic heritage while also encapsulating the philosophical foundations of its people through narratives of valour, despair, love, and daily existence. In the rugged terrains of Chitral, situated within the expansive Hindukush mountain range of Pakistan, the Khowar language thrives as a significant representation of the region's rich linguistic diversity. Khowar folk poetry serves as a crucial component of the linguistic tapestry, providing significant insights into the cultural and emotional landscape of the Khowar-speaking community. In contrast to written literature, the oral transmission of these folk poems creates a complex interplay of language and melody, encapsulating the nuanced spectrum of human experience.

The implementation of thematic analysis offers a comprehensive framework for examining these oral texts. This

qualitative technique explores the content in-depth, revealing themes that are essential for comprehending the textual nuances as well as for recognizing the wider cultural and social contexts they represent. This study focuses on the renowned Khowar folk poems—Nano Begal, Nandoshi, and Ghoru—aiming to decode the layers of meaning embedded within their narratives and explore themes of moral and emotional significance that resonate with universal human experiences. This research contributes to the academic discourse on folk literature and reinforces the significance of oral traditions in the preservation of a community's cultural heritage. This study employs a detailed thematic analysis to elucidate the underlying messages present in Khowar folk poetry, thereby enhancing our comprehension of a cultural practice that is both enduring and dynamic.

2. Literature Review

The linguistic diversity of Pakistan's northern areas, particularly the Chitral district in the Hindukush mountains, offers a unique setting for linguistic and cultural research. Among the twelve languages spoken here, Khowar stands out as the lingua franca, noted for its rich oral and literary traditions. According to Sloan (n.d.), around 250,000 native speakers primarily use Khowar in Chitral and its diaspora across major Pakistani cities. Decker (1992) underscores its role as a common tongue, fostering communication within and beyond Chitral. Khowar's literary output, particularly in folk poetry, showcases a vibrant continuum of the community's oral traditions, echoing the socio-cultural dynamics of the region. Kamal (2018) argues that while the literary scene in Chitral predominantly features poetry, other genres like novels remain sparse, with Zafar Ullah Parwaz's 'Angeristanu' marking a notable exception.

Folk poems, which are central to Khowar literature, embody the collective memory and values of the Khow people. Dundes (1966) classifies these poems as folklore, functioning as a repository of cultural wisdom and a means for the oral transmission of the community's history across generations. Ahmad, Ullah, and Nawab (2024) Proverbs, frequently characterized as linguistic nuggets or pearls of wisdom, serve a significant function in mirroring the collective human experience and the values inherent within a community. In this context, Khowar proverbs, akin to folk poems, convey fragments of insight, truth, or advice, encapsulating the practices, traditions, and beliefs of the Chitrali community. Nasir and Fatimah (2017) emphasize that folk poems undergo adaptation and evolution while maintaining fundamental themes that reflect and respond to the changing concerns and values of the community.

The scholarly use of thematic analysis in folk poetry provides insights into the complicated interplay of language and culture. Braun and Clarke (2006) characterize thematic analysis as a versatile approach that can be used inductively, allowing themes to arise without preconceived preconceptions, or deductively, where themes are identified in advance and used to frame the study. This method's versatility makes it ideal for exploring the rich and layered expressions found in folk poetry.

Extensive research on folk poetry has identified diverse themes, including familial relationships, societal roles, and emotional landscapes. Lalremruati (2019) examines Mizo folk songs, highlighting themes of love, sacrifice, and communal ties that reflect the broader societal ethos. Thwala (2017) analyses the Tingabisa songs, highlighting themes of nature, love, and social values that collectively establish a communal identity and continuity. These studies highlight the thematic depth of folk poetry, providing significant insights into the societies from which they emerge.

Nonetheless, in light of the diverse themes and narratives found in Khowar folk poetry, this literary area appears to be significantly underexamined. This research seeks to address this gap through a thematic analysis of three prominent Khowar folk poems—Nano Begal, Nandoshi, and Ghoru. The goal is to reveal the universal moral and emotional themes they convey, thus enhancing the overall comprehension of Chitral's cultural heritage and its literary expressions.

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology to examine the thematic intricacies of three culturally important Khowar folk poems: Nano Begal, Nandoshi, and Ghoru. The selection of these poems is based on their significance within the Khowar-speaking community and their accessibility in both original and translated versions on the

Mahraka Website. The dual-language format facilitates a comprehensive examination of the poems' textual nuances and cultural significance.

Braun and Clarke (2006) utilized thematic analysis to identify and interpret the primary themes present in the poems. The process included initial data familiarisation, systematic coding of the text, theme development, and refinement. A critical review of each theme was conducted to ensure it accurately represented the data and reflected broader cultural insights. Badenhorst (2008) advocates for this approach, highlighting that qualitative research primarily involves the interpretation of texts to uncover deeper meanings and human experiences.

The translations and analyses were conducted with attention to the source material, emphasizing ethical considerations that uphold the cultural integrity and linguistic authenticity of the poems. Cross-referencing themes with existing literature and expert opinions addressed the study's limitations, including potential biases from translation and the interpretive nature of thematic analysis.

3. 1. Theoretical Framework

The thematic analysis serves as the principal method for identifying and interpreting the central themes present in the three Khowar folk poems: Nano Begal, Nandoshi, and Ghoru. This serves as the foundation of the research. Thematic analysis, as described by Villegas (2023), entails a methodical process for examining qualitative data and identifying patterns that arise during interpretation. The researcher interacts with the data through a reflexive process, permitting personal experiences and insights to inform the comprehension of the identified themes.

This study employs thematic analysis alongside Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, which explores the presence of multiple voices within a text. Khowar folk poetry exhibits a wealth of dialogic interactions, showcasing various societal perspectives that engage with gender roles, social hierarchies, and communal values. This theoretical framework enables researchers to interpret these poems as dynamic dialogues that both express and shape the cultural identity of the Chitrali community.

Dennis Tedlock developed the methodological approach of ethno poetics, enhancing analysis by emphasizing the performative and structural elements of oral literature. This approach is significant in the analysis of Khowar folk poetry, as the interaction of language, rhythm, and cultural performance enhances comprehension of how these poems embody and express communal identities and values.

Finally, the study integrates theories of cultural identity, especially those proposed by Stuart Hall, to examine the role of Khowar folk poetry in the preservation and expression of cultural heritage. This research analyses the themes of tradition, memory, and identity in these poems to demonstrate their role in preserving the cultural continuity of the Khowar-speaking community.

These theoretical perspectives offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing the complex meanings within Khowar folk poetry, positioning these works as active participants in the cultural discourse of the Chitrali people.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

This section conducts a meticulous analysis of the selected Khowar folk poems—Nano Begal, Nandoshi, and Ghoru—to uncover the underlying themes that resonate within the cultural and historical context of the Khowar-speaking community. Each poem functions as a cultural artifact, providing insight into the values, beliefs, and social structures that have influenced the Chitrali community throughout history. This study employs thematic analysis to identify and interpret the recurring motifs and narratives present in the poems, illuminating their reflection of the community's collective memory and attitudes towards significant social issues. This discussion delves into these themes comprehensively, offering a nuanced understanding of the cultural heritage inherent in Khowar folk poetry.

4.1 Thematic Analysis of “Nano Begal”

4.1.1 Defiance of Societal Expectations and Gender Role

During that period, the concept of bravery within the state system was primarily associated with the youth. Throughout history, literature has consistently portrayed words like bravery, strength, and intelligence in

connection with young people. The narratives often focused on the exploits of the youth, showcasing their valour in activities such as horse riding, archery, polo, and warfare. It is noteworthy that, in literature, discussions often veered towards the perceived weaker aspects of women's personalities. However, in the context of the mentioned song, a remarkable departure from this norm occurred. The song highlighted the extraordinary roles played by a woman, challenging the traditional notion that bravery was exclusively attributed to young men. In doing so, it not only defied societal expectations but also celebrated the amazing and courageous feats of women in a time when such recognition was not commonly accorded to them.

In this poignant song, the opening lines resound with defiance:

"Behold the ruthless Mehtar's ruthlessness, O mother's Begal!

Behold my pierced and bruised heart, O mother's Begal!"

These lines carry profound meaning, especially considering the constraints of speaking openly against rulers, be it in a monarchy or a democracy. The bold woman in the song challenges the gender hierarchy enforced by the *Mehtar*, questioning his actions and insinuating that even an old woman could excel in the skills the ruler prizes:

"Wherefore should the *Mehtar* get you murdered?

While even an old woman could hit the ball, O mother's Begal!"

The subsequent lines intensify the condemnation, as she curses the ruler for his heinous act:

"May he, who killed thee, lose his son too!

And may mourning never cease in his house! O mother's Begal!"

In these verses, the woman not only challenges the ruler's gender bias but also confronts his very manhood, making a powerful statement against oppression and injustice.

4.1.2 Resilience and Heroism

In this poignant folk poem, the essence of bravery extends beyond personal boundaries, transcending mere self-awareness. It involves not only possessing courage within one's heart but also translating that bravery into tangible action—an embodiment known as resilience. This concept finds resonance in a compelling song sung by *Begal's* mother, transforming her grief and outrage into an act of heroism. When faced with the tragic murder of her son, she resists silence and instead channels her inner bravery through the power of song. In a courageous display, she confronts *Mehtar*, the perpetrator, using her words as a formidable weapon, ultimately triumphing over him in the eyes of onlookers.

4.1.3 Grief and Mourning

The theme of grief and mourning is dominant in most of the genres of literature. The themes of sadness and sorrow have also been the central ideas of many tragedies and elegies of English literature. In many genres of literature, these themes are the result of the wish of the character to be widely admired. The ego of one character causes the grief of the others. Similarly, the poem *Nano Begal* (Mother's Begal) reveals the theme of grief and mourning. The grief and mourning of the mother of *Mirza Begal* is the result of the cruelty of the *Mehtar*. The mother of *Mirza Begal* laments over the loss of his son. The repeated use of the phrase "pierced and bruised heart" and the mother's wish that the *Mehtar* who killed him should lose his son, highlights the intense sorrow the speaker of the poem feels.

4.1.4 Injustice and Violence

The theme of injustice and violence is often associated with the pieces of literature that have been produced in times of chaos and turmoil. The doer of injustice has always been the powerful. The folk poem *Nano Begal* highlights the theme of injustice and violence. The line "Wherefore should the *Mehtar* get you murdered?" suggests there has been a central role of *Mehtar* in doing the injustice. The theme of injustice and violence is dominant throughout the poem.

4.1.5 Loss of Talent and power

According to Danish (n.d.), polo had been the state of Chitral's elites' preferred pastime. It is a very difficult game to play, as compared to other sports. It requires skill as well as power at the same time. The poem highlights the remarkable skills of *Mirza Begal* in the game of polo. The speaker of the poem, the mother of Mirza Begal laments over the loss of the talent. The poem highlights the theme of the loss of talent and the uniqueness and irreplaceability of the individual. Talent and skills make one head and shoulder above others. Similarly, the poem highlights the theme of power, the power of the deceased one. The poem suggests that Mirza Begal had a significant presence and influence. He was not an ordinary player but he had a powerful and unique playing style. The lines "Who could play the game like thee now?" and "Thy flying-hit would soar high into the air" emphasize his unique impact on the game and the people around him.

4.1.6 Regret and Nostalgia

The poem highlights the themes of regret and nostalgia. The speaker of the poem, the mother of Mirza Begal reflects on his playing style, his abilities, and the joy he brought to the game. The tone of the poem suggests clearly that the speaker regrets the absence of his son.

4.1.7 Descriptive Imagery

Descriptive imagery adds to the beauty of a literary piece. The use of words and phrases in a piece of literature that appeals to the senses is always unique. The poem makes extensive use of descriptive imagery, especially in passages like "And would tear through the heights of the sky" and "Thy flying-hit would soar high into the air." These suggestive details support the subject of honoring the remarkable abilities of the departed while also heightening the poem's emotional impact.

4.1.8 Femininity

The theme of femininity in the poem is portrayed through the character of the mother of Mirza Begal who is the speaker of the poem. This is evident in the lyrics, as *Begal's* mother, having engaged in polo during her youth, assumes the role in place of her son. The background story and the poem lines suggest that even though she is a woman, she possesses remarkable strength and skill in polo that is typically associated with men. To add more, women of that period consistently joined men in various forms of entertainment, a phenomenon commonly observed in rural societies. This highlights the idea that femininity is not synonymous with weakness. Apart from that, the poem also highlights the intelligence and resilience of the speaker.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of "Nandoshi"

4.2.1 Femininity

The poem Nandoshi reveals the concept of femininity. Here, some of the poem's textual components related to the concept of femininity are revealed. In the poem, Doshi is compared to the fragile "*Birghal*-flower of Brok-the-paradise." This explanation emphasizes the beauty and fragility that are frequently connected to femininity. The mother's nurturing is another aspect of femininity that the poem portrays. The mother's care and protection are consistent with conventional ideas of masculinity and defending femininity. The mother has nostalgia and a yearning for the past; she regrets the past. This element also shows the sentimental and emotional connection, which can be seen as characteristics of femininity.

4.2.2 Parental Love and Concern

Parental love and concern have been the central themes in many genres of literature. The folk poem Nandoshi has the theme of parental affection. The theme is dominant throughout the poem. The central theme of the passage appears to be the deep love of a mother towards her daughters, Doshi and Nandoshi. The speaker expresses their care and affection for Doshi and grieves over the sad demise of her daughter Nandoshi.

4.2.3 Sacrifice and Loss

The poem highlights the theme of sacrifice and loss. The mother's sacrifice for the happiness of others and her misery depict how the people of the past used to be. "Oh me! Giving away Doshi (in a painful bargain) I took back Nandoshi, my daughter. Oh, Nandoshi My daughter" suggests how the mother sacrifices his daughter for another daughter. She veiled her grief and looked for the happiness of others. The daughter, Doshi sacrifices her remaining life to fill the gap of her sister in her in-laws. Despite the loss of one family member the mother and daughter did exemplary work for the happiness of others.

4.2.4 Cultural and Regional Identity

The poem depicts the cultural and regional elements. These cultural and regional elements contribute to the background of the poem. The names of particular places and the accent, which the poem incorporates contribute to the themes of regional identity and may provide background and context for the poem. These names are, *Shandoor*, *Brok-de'r*, and *Laspur*.

4.2.5 Nostalgia and Nature

The poem evokes nostalgia while highlighting various aspects of nature through references to landscapes. The allusions to natural settings and sceneries, such as *Brok-the-Paradise*, *Laspur*, the waterfall, the skylight frame, and the sun beans, allude to a relationship between people and the natural world. The mother expresses her longing for the time when her late daughter was alive, saying that she wishes she could "drink water from the waterfalls of *Laspur* just once more." There's a sense of nostalgia with this theme.

4.2.6 Desire and Hope

The speaker conveys her wishes and hopes for her daughters. The scenes where you level *Shandoor* like a vegetable garden and walk through *Barset-the-Paradise* are the highlights of the concept of hope and longing. The subject of hopes and ambitions for a better future is reflected in these desires.

4.3 Thematic Analysis of "Ghoru"

4.3.1 Innocence and Childhood

In the poem, a child and mother have a chat. It emphasizes the child's curiosity and innocence. She keeps asking her mother about the tragic sign that appears on the horizon. Her innocent and childlike outlook on the world is reflected in the child's innocence and compassion. She questions her mother endlessly about the warning signals of the impending disaster, but her mother views her as inexperienced and gently guides her.

4.3.2 Mother's Love and Reassurance

In every genre of literature, the theme of mother's love is dominant. The pure love, that surpasses all the other types of love. The love exists between the mother and kid in every species. The same theme of love is reflected in this poem. How the mother reassures her kid and comforts her is beyond explaining in words. She responds to the child's questions lovingly and caringly. She tries to ease the kid's fears and concerns. The phrase "Oh mother's darling" seems to come out from the heart of the mother.

4.3.3 Trust and Faith

Since she has been living with that trust and faith, the mother instills these qualities in the child. Her death is the result of her faith in the situation. Even in the face of a perceived threat, she reassures the youngster that they are safe and there is no danger. The poem addresses the issue of faith and confidence in parents' and caregivers' protective roles.

4.3.4 Femininity

The poem's topic of femininity is illustrated by the mother's nurturing, parental figure, and directing functions. The mother is portrayed as a kind and understanding person who comforts her child about the different worries and

threats in the future. She responds to her child's inquiries and anxieties with compassion and certainty, embodying the traits of a resilient, strong, and loving mother. Despite the difficulties and possible dangers, the mother continues to provide her child with protection and comfort. In her gentle speech, she gives her advice concerning the future. This subject emphasizes the conventional protecting, guiding, and caring roles that are frequently connected to motherhood and femininity.

4.3.5 Nature and Environment

The sunlight, the mountain route, and the elements of nature all conjure up images of the environment. The child's circumstances mirror what the child considers to be a threat. When a man appears, the mother sees him as a shepherd, and the kid sees him as a hunter. For them both, it depicts the environment differently. The poem makes a connection between the natural world and the child's concerns.

4.3.6 Trust in Divine providence and Independence

The poem's last few lines convey a deep faith in heavenly protection and direction. Emphasizing themes of faith and spirituality, the orphans are urged to put their trust in God to guide them on their journey. The poem's final section likewise addresses the orphan's destiny. The mother predicts that the orphan will be independent, courageously forging forth, and shielded by a greater force—the All-Powerful God. Themes like resiliency, independence, and the function of faith in directing one's path are conveyed in this.

5. Conclusion

The thematic analysis of the three Khowar folk poems—Nano Begal, Nandoshi, and Ghoru—reveals significant cultural, emotional, and social themes inherent in the heritage of the Khowar-speaking community. These poems function as important cultural artifacts, reflecting the historical and cultural contexts of their times while also conveying universal human experiences that resonate across generations. The analysis of Nano Begal examines themes of grief, loss of talent, and the struggle against injustice, while also illuminating the frequently overlooked contributions of women in challenging societal expectations. This poem serves as a testament to the resilience and heroism that can arise from tragedy, reflecting the complexities of power, gender, and societal norms. Nandoshi explores themes of femininity, parental love, and the sacrifices and losses that accompany familial responsibilities. The poem illustrates cultural and regional identity, while also invoking nostalgia and natural imagery. This highlights the profound connections between the Khowar people and their environment, alongside the lasting ties of family and tradition.

Finally, Ghoru highlights themes of innocence, trust, and the nurturing aspect of motherhood. The poem analyses the nurturing and guiding aspects of maternal love, while also investigating overarching themes of faith in divine providence and the significance of independence. Ghoru vividly depicts the natural world, emphasizing the intricate relationship between the Khowar people and their environment, which reflects the community's reliance on nature for physical sustenance and spiritual guidance. In conclusion, these three poems provide insight into the cultural heritage of the Khowar-speaking community. The themes examined are pertinent to the historical and cultural context of Chitral and also reflect universal human experiences, serving as essential resources for comprehending the community's values, beliefs, and social structures. The findings of the study highlight the significance of preserving oral traditions, which offer valuable insights into the lives and identities of the Khowar people. This analysis identifies recurring themes that enhance our understanding of these literary works and underscore the significance of these poems in conveying and preserving the cultural knowledge of the Khowar-speaking community.

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