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Free Will and Determinism in the Poetry of Ghani Khan: A Philosophical Inquiry

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Abstract

This article argues that Ghani Khan offers a poetic version of compatibilism, in which God imposes a cosmic structure of deterministic order, and human freedom is exercised as conscious involvement in that order. This dimension of Ghani Khan's work has been largely overlooked, as existing scholarship on him focuses on his Sufi philosophies, existential ideas, and poetics. The article provides a textual analysis of some of the selected poems from Latoon to explore Ghani Khan's view of determinism and free will, and analyzes his emphasis on the importance of human choice in a divinely designed world. The article also draws connections between Ghani Khan and Islamic theologians such as Al-Ghazali, as well as modern compatibilists such as Hume and Frankfurt, arguing that the poet offers a unique philosophical vision in which the self is free in necessity.

Keywords: Free will, Determinism, Compatibilism, Human Agency, Divine Necessity.

Introduction

From Rumi to Milton, Aristotle to Kant, Augustine to Al-Ghazali, poets, philosophers, and theologians have grappled with the question of whether human beings are the masters of their fate or merely actors in a drama written by of God or nature (Rosario Neuman Lorenzini, 2025).

In modern philosophy, the view that causal determinism is compatible with free will is known as "Compatibilism". If freedom is not defined as a break in the causal chain but rather as the capacity to act on our own reasons, values, and desires, then it is possible to have moral responsibility in a determined world (Bailey, 2021).

Various branches of Islamic intellectual traditions tried to hold both omnipotence of God and human responsibility and, as such, had complex compatibilist systems before the European terms (Abdullah, 2022).

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The paper will discuss the questions of free will and determinism in the selected poems of Ghani Khan. He occupies a distinctive place in this conversation. His work can be examined in the context of the philosophical theory of compatibilism, which reconciles the problem of free will and determinism. Ghani Khan (1914-1996) was a famous Pashto poet, writer, artist, and philosopher. The contributions that Ghani Khan made to literature and philosophy have been extensively researched, but the role of free will and determinism has been poorly examined. The majority of researchers focus on Ghani Khan's Sufism and existentialism, but they fail to see how his poetry harmonizes human free will and determinism. This study seeks to fill that gap by using compatibilism to examine Ghani Khan's thought and demonstrate how his works can be used to address broader philosophical questions.

According to Shazia Babar, Ghani Khan is deeply concerned with promoting the ideas of free will and personal freedom. Even his poetry rebels against oppressive orders and advocates free life based on personal aspirations, which appeal to Romantic values and mysticism, focusing on self-sufficiency (Babar, 2008).

While presenting the other aspect of Ghani Khan's writing, Shah insisted that his writings tends to describe life as a cage into which the bird continues to sing, a world where there are laws and where there are mysteries which can be discovered but cannot be understood, and a human being who is carried by forces that he can never understand but who is capable of true love and beauty as well as moral choice. (Shah, 2011).

Ghani Khan's thinking was also influenced by modern philosophy. In modern philosophy, compatibilism was developed by philosophers like David Hume, who argues that the concept of the power to act or not to act according to the will determinations, and by Harry Frankfurt, who raised the question of higher-order desires and the conditions of moral responsibility (Kane, 2005). Although there exists no indication that Ghani Khan read these figures directly, the fact that the themes are shared is simply remarkable. The human dignity, he insists, is based on the reaction to the circumstances one is forced to present the Frankfortian notion that freedom is in being able to identify with the impulses that make a person act (Frankfurt, 1971). His fear of hard determinism is the same as Hume's rejection of metaphysical indeterminism as a requirement of freedom. His poetry is notable in its synthesis of mystical determinism, Pashtun cultural particularity, and contemporary existentialist sense, which suggests what can be appropriately termed a compatibilist vision of human freedom.

The Existential Dimension

Ghani Khan's poetry demonstrates an existential vision where the human being is represented as a questioning and freedom-seeking agent. Similar to existentialist philosophers, Ghani Khan puts a strong emphasis on the individual consciousness, inner liberty, rebellion against imposed meanings, and the duty of self-creation instead of passive submission to the forces of determinism (Taizi, 1998). The poetic voice always proclaims to him that real freedom is not political, social, but existential and inner, based on authenticity and self-knowledge. This makes Ghani Khan correspond with the existential philosophy, especially the notion that human beings are supposed to make meaning by choice even in the presence of restrictions of fate and circumstance (Zafar, 2012).

خدایه ستا جنت به په دې یو هم بدل نه کړمه
وېنه زما، مېنه زما، جام زما، جام زما (khan, 2023, p. 14)

**“O God, I would not trade your paradise even for this one thing.
My blood, my love, my cup—my cup.”**

In these verses, Ghani Khan anticipates a daring compensation of lived intensity with promised transcendence. The rights of the speaker were experience, love, intoxication of life, and an over abstract reward. Instead of some hope of salvation, meaning is found in the present existence. This is achieved by doing rather than waiting.

نن دمستی ورځ ده گوره زه په مستېدو شومه
داسې گدا وکړه چې زه هم په گډېدو شومه
نن ده هغه ورځ چې پښتون ژوند په مرگ کتلی وو
خپلې محبوبې له زلمي سر تلې کښې وړی وو (khan, 2023, p. 10)

**“Today is the day of happiness—look, I have become happy.
Dance so aggressively that I, too, am swept into the dance.
Today is that day when a Pashtun won life through death.
For his beloved, the young man carried his head in his hands.”**

Life is described as a thing one gains through bravery and not just survival. Ghani Khan glorifies danger, sacrifice, and determination as some sources of meaning. The finality of death faces purpose and becomes meaningfulness. The collective identity is made as an act, not one to be undergone. Life becomes rich when we decide to struggle.

په جنگ کښې بهادر او مستانه لکه چنگیز
په مېنه کښې بي شرمه بي پروا لکه انگرېز (khan, 2023, p. 158)

**“In war—brave and cheerful like Genghis;
In love—shameless, reckless, like the Englishman.”**

In this verse, Ghani Khan emphasizes that opposing characteristics do not express regret. The self does not remain in one moral position. The presence of weakness and strength exists. There is no excessive self-censorship in life. Authenticity subjugates moral rigidity.

زہ بو قصہ نہ ہم، خو باب پمہ د تولو
زہ کلہ مراد، کلہ ارمان، کلہ غرور پمہ (khan, 2023, p. 186)

**“I am not a single story, but a whole chapter of all.
At times I am fulfilled, at times longing, and sometimes pride.”**

Ghani Khan claims centrality and not marginality. The identity is fluid, which switches between satisfaction and desire. Life is written and not given. There are several stories that the self is involved with. Becoming is an alternative to being.

زہ یم زہ یم رنگ سرور او شیرنگار زہ یم
د جانان سترگو کبئی مراوی خمار زہ یم (khan, 2023, p. 244)

**“I am, I am—glow and eagerness, I am.
In my beloved’s eyes, I am the peaceful drunkenness.”**

He maintains that life is confirmed by being and manifesting. The recurrent affirmation of I am stresses consciousness. Sensation and meaning are the self. Identity is not explained, it is lived.

دلته زہ یو او یکتا یم، هلته زر زما پہ شان
چار چاپیرہ سپیری خاوری، زہ یوازی یم رویشان (khan, 2023, p. 609)

**“Here, I am one and singular; there, a thousand are like me.
All around—barren dust; I alone am glowing.”**

According to Ghani Khan, loneliness is a symbol of excellence and not defeat. Consciousness makes the person stand out of the homogeneous crowd. The lightness of the soul is in contrast to the barrenness of the world. Real existence, rather than numerical belonging, takes its place. Life makes sense when alone.

چئی وی اجل ملا تہ اوری او کہ نہ اوری
تشہ خاؤرہ نہ دہ غنی، خنکہ بہ شی خاؤری؟ (khan, 2023, p. 459)

“Are you crying out to the Angel of Death—does Mullah hear you or not?”

Ghani is not mere dust; it is rich and fertile—how could it ever become dust?”

Ghani Khan opposes a material finality of human life. Identity goes beyond the physical dissolution. The self does not allow being anonymous in death. Life still exists by way of meaning.

The Deterministic Dimension

According to this philosophical theory, all events and decisions made by people are determined by natural laws that govern following events (Startup, 2021).

Mostly, Ghani Khan states that he believes in the power of divine forces and the divine nature of the universe, and how it works mysteriously. The fact that life unfolds according to divine purposes is attributed to the views of spiritual determinism.

باغ کبني څوک گلاب شی ، څوک شی سروی ، څوک ورځاری
څوک د مینځ غنچه شی څوک کبل د غاري غاري
تاج د چا د زرو د چا تاج شی د غمونو
ویش د بل په لاس دی که ته خاندی او که ژاري
(Ghani K. , 2023, p. 213)

**“Some grow to be a rose in the garden, some grow to be cypresses,
and some grow to be wildflowers.**

**Some become tender buds in the middle, and some become grass by
the roadside.**

Some wear crowns of gold, and some wear the crowns of sorrow.

**The distribution is in someone else’s hands- whether you laugh or
cry.”**

Here, he introduces a worldview that strongly supports a deterministic philosophy, as the circumstances under which people are born, and the roles they end up occupying, are largely influenced by forces that they cannot control. Such imagery as crowns of gold and crowns of sorrow highlights the unfair distribution of good and misery, indicating that good and evil are not deserved but are distributed by some other order. The last line, the distribution is in someone else's hands, literally states a deterministic belief that human lives are subject to a system of forces (divine will, fate, cosmic order, or natural law) that predetermine the situation regardless of what one wants to do.

که تش په عقل وی په لیاقت وی، نه په نصیب وی نه په قسمت وی

شیطان به نن لونی وۀ له جبریله، غنی به هم لایق د ولایت وی (khan, 2023, p. 35)

If it were based on reason or merit alone, and not on fate, not on destiny

Then Satan would be greater than Gabriel, and Ghani would also be worthy of sainthood.

Rational and moral competence are irrelevant in determining the human outcomes, according to Ghani Khan. He cites a deterministic system where positions are predetermined without regard to intellectual or moral work. The verse is detrimental to social organization because it suggests predestination.

زما بخت دشمنی بخت دی، یا به مرمه یا به سوخم
یا به ویخ له د دریاب خم، یا به پاس په چپو خوخم
عجب زه عجیبه لاره، عجیبه کاروان روان دی

(khan, 2023, p. 82) ما وروستی پراو له بیانی، که زه ځمه او که زه نه ځم

My fate is the fate of the flame; either I shall burn, or I shall die.

I will either drown in the sea or ride on the waves.

Weird, and strange, am I, and path; weird, the caravan that goes.

It gives me the last point of destination, willingly or not.

The verses put the human being as directed to a purpose: the self-moves to a predetermined end.

چا ته جام کښی د سرو خاوری شگی واچي

(khan, 2023, p. 197) چا ته ورکړي ده اړو ډبرې کښی لال

To some, the goblet is filled with dust and pebbles,
To others, a ruby is placed within tons of ashes.

In this case, structural inequality is brought out by Ghani Khan as an ontological condition. Distribution is not governed by some visible moral cause. Results seem to be randomly assigned but fixed in a systematic manner. Hard work and effort do not define reward. The process of allocation is a deterministic one, which is not visible. Justice has become alien to human expectations.

لاس می بند ژبه می بنده

(khan, 2023, p. 342) داسی ناست یمه ډبگر

I am bound by the hand, and gagged by the tongue,

I am sitting here, like a pot on the shelf.

Human will, according to Ghani Khan, is mostly faced with constraint and not possibility. The causal limitation is represented by physical and expressive

paralysis. There is a desire that is not effective. The man is diminished to tolerance. Circumstances dictate actionlessness.

چا له مېنه ورکړي چا له څوکي د لاس گوتې
څوک د سر گلاب کړي په چا توري لاري توکي (khan, 2023, p. 427)

**To some, you gave love; to others, cold fingertips.
Some are crowned like roses; others are spit upon.**

Ghani Khan makes an emotional fortune pre-determined instead of a choice. In love and denial are present, predetermined conditions. There are specific patterns of social evaluation. People pass through emotional climates that they do not choose. Experience is shaped before action.

هر شي يو تول کبني گند لي دی جور او پۀ سوچ جور شوی دی
سټوري او نمر او رڼا او هوا هر يو ني لاس کبني نيولي دی (Ahmad
Sahibzada, 2014, p. 34)

“Everything has been stitched together in a single balance ;All things are fashioned and thoughtfully arranged .The stars, the sun, the light, and the air. Each one has been held firmly in His hand.

In this vision, Ghani Khan describes the universe as a closed causal system. Everything works according to measured need. Nothing escapes the total structure. Natural forces obey pre-established relations. Autonomy dissolves into coherence. Determinism governs both matter and meaning.

زه نرمه خټه يم لاس د کولال کبني
يا به د ميو جام شم او يا کوزه د جو مات (Ahmad Sahibzada, 2014, p. 216)

**“I am soft clay in the potter’s hand;
Either I will become a cup of wine, or a pitcher that breaks at the riverbank.**

The poet himself gives a graphic metaphor in this verse, which is closely related to deterministic philosophy; the human being is described as soft clay, which is wholly in the hands of the potter. The clay has nothing to say of what it is, whether a cup to hold wine or a delicate pitcher to be broken by the riverbank.

The Poet as Philosopher of the Middle Path -Compatibilist Themes in Ghani Khan’s Poetry

The concept of compatibilism is a philosophical standpoint that attempts to harmonize the ideas of determinism and free will with the argument that human freedom lies not in the lack of causal necessity, but in the ability to act in line

with the inner will, personality, and conscious approval of action (Frankfurt, 1971). In this view, determinism does not rule out moral responsibility, but it gives the ordered circumstances under which agency is significant. The same perception of freedom is also present in the poems of Ghani Khan, who often recognizes fate, divine order, and cosmic necessity, but at the same time accepts selfhood, dignity, and inner autonomy. The poetic philosophy of Ghani Khan in this respect is quite compatible with compatibilist thinking, as it does not compromise the necessity and freedom to a mere passivity of a human subject (Taizi, 1998).

In order to demonstrate compatibilism, we will take some selected poems from *Latoon* and analyze them in terms of their thematic and philosophical richness.

ته د بنېادم د بخت او تېبنتي بو تصوير بي
بو رنگين خمار په تار تړلي د تقدېر بي (khan, 2023, p. 258)

**You are the image of man's fortune and flight,
a colorful intoxication tied by the thread of fate.**

The human state, according to Ghani Khan, is a matter of destiny, but with the vitality within. Existence is linked to fate, and it does not deprive it of color or intensity. The motion takes place within boundaries and not outside them. Human liberty is not destined to die because it is a way of expression. Life is tied and alive simultaneously.

خداپه عقل چې وؤ زړه دي ولي راكړو؟
په بو ملك كېني دوه خود سره بادشاهان
بادشاهي او فقيري دي ولي بو كره؟
د ژوندون په هره ساه كېني مرگ پنهان
ولي غم لكه اسمان په جهان خور دي
خداپه ولي خوشالي دي كره ناپابه؟ (khan, 2023, p. 272)

**O God, if you gave reason, why did you also give the heart?
Two obstinate kings of one kingdom--how shall they rule together?
Why hast thou two souls, one, royalty and beggary?
Why is death hidden in every breath of life?
Why is sorrow spread across the world like the sky?
O God, why did you make happiness so rare?**

In the case of Ghani Khan, there is no cancellation of agency with respect to inner conflict, but a characteristic of agency. There is the coexistence of reason and emotion as opposing powers of the same self. Peace is never handed; it has to be

bargained for. Life incorporates both the uplift and the denial within one building. Grief and happiness are not evenly spread, but sense is created by conscious suffering.

اول ږوند وم، تا بېنا کړم، بيا دې ږوند کړم
خکه نه راکوی ژوند مزه اوس ما له (khan, 2023, p. 606)

**At first, I was blind; you gave me sight, then blinded me again.
That is why life no longer brings me joy.**

Ghani Khan introduces awareness as something gifted and burdened.

Perception is enhanced, and the lack of innocence increases. Negation of happiness comes after augmented cognition and not outward failure. With consciousness, the taste of life becomes different. It is determination that makes the experience, but the response is inward. Liberty is held to live as conscious awareness and not as pleasure.

دلته د فطرت کمال، دلته د ادم جنون
دواړه په ضد شوی وو، جوړ نی که تری خه افسون (khan, 2023, p. 584)

**Here is Nature's perfection, here is Man's madness,
Though both were in conflict, you made some magic from them.**

Ghani Khan notes that there is no cancellation between order and impulse. The human restlessness is put in perspective by nature. It is at the point of structure and excess that creativity emerges. Meaning does not lie in making a choice. Vitality is then generated by synthesis. Agency acts upon tension, as opposed to purity.

يو سرک د گلستان بله لاره د زندان
مينځ کښي زه ولاړ حيران چي په دې خم که په دې (khan, 2023, p. 567)

**One road leads to the rose garden, another to the prison.
I am in the middle of them, confused,--which way shall I go?**

Ghani Khan puts the self between fixed options. The ways are prescribed, but indecisiveness is human. Our choices only lead to results that are already exist. Confusion is the hallmark of responsibility and not a lack of strength. Acting takes place on pre-destined paths. The burden of selection is freedom.

هر سړی پواځي دى ده خپل خود په قلا کښي بند
خوک د پرون خپال کښي ورک او خوک خوب د سبا کښي بند (khan, 2023, p. 421)

**Every person is alone, locked within the confines of their own self.
Some are lost in thoughts of yesterday, others imprisoned in dreams
of tomorrow.**

In these lines, Ghani Khan's isolation is a worldwide status. People are imprisoned by their memories or expectations. The mind is confined in time, like in various directions. Situation restricts the being, but when one is aware, the trap is unveiled. The initial release is that of recognition.

دي گوگل کيني مي دننه
هم دنبا ده هم قيامت دي
دا هم لاره هم کاروان دي
(khan, 2023, p. 484) هم تدبير دي هم قسمت دي

**Within this heart of mine,
There lies both the world and the Day of Judgment.
It is the way and the procession.
It is both planning and fate (SahibZada, 2014, p. 183).**

Ghani Khan believes that there is co-existence of calculation and destiny in the same interior space. There is no rejection of preordination by human intention. They work concurrently as opposed to being competitive. Life proceeds by conformity and not resistance. Liberty is a conscious involvement. The self is designed and predetermined.

زه بو مست شان لپونتوب يم
(khan, 2023, p. 488) د هوا په اس سورپگم

**I am a glorious madness,
Riding the horse of the wind.**

This verse narrates as a movement of natural force. It is the wind that carries, but the rider agrees. Direction is not written, but it is participatory. Surrendering is the flow of energy. The willing motion is represented as freedom. Limitation and rapture will intermingle.

دي بي انصافه د زور جهان کيني
دي بي کيني د پېغور جهان کيني
دي په غريبو نسکور جهان کيني
(khan G. , 2023, p. 4) سترگي ليدونکي را, عقل روښان را

**In this unjust world of brute force,
In this shameless world of constant blame,**

**In this broken world where the poor are crushed,
Grant me seeing eyes, grant me a shining mind.**

The external world is characterized by injustice, and not an inner response. The process of change is initiated by perception and not power. Clarity becomes resistance. The situations may be difficult, but the consciousness redefines participation. The existence of freedom is in judgment. Vision enables the agency to persist.

These versus lead to a philosophy that accommodates both determinism and free will, a middle ground- Compatibilism.

Conclusion

The critical analysis of the poetry by Ghani Khan shows that his philosophical perspective is essentially consistent with the theory of compatibilism, where divine determinism and human choice are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they support each other. According to his poems, human beings are directed by divine, natural, and social circumstances, but they still have the ability of moral consciousness, creativity, and choice. The metaphors used by Ghani Khan, including the clay in the hands of the potter, the moral clarity of the madman in the face of injustice, the harmony of natural paradoxes, and the aesthetic value of struggle, have a compatibilist interpretation of freedom as something exercised within necessity and not outside of it. The poet integrates the concepts of Sufism, determinism, Pashtun cultural values, and self-assertion of existence to form a philosophical synthesis that challenges the rigid opposites of fate and agency. Finally, Ghani Khan provides a poetic philosophy where human beings can find freedom when their inner will is in accord with the moral and cosmic order of the universe and when they are engaged in the order consciously.

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