



DIROSAT

Journal of Education, Social Sciences & Humanities

Journal website: <https://dirosat.com/>

ISSN : 2985-5497 (Online)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58355/dirosat.v4i3.265>

Vol. 4 No. 3 (2026)

pp. 602-611

Research Article

Social Emergentism in the Poetry of Khushal Khan

Hamid Shinwari, Fahim Bahir

Department of Pashto, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Alberoni University, Afghanistan

Corresponding Author, Email; hamidshinwari40@gmail.com (Hamid Shinwari)



Copyright © 2026 by Authors, Published by **DIROSAT: Journal of Education, Social Sciences & Humanities**. This is an open access article under the CC BY License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Received : June 14, 2026

Revised : July 16, 2026

Accepted : August 15, 2026

Available online : September 28, 2026

How to Cite: Hamid Shinwari, & Fahim Bahir. (2026). Social Emergentism in the Poetry of Khushal Khan. *DIROSAT: Journal of Education, Social Sciences & Humanities*, 4(3), 602-611. <https://doi.org/10.58355/dirosat.v4i3.265>

Abstract. Social Emergentism is a modern philosophical and social theory based on the principle that new structures and characteristics emerge through the interaction of various simple elements, relationships, and activities. In the context of language, this theory views language as a social, gradual phenomenon that develops through human interaction and social experience. In literature, Emergentism suggests that a literary work acquires new forms, meanings, and characteristics through the combination and interaction of different artistic elements. Social Emergentism, in turn, emphasizes that cultural, social, and political activities contribute to the emergence of new social and intellectual movements. Khushal Khan Khattak is an important literary example of this theory. In addition to his poetry, he actively struggled with the problems, disunity, and political conditions of his society. His poetry reflects the concepts of honor, unity, solidarity, social criticism, and national struggle.

Keywords: Emergentism, Social Interaction, Social Change, Intellectual Movements, Honor, Unity, Solidarity, Social Criticism, National Struggle, Political Thought

INTRODUCTION

In the late twentieth century, numerous new theories and intellectual movements emerged in the fields of philosophy, sociology, and literature, opening new approaches to the study and analysis of literary works. Emergentism is one of these theories, based on the principle that new structures and characteristics emerge from the interaction of various elements, relationships, and activities.

From the perspective of Emergentism, language is not merely an individual phenomenon; rather, it develops gradually through social relationships and human experiences. Likewise, in the literary field, the combination and interaction of various artistic elements contribute to the emergence of new meanings, forms, and literary characteristics. Therefore, Social Emergentism considers the relationship between literary works and society an important subject of study.

In Pashto literature, the literary and social activities of Khushal Khan Khattak are of particular significance for the study of this theory. His poetry reflects concepts of social problems, honor, unity, solidarity, social criticism, and national struggle. Therefore, studying Khushal Khan Khattak's literary and social thought from the perspective of Social Emergentism provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of his personality, struggle, and literary activities.

Statement of the problem

In Pashto literature, Social Emergentism is an important theory that examines the emergence of new intellectual and social structures through the interaction of social, cultural, and political elements. Clear manifestations of honor, unity, solidarity, social criticism, and national struggle can be observed in the literary and social thought of Khushal Khan Khattak; however, these characteristics require systematic study from the perspective of Social Emergentism. Therefore, the main problem of this study is: How is Social Emergentism manifested in the literary and social thought of Khushal Khan Khattak, and what relationship do his literary and social activities have with this theory?

The significance of the study

Social Emergentism is one of the important theories in contemporary philosophy and social sciences. It examines how new structures and movements emerge through the interaction of social, cultural, political, and intellectual elements. Although this theory has considerable value for analyzing literary works in various social and literary contexts, there is still a significant gap in its application and study within Pashto literature.

In particular, the concepts of honor, unity, solidarity, social criticism, and national struggle are widely reflected in the poetry of Khushal Khan Khattak. However, these concepts have not been sufficiently studied in relation to the theory of Social Emergentism. Therefore, the main research problem is to identify the elements of Social Emergentism in Khushal Khan Khattak's literary and social thought, examine how these elements emerge through their interaction with one another, and explore how they are reflected in his poetry.

This study therefore attempts to clarify the fundamental elements of Social Emergentism in Khushal Khan Khattak's poetry, the relationships among these elements, and the influence of social, cultural, and political conditions on their emergence and development.

Research Questions

1. What are the major elements of Social Emergentism reflected in the poetry of Khushal Khan Khattak?
2. How do the concepts of honor, unity, solidarity, social criticism, and national struggle reflect Social Emergentism in Khushal Khan Khattak's poetry?
3. How do social, cultural, and political factors interact in the emergence of Khushal Khan Khattak's literary and social thought?

Research methodology

In this study, library-based and documentary sources are used, and a descriptive-analytical method is employed to analyze the data. Examples from the poetry of Khushal Khan Khattak are compared and analyzed in accordance with the principles of Social Emergentism in order to scientifically demonstrate the reflection of this theory in his literary and social thought.

Literature Review

As mentioned earlier, Khadija Begum Ferozuddin, an Afghan woman, began writing about him in the English language in 1928 and completed her ten-year literary work, entitled *The Life and Works of Khushal Khan Khattak* by 1938. This is considered among the earliest written biographical studies of Khushal Khan.

The second work is titled *The Afghan Classical Poet Khushal Khan Khattak: Life and Artistic Creativity*, a biographical study written by the late Professor Gul Mohammad Noori. This work was part of his PhD dissertation written in Moscow in the Russian language in 1949.

Another study entitled *Khushal and Aesthetics* was written by Iqbal Nasim Khattak after completing his PhD. It was later published by the Pashto Academy of the University of Peshawar in an attractive format and with good printing quality. In the opening pages of this study, various definitions of aesthetics and some philosophical discussions are presented. This is followed by a discussion of the aesthetic aspects of Khushal Khan's poetry.

A PhD dissertation entitled *Khushal Khattak Lyric* was written by a Russian scholar named Pavel Mikhailovich Sergeyev in 1992. He was awarded a doctoral degree by Saint Petersburg University for writing this dissertation. It discusses Khushal Khan Khattak and the influences of his ideas, which led to the writing and publication of many books and scholarly works about him.

The PhD dissertation entitled *The Uniqueness of Khushal's Religious Belief* (1396) by Dr. Ajmal Azim, a professor at Kabul University, consists of thirteen chapters. He extensively discusses Khushal's poetic thought, religious beliefs, Khushal's nationalism, art from Khushal's perspective, Khushal's tolerance and moderation, the geography of the Pashtun homeland from the perspective of

Khushal's nationalism, Khushal's desire for progress, Khushal's theory of education and training, Khushal's attitude toward women, and a critical review of Khushal's ideas.

Professor Shawali Khan has written a specialized work entitled *Khushal Pezhendana* (An Introduction to Khushal). This work examines various aspects of Khushal Khan Khattak's life, family, personality, scholarly and literary status, intellectual characteristics, and poetry. The work is considered one of the important sources for the study and introduction of Khushal Khan, particularly because its title is directly related to the subject of Khushal Khan studies. The second edition of the book was published in 1400 Solar Hijri in Kabul by Samoon Publishing Society.

So far, numerous Pashto writers, literary scholars, and researchers have carried out various studies and works on Khushal Khan Khattak. Hundreds of articles, notes, and commentaries have been written by various individuals. Seminars and commemorative gatherings have also been held on different occasions, and their proceedings have been preserved in the form of collections and compilations. These works have examined Khushal Khan Khattak's life, personality, intellectual perspective, literary status, social and political thoughts, heroic spirit, and literary school from different perspectives. However, no one has so far conducted a specific study on Social Emergentism in relation to Khushal Khan Khattak.

Social Emergentism in the Poetry of Khushal Khan

In the late twentieth century, numerous new philosophical schools emerged. Literature was also influenced by these developments, and various trends and movements appeared within it. Literary poetry and prose are studied based on these new ideas and theories. The theory of Emergentism is also relatively new, and it has emerged in various fields of literature. The term *Emergentism* is referred to as *Zuhurpalana* in Pashto, while in Persian it is also known as *Zuhur-gara'i*, *Boruz-gara'i*, and *Now-zuhuri* (*Cambridge Dictionary*, 2016). The term is originally derived from the English word *Emerge*. The literal meaning of this word is to appear, become visible, emerge, or move from an unclear or hidden state into an apparent state.

Some language researchers also use this term to refer to gradualism. There are different views on this issue; however, many agree that in science, philosophy, and sociology, it is used to refer to the concept whereby something new emerges from the combination of simple components, possessing properties that are not found in the individual components. This theory is called Emergentism. According to this theory, a new structure emerges from the combination of components, possessing its own characteristics and nature. According to Aliases (2016), for example, when we refer to a flower garden, it is in fact formed through the combination of different flowers, and this structure differs significantly from its individual components. Proponents of this theory believe that the nature of everything emerges on the basis of relationships among components and the formation of new structures.

Emergentism is a branch of the philosophy of language. Its proponents believe that language is not learned all at once; rather, it is acquired gradually within society. Language is closely connected with society. When human beings appeared on the earth and human societies were formed, each society developed over time. A language

likewise developed in different forms within various societies, eventually giving rise to different languages. On this basis, language is regarded as a social phenomenon and cannot continue to exist without society (Ghorbandi, 1400).

Proponents of Emergentism (Gradualism) have presented various views on the nature of language. They have attempted to explain human linguistic capacity in terms of general human abilities that are not inherently linguistic, such as thinking, establishing communication, and interpersonal interaction. In this regard, the linguist Edward Sapir expressed the following view: "Language is, above all, a cultural or social product and should be understood as such" (Chapand, 1405, p. 5).

The nature of this theory can also be observed in our lives and literature, where new forms and structures emerge from the combination of simple components or elements, which, in terms of their nature and form, differ from the individual components. When a writer or poet turns to beautiful combinations in artistic prose and poetry and creates something new through the combination of elements, thereby attracting the readers' attention and enhancing the beauty of the text, this process itself reflects the philosophy of Emergentism or Gradualism. Likewise, in many areas of our lives, whether in science or social affairs, new forms emerge through the combination of two or more simple components. Without this process, many aspects of life would remain incomplete and come to a standstill. In particular, science has made rapid advances in this regard in the present era. Numerous examples of this theory can also be observed in our traditional or customary way of life. For example, in our region, people formerly used a mixture of yellow clay or *Makanda* and water as a white coating for walls; through the combination of the two materials, a white substance emerged.

Social Emergentism emerges from the actions of a society and its numerous activities. These activities may be cultural, economic, and so on. In this paper, we shed light on the aspect of Khushal Khan's struggle within the framework of Social Emergentism; otherwise, the dimensions and forms of Social Emergentism in Khushal Khan's thought are diverse.

A writer is a member of society and is required to understand and fulfill certain social responsibilities. This characteristic is found in great personalities who change history and emerge as prominent figures in it. In this regard, psychologist Dr. Smiles states: "Being respected among one's people depends on influencing their hearts, and such influence cannot be attained through money alone. The only way to achieve it is through good conduct, successful experiences, and innovations for the benefit of one's people" (Smiles, 1387, p. 83).

In Pashto literature, we have literary movements that, alongside their literary contributions, made tireless efforts for the freedom and progress of their country and society. This aspect is particularly rich in the second period of Pashto literature. Many writers and poets of this movement created works concerning the freedom, progress, unity, peace, war, and regional affairs of their homeland and people, and they also actively participated in the struggle. This aspect and the influence of Social Emergentism can be clearly observed in the poetry of Khushal Khan. This characteristic can also be found in world literature beyond Pashto literature. The

French writer Jean-Paul Sartre's plays and some works of Allama Iqbal Lahori also contain significant reflections on their societies (Athar, 1393).

Clear representations of social criticism can be found in Khushal Khan's style. In some of his poems, his style explicitly subjects his society, its people, dominant social and political systems, and cultural movements to critical examination (Hewadmal, 1393). In my view, the influence of the aforementioned philosophy can be observed in this aspect.

Professor Dr. Aslanov, in his work *The National Movement of the Roshanis*, writes: "Khushal Khan is regarded as the greatest figure of poetry and literature among the Pashtuns. He is the leader of the Khattak tribe, a poet, a commander, and a military figure" (Zewr, 1386, pp. 152–153).

Khushal Khan himself provided an extensive account of his family and leadership in one of his qasidas, explaining that his leadership had been inherited from his ancestors and that he had acted according to the responsibilities associated with it. He spent most of his youth supporting the Mughals. Over time, new figures came to power in the Mughal court, and certain tensions toward the Pashtuns also emerged. Thus, when Aurangzeb became emperor, he imprisoned Khushal Khan in 1074 AH and sent him to India. Scholars of literature have expressed different views regarding the number of years he spent in captivity; however, he was released in 1079 AH and returned to his homeland (Afghan, 1399).

Although Khushal Khan possessed the skills and experience of leadership and chieftainship, and his position had been inherited from his ancestors, in my view, the influence of Social Emergentism can be seen in the qualities for which Pashtuns still recognize him as a courageous warrior. When he took up the sword in defense of the honor of his fellow Pashtuns, that sword earned him an enduring place in Afghan history.

"I girded my sword in the name of the Afghan
I am Khushal Khattak, the warrior of the age." (Taniwal, 1392, p. 1316).

When Khushal made this decision, he was not alone; rather, he had other individuals and companions by his side. Through their collective activities (components), a national movement and a path of honor and resistance were formed, which can be regarded as a determined step toward Social Emergentism. This process went beyond individual issues and paved the way for a major national movement and current.

Likewise, Khushal Khan regarded the Mughals as harmful to his society and began an armed struggle. Struggle naturally emerges through various movements, and through such activities, a new form or condition emerges within society. Through Khushal's sword and activities, the Pashtuns were distinctly introduced to others. The following verse illustrates this image:

"Likewise, he says: I girded my sword against the Mughals
I made the entire Pashtun people known to the world." (Asghar, 1393, p. 135).

In world literature, the tribal aspect of Khattak, such as ethnic and racial issues, has also been widely discussed. Numerous writings have addressed the relationship between white and Black people, and some have attempted to break down these boundaries. Race and ethnicity are two distinct concepts. Race refers to

characteristics transmitted genetically from one generation to another, whereas ethnicity is a shared cultural identity that came to be used in literary and cultural fields after colonialism (Kartz, 1394).

Khushal Khattak also speaks about his tribe:

"I girded my sword against the Mughals

I made the entire Pashtun people known to the world." (Rasa, 2002, p. 44).

"Thanks also that I girded my sword

My sword became famous throughout the world." (Rasa, 2002, p. 1022).

"The Khattaks were once counted by number and rank

I made the Khattaks count among the nations." (Rasa, 2002, p. 43).

Two aspects can be identified from the above verse:

1. **Khushal Khan as the leader of the national struggle:** The struggle against Mughal rule could not be carried out by Khushal Khan alone. As the Pashto proverb says, "There are many stones, but the work is accomplished through cooperation." Khushal may have been the leader of this movement, but a large group was involved in creating and sustaining it. Other Khattaks and Pashtuns were also part of this movement.
2. **Cultural Movement:** One of the major outcomes of Khushal's cultural activities was the emergence of a significant literary school, which continues to be known as the Khushal Khattak School. Numerous poets, writers, and members of Khushal Khan's family joined this school and contributed to its formation. Through these activities, the name and reputation of the Khattaks were elevated.

Movement for Honor: One aspect of Social Emergentism is the gathering and mobilization of individuals and ideas for the purpose of defending honor. Khushal Khan also emerged with this objective; he organized an army and brought together different ideas. In pursuit of his objectives, Khushal Khan also found regional allies and followers, among whom he repeatedly mentions Darya Khan and Aymil Khan alongside other leaders. The language of Khushal Khan's poetry also mobilizes the courageous:

"Hearts without courage for the sword

What use are such hearts?

A brave man who comes for honor

He is defined neither by son nor father." (Asghar, 1393, p. 135).

Khushal's Social Emergentism, particularly its aspect of struggle, was not confined to his own region, nor was he alone in it. Rather, this new structure consisted of groups of individuals and communities from different regions. Periodic developments and changes in the opposing side were among the elements that formed the interconnected chain of this structure, presenting us with a vivid picture of Khushal's philosophy of Emergentism. This picture can be found in the following verses:

"If there are Pashtuns who stand for honor, the time is now

In this struggle for honor, wealth, property, and possessions are all sacrificed.

Day by day, fresh victories and triumphs are achieved

Year by year, the funeral of the wicked Mughals is carried out.

From Kabul to Attock, across the mountains
The heads of the Mughals lie piled up.” (Rasa, 2002, p. 1022).

Or:

“Whether Shinwaris, Mohmands, or Afridis
They defeated all the provincial armies.” (Rasa, 2002, p. 24).

Third Image: Khushal Khan’s life can be divided into two major phases: 1. Khushal as a friend of the Mughals; and 2. Khushal as an enemy of the Mughals. During the first period, a number of Pashtuns were displeased with him, and he fought on behalf of others, resulting in the deaths of many Pashtuns. When Khushal Khan was imprisoned, many Pashtuns, including some of his opponents, became distressed. When he was released, Khushal Khan charted a third path and initiated a new movement. Khushal did not merely stand with his people verbally; rather, he stood with them with genuine conviction and from the heart. This greatly pleased many Pashtuns, who came to realize that Khushal was no longer a supporter of a position or office; instead, he stood with his people under all circumstances. The following verses illustrate this:

“All of these are evident to me, both outwardly and inwardly
Today, all Pashtuns are pleased with me.

If I have sincere devotion to the Mughals in my heart,
God knows whether any Pashtun can be free of me.

Today I stand for the honor of all Pashtuns
Even though I have stood at every door and in every place.” (Rasa, 2002, p. 1021).

The Weary and Exhausted Khushal: Literary histories of Khushal’s life indicate that his later years were filled with difficulties. As a person grows older, his experiences of life and his surroundings become more mature. Khushal presented his experiences to readers in the form of poetry. In these poems, he refers to issues that wounded his aspirations and to the movements and ideals he had pursued but left incomplete. Until the end of his life, Khushal understood the value of Social Emergentism and was troubled by the difficulties that arose in the course of this philosophy. Khushal Khan viewed Social Emergentism through the concepts of honor, unity, and solidarity:

“I hold great ambitions within my heart
But what can I do when the Pashtuns have all lost their sense of honor?

Every undertaking of the Pashtuns is better than that of the Mughals
My greatest regret is that they lack unity.” (Rasa, 2002, p. 43).

Or:

“Unity never emerged among the Pashtuns
Otherwise, I would have torn apart the collar of the Mughal.”

Likewise, an organized movement of individuals develops around an issue or event, and this movement creates a new form. To achieve their objectives, however, the Pashtuns must unite along the path of honor. Yet Social Emergentism cannot succeed through this path alone; therefore, Khushal turned toward humility:

“Because of the sorrow caused by dishonorable Pashtuns,
I abandoned my greatness and embraced humility.” (Taniwal, 1392, p. 1316).

Accordingly, the old Khushal regained his youth through the unity and solidarity of the Pashtuns and continued to dream of it:

“If the Pashtuns attain the blessing of unity,
Old Khushal will become young again.” (Rasa, 2002, p. 44).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that the principles of Social Emergentism are clearly reflected in the poetry and social thought of Khushal Khan Khattak. The major elements of this theory in his poetry include honor, unity, solidarity, social criticism, and national struggle. These elements emerged through the interaction of social, cultural, political, and historical conditions rather than through individual thought alone. The study further reveals that Khushal Khan's struggle against the Mughals developed from changing political and social circumstances and gradually became a broader collective movement involving different Pashtun groups and leaders. His poetry also reflects strong criticism of social disunity and emphasizes unity as a foundation for collective strength and progress.

Moreover, Khushal Khan's influence was not limited to political struggle. His literary activities contributed to the emergence of a distinct Khushal literary school, demonstrating the interaction between individual creativity and collective cultural development. Therefore, Khushal Khan Khattak can be regarded as an important literary example of Social Emergentism, in which individual ideas, social conditions, collective action, and cultural activities interact to produce new intellectual, literary, and social structures.

REFERENCES

- Cambridge University Press & Assessment. (n.d.). Emerge. Cambridge Dictionary. Retrieved August 28, 2026, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/emerge>
- Chapand, A. J. (1405 AH). *Philosophy of language* [Lecture notes for the Pashto PhD program]. Nangarhar University, Faculty of Languages and Literature.
- Ferozuddin, K. B. (1938). *The life and works of Khushal Khan Khattak* [Doctoral dissertation]
- Ghorbandi, M. (1400 AH). *Lexicography*. Nawisa Publications
- Hashimi, S. A. (1393 AH). *History of Pashto poetry*. Momand Publishing Society.
- Hewadmal, Z. (1393 AH). *History of Pashto literature*. Danish Publishing Society.
- Kartz, D. (1394 AH). *An introduction to literary theories* (F. Mirza Zada, Trans.). Parsek Publications.
- Khattak, I. N. (n.d.). *Khushal and aesthetics* [Doctoral dissertation].
- Noorzi, G. M. (1949). *The life and artistic creativity of the Afghan classical poet Khushal Khan Khattak* [Doctoral dissertation].
- Parviz, A. (1393 AH). *Literary research* (A. Sadat, Trans.). Mihan Publishing Societ.
- Philosophyball Wiki. (n.d.). *Emergentism*. Miraheze. Retrieved August 28, 2026, from <https://philosophyball.miraheze.org/wiki/Emergentism>
- Rasa, S. R. (2001). *Armaghan-e Khushal*. University Book Agency.

- Serkevich, P. M. (1992). *Khushal Khattak lyric*.
Shah Wali. (1400 SH). *Khushal pezhendana [An introduction to Khushal]*. Samoon Publishing Society.
Sherzad, A., Pashtun Aqa, A., & Shazia. (1399 AH). *History of Pashto literature: The classical period*. Nawisa Publications.
Skali, A. (1396 SH). *The uniqueness of Khushal's religious belief* [Doctoral dissertation].
Smiles, S. (1387 AH). *Self-reliance*. Momand Publishing Society.
Taniwal, M. H. (1392 AH). *Styles of Pashto poetry*. Publications Department of the Academy of Sciences.
Zewar, Z. A.-D. (1387 AH). *History of Pashto literature: The medieval period*. Safi Center for Pashto Research and Development.