



The Role of Early Literary Biographies (Tazkiri) in the Ancient History of Pashto Literature

Mohammad Israr Shinwari^{1*}; Zahidullah Karimzai¹

¹Department of Pashto, Faculty of Education, Kunduz University, Afghanistan

*Corresponding Email: Israr.shinwari@gmail.com, Phone Number: +93798989953

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Abstract

The role of early literary biographies in the ancient history of Pashto literature is a significant and fundamental subject, as these biographies have transmitted to us the thoughts, styles, and contributions of early poets, writers, and Sufi figures. These literary biographies also convey vivid depictions of the social, cultural, political, and intellectual values of their respective eras. In addition, the Pashto literary tazkirs mentioned in this article serve as historical sources for future generations. These are precisely the literary tadhkirahs that extended the history of Pashto literature back to the second Hijri century. In the article, the tadhkirahs mentioned have preserved our Pashto language and the history of the Pashtun people. It is these Pashto literary biographies that have provided authentic and reliable historical material for the study of our Ancient Literary History. Thanks to these few literary biographies, the Pashto language—and particularly the recorded history of the Pashtun people—has found a place among the recognized literary traditions of both the region and the world. Also, this article provides information about all the poets, and writers of ancient history, from which book or tazkirs each poet and writer is taken. The qualitative method has been used in writing this article. Because through this method, it is easy to find libraries, online websites, and reliable sources. I thoroughly analyzed and evaluated all the sources after carefully reading them, and I have incorporated accurate information from them into this article.

Keywords: Mohammad Hotak, Tazkira, Tazkira al-Awliya, Pashto, Pata Khazana.

Introduction

Literary Tazkeri have witnessed various stages and developments throughout history. Literary Tazkeri have preserved the lives and literary characteristics of ancient poets, writers, Sufis, and great figures in the field of literature of a language.

Fortunately, Pashto is among the about fifty (50) languages in the world today that have a rich literature and is the language of writing and reading for millions of speakers worldwide (Shinwari, 2014: 29). Moreover, literary biographies serve as a historical foundation for the Pashto language and literature. For this very reason, I intended to write an article to explore the role, value, characteristics, and literary contribution of the early

literary biographies in Pashto literature. This study aims to explore strengthen the scholarly understanding of these important texts within Pashto literature and to lay the groundwork for an effective approach that enlightens the minds of the new generation. The tradition of writing literary biographies, as it exists in Persian and Arabic languages, has also been preserved in Pashto literature. A significant portion of the works related to Pashto literary biographies has been authored by scholars such as Prof. Abdul Hai Habibi, Habibullah Rafi, Zalmai Hewadmal, and some other contemporary writers. However, accessing these writings nowadays has become quite difficult. For this reason, I intended to analyze and evaluate the role and contribution of these biographies within Pashto literature (Rohi, 1999, p. 13). Literary scholars have diverse opinions regarding the types of Tazkeri, and so far, there is no unanimous agreement among them on the classification of Tazkeri. Each literary school has presented its own views on Tazkeri. The following section briefly outlines the main classifications proposed for Tazkeri., I will briefly mention the classification of Tazkeri here:

Material and Method

The study is based on a qualitative approach, and data was collected based on a document analysis method. In this method, information related to the selected topic is collected and evaluated from existing written sources. Reliable references have been provided for every analysis and evaluation. Because some fragmented sources were already available, I used the method to find relevant information about these authentic sources in libraries and online websites. All selected sources were carefully read, analyzed, and evaluated, and the verified information was incorporated into the study.

Ancient Pashto Literary Biographies

The term "Tazkira" is an Arabic word which literally means mentioning, stating, recalling, or a record of identification. Terminologically, a tazkira refers to a work in which the lives, events, and contributions of scholars, mystics, religious and national figures, and other renowned personalities are documented and introduced.

In literary and cultural studies, a literary tazkira refers to a work that introduces the lives, events, and works of poets and writers. It also preserves samples of their poetic and prose writings.

Based on the above explanations, literary Tazkeri serve as an excellent and informative source for preserving the brilliance and vitality of a language's literature.

In the Ariana Encyclopedia, the following is written about the literary tazkira: Tazkira is an Arabic word that means remembrance, or something that serves as a means of recalling. In other words, it refers to a book or collection in which the biographies of poets and writers are compiled. (Ariana Encyclopedia, 2008: 654).

Likewise, the Pashto-to-Pashto Explanatory Dictionary states the following about a literary tazkira: A tazkira is defined as a book in which the biographies of poets or other scholars are written. (Pashto-to-Pashto Explanatory Dictionary, 1981: 356).

Professor Dr. Jamshid Rasheedi, a lecturer at Kabul University of Education, writes in his book "Literary Theory" about literary tazkira (biographical anthologies of writers and poets): "A literary tazkira may include the reputation of the writer or poet: name, pen name, pseudonym, father's name, family background, notable relatives, education, socio-

economic status, occupation, place of birth and death, opponents, friends, religious and political beliefs, and the titles of their works.”

Similarly, Senior Researcher Zalmai Hewadmal, in one of his writings, outlines the general principles of writing a tazkira (biographical anthology) as follows:

1. Complete biography and life events of the poet or writer;
2. The works and creations of the poet or writer;
3. Explanation of the formal and thematic characteristics of the poet's or writer's works;
4. Alongside the introduction of poets or writers, providing examples of their poetry or prose writings. (*Rasheedi*, 1395: 47)

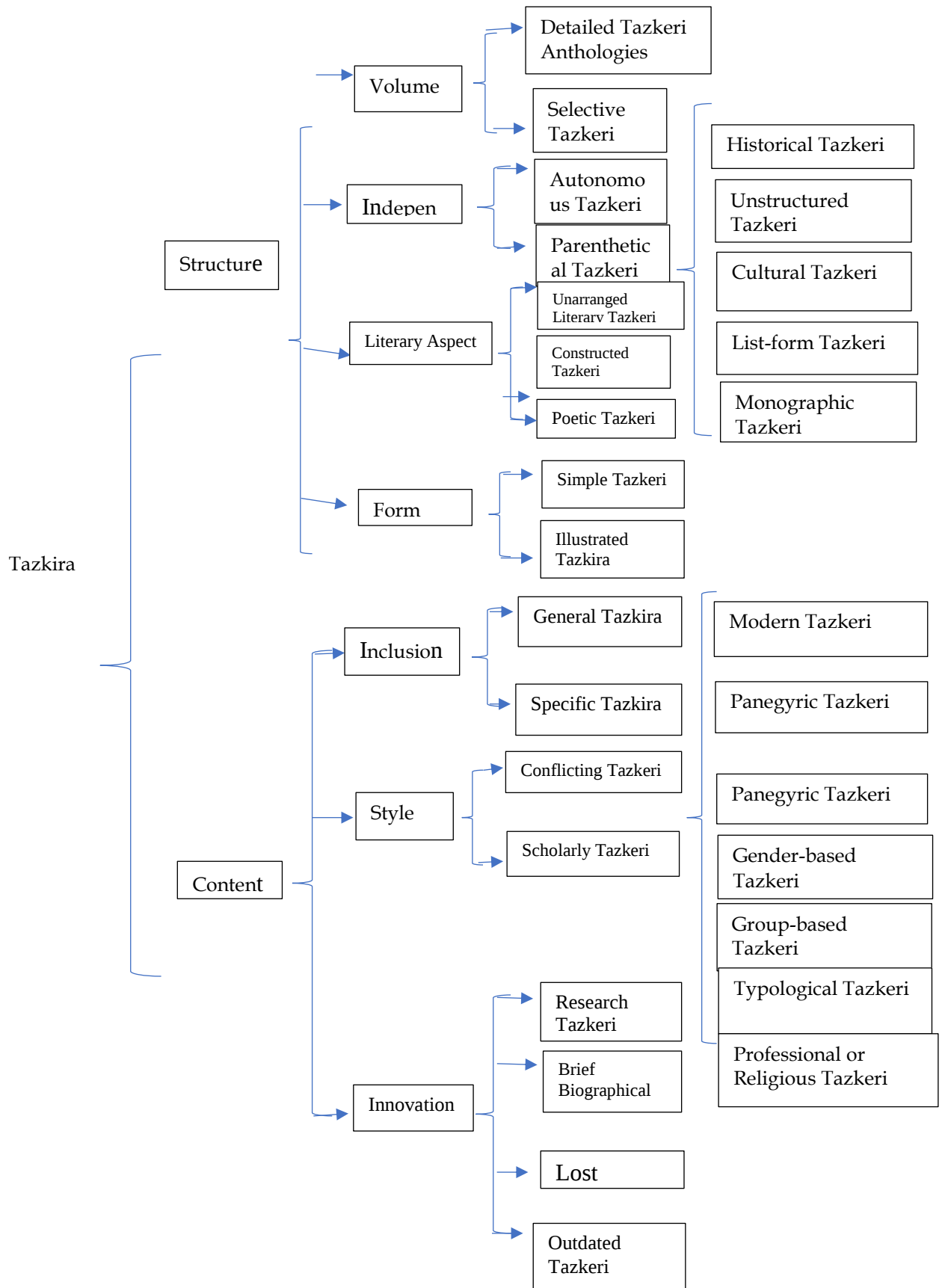
In this part of the article, it is noted that that a literary tazkira is different from literary history. Here, I will only present one definition of literary history: Literary history is the discipline that studies the emergence and development of artistic literature in relation to historical conditions. (Rohi, 1999: 18)

In the second volume of the *Farhangnāma-ye Adabi-ye Farsi* (Persian Literary Encyclopedia), literary Tazkeri are divided into the following two categories:

General Literary Tazkira: This type introduces poets of an entire language in a general manner. For example, in Dari (Persian), the literary tazkira *Lubāb al-Albāb* by Awfi is one such work.

Specific Literary Tazkira: This type relates to a particular historical period and introduces poet's specific to that era. (*Hashemi*, 2017: 318)

An Iranian writer, Saeed Shafi'oon, in one of his articles, has classified literary Tazkeri as follow



In this section of the article, it was intended to briefly mention those literary Tazkeri which, due to the passage of time, have been physically lost or whose titles are mentioned only in earlier works but are no longer available to us today. Despite this, they hold a special place in Pashto literature and the history of the Pashtun people.

Tazkira al-Awliya is, to date, the earliest known tazkira in the Pashto language, of which we have been able to access a few pages. Before this tazkira, no other prose book in Pashto—except for Salo Waghma—is known to us.

The esteemed researcher Habibullah Rafi 'writes about *Tazkira al-Awliya*: "Our *Tazkira al-Awliya*, like Sheikh Attar's *Tazkira al-Awliya*, does not merely recount the stories of the saints' piety and devotion, but also vividly presents their biographies, ethics, family backgrounds, the era they lived in, and their literary status."(Rafi', 1350 [Solar Hijri]: 2)

This tazkira has been lost to us until now, with only a few initial pages—eight pages in total—available. These pages were discovered by Professor Abdulhai Habibi in Kandahar in the year 1319 (Solar Hijri) and their facsimiles were published in the 1319 annual edition of Kabul in the first volume of Pashtana Shoara (Pashto Poets). (Youn, 1389 [Solar Hijri]: 127)

The few pages discovered by Professor Abdulhai Habibi have brought a significant transformation to Pashto literature. For example, from this literary tazkira, the poetry of four mystics and literary figures—Sheikh Betani, Sheikh Malkiar, Sheikh Ismail, and Bakhtiyar Dagho—has come to light. This very tazkira historically placed Pashto literature on par with the literatures of other languages.

Tarikh-e Suri (The History of Suri)

After Tazkira al-Awliya, Tarikh-e Suri is the second known Pashto tazkira. Unfortunately, this tazkira is no longer available to us; only its name has been mentioned by Sheikh Kata in his book "Largoonyay Pashtanay" (Ancient Pashtuns). From the title of the tazkira, it is evident that its content likely focused on the history and background of the Suri family. Furthermore, this book also indicates that the Suris were Pashtuns.

Professor Abdul Rauf Noshahrawi, in his book, writes about the writing of *Tarikh-e Suri*:

"The tazkira Tarikh-e Suri was written by Muhammad bin Ali Basti in the year 650 AH (Islamic calendar)." (Noshahrawi, 1988: 5)

Regarding the date of the composition of *Tarikh-e Suri*, it can be stated that around 750 AH, Sheikh Kata had cited this book. Additionally, the book includes a biography of Shakarndoy Ghorī, who lived around 580 AH. Therefore, it can be estimated that *Tarikh-e Suri* was likely written between the years 640 and 700 AH. (Rafi', 1350 [Solar Hijri]: 16)

The aforementioned tazkira is of great significance in enriching the history of the Pashtuns, as it includes the life and epic poetry of Amir Krōr, as well as qasidas (odes) by Sheikh Asad Suri and Shakarndoy Ghorī. These contributions have provided documented evidence not only for the historical narrative of the Pashtun people but also for the literary history of the Pashto language.

Akhbār-al-Lodi

The third tazkira that contributes to the richness of Pashto literature, whose name is revealed to us through *Pata Khazana* by Kaleed-e Kamrani, is the tazkira titled *Akhbār al-Lodi*. From the title, it is evident that this book likely contained the general history of the Lodi family in Multan.

Regarding the Lodi dynasty, Habibi writes in his book *A Short History of Pashto Literature*: "Pashto literature flourished in the court of the Ghurids, and many poets, authors, and prose writers emerged. During this time, the Lodi royal family in Multan—between 300 and 400 AH—were Pashto-speaking kings, and some Pashto poetry has also been preserved from them." (Habibi, 1346 [Solar Hijri]: 10)

The Akhbār al-Lodi tazkira was written in 686 AH about the history of the Lodi family. According to the *Pata Khazana* tazkira, which quotes from Kaleed-e Kamrani, the author of Akhbār al-Lodi was Sheikh Ahmad, son of Saeed, whose period of residence is placed in the late 7th century AH.

Unfortunately, the full text of this important tazkira is not available to us today. Only a few names of poets and some of their verses have been quoted by the author of Kaleed-e Kamrani.

(Rafi', 1350 [Solar Hijri]: 21)

The discovery of this book also dispelled the doubt and skepticism regarding whether the Lodis were Pashtuns. Furthermore, this tazkira includes a poetic debate between Amir Nasr Lodi and his cousin Sheikh Razi, features pure Pashto vocabulary, and confirms the rule of Pashtun kings in Multan.

Largoonyay Pashtanay (Ancient Pashtuns)

After the Tazkeri mentioned above, another important and valuable Pashto tazkira is titled *Largoonyay Pashtanay* (Ancient Pashtuns). Unfortunately, the full text of this significant work is no longer available. However, it was in the possession of the renowned national

historian Muhammad Hotak when he was writing *Pata Khazana* between the years 1141–1142 AH, and he frequently made use of it throughout his compilation. The author of the *Largoonyay Pashtanay* (Ancient Pashtuns) *tazkira* was Sheikh Kata, whose lifetime is estimated to be around the year 750 AH. This scholar wrote a valuable book in Pashto on the history of notable Pashtun figures, titled *Largoonyay Pashtanay*. The author of *Pata Khazana*, Muhammad Hotak, frequently refers to this book, and it appears that this was his primary and perhaps only major source. It is believed that he had access to it while compiling *Pata Khazana*. (Yoon, 2015: 487)

This valuable *tazkira* introduces us to the biography and poetry of Amir Kror, the life and *qasida* of Sheikh Asad, the introduction and poetry sample of Shakarndoy Ghor, as well as the biography and poetry of Hashim Sarwani. Additionally, this *tazkira* preserves the knowledge of notable Pashtun kings, poets, and warriors, alongside safeguarding the literary, political, and social history of the Pashtun people.

GharghashtNama

Gharghasht Nama is a poetic *tazkira* in the Pashto language that, alongside moral poetry, also contained biographies of the Lodi poets and samples of their verses. This *tazkira* was personally seen by Muhammad Hotak. The author of this *tazkira* is believed to be Dost Muhammad Kakarr, son of Babur Khan, who composed it in verse in the year 929 AH. After the death of his father, Dost Muhammad Kakarr wrote down in poetry the stories and anecdotes he had heard from his father. Researchers suggest that this may have been a duplicate or second version of a *tazkira* originally written by his father.

The poetry of *Gharghasht Nama* is simpler compared to others, with fewer difficulties, lacking significant terminology or rare words. It also contains some words and idioms borrowed from other languages. (Alizai, 1399 [Solar Hijri]: 32)

Bustan al-Awliya

Bustan al-Awliya is also an ancient and early *tazkira* in the Pashto language, which is no longer available today. However, the father of Muhammad Hotak, the author of *Pata Khazana*, saw it at the house of Hasan Khan Baritz in Shorawak, Kandahar, and took notes from it. This book mainly contained the biographies of Pashtun saints and spiritual poets. The author of this book was Sheikh Bustan Baritz. Additionally, Nimatullah Herawi, a contemporary of Sheikh Bustan Baritz, wrote his biography in the book *Makhzan-e Afghani*. This *tazkira* was likely written around the year 998 AH. (*Raft'*, 1350 [Solar Hijri]: 32) From the text of this *tazkira*, Muhammad Hotak quoted the biography of Sheikh Teyman and included a sample of his poetry.

Kaleed-e Kamrani

According to *Pata Khazana*, *Kaleed-e Kamrani* is also a valuable and precious *tazkira* of the Pashtuns. The author of *Kaleed-e Kamrani* was Kamran Sadozi. Kamran belonged to the Sadozi tribe and was one of the five sons of Sado Khan, the head of the great Sadozi family.

Kaleed-e Kamrani was written around the year 1038 AH in Shahr-e Safa, Kandahar. (*Hewadmal*, 2000: 37)

Awliya-ye Afghan (Saints of the Afghans)

Awliya-ye Afghan is another tazkira that is currently not available to us. However, in the 12th century AH, the author of *Pata Khazana*, Muhammad Hotak, made use of a narration from his father taken from this work and quoted the biography of Mrs. Naykbakht from it. The author of this tazkira was Sheikh Qasim, the son-in-law of Sheikh Imam Uddin Khalil Ghoryakhel, who was popularly known as Sheikh Kabir Balapir. Besides *Awliya-ye Afghan*, Sheikh Qasim also authored another book titled *Tarikh-e Afghani*. Since Sheikh Qasim lived between 1020 and 1060 AH, his lifespan was approximately 40 years. It is likely that he wrote this book around the age of 30, which would place its composition around 1050 AH. From this tazkira, only the biography and a sample of poetry of Mrs. Naykbakht have been quoted through *Pata Khazana*. Mrs. Naykbakht was a mystic and Sufi poetess who had a collection of poems titled *Irshad al-Fuqara* (Guidance for the Poor). (*Rafi'*, 1350 [Solar Hijri]: 42)

Pata Khazana

Pata Khazana is the only complete tazkira of the early Pashto Tazkeri that has come into our possession to date. This tazkira not only traces Pashto written literature and poetry back to the first Islamic century but also proves that Pashto had been a courtly, poetic, and literary language long before that. Moreover, many Pashto-speaking kings were also poets of the Pashto language.

The author of this tazkira is Muhammad Hotak, who introduces himself in his book as follows:

"This is Muhammad, son of Dawood, son of Qader Khan, from the Hotak tribe. Our original homeland is Margha, from where my grandfather Qader Khan came to Suyuri and settled there. After some time, by fate and destiny, he moved and settled in a village called Kokaran near Kandahar, where his profession was agriculture..." (*Rafi'*, 1350 [Solar Hijri]: 47) *Pata Khazana* was written and compiled by Muhammad Hotak under the encouragement and order of Shah Hussain Hotak between the years 1141-1142 AH. Muhammad Hotak himself states about writing this tazkira: "When the author began writing this book, it was Friday, the 16th of Jumada al-Thani, in the year 1141 AH."

This book is divided into (3) sections:

The first section: Introduction to poets who have passed away.

The second section: Biographies of contemporary poets of the author.

The third section: Women who have written poems in Pashto (Hotak, 2020: 6).

In all three sections, Muhammad Hotak introduces the biographies and samples of poetry of a total of 51 Pashto poets and poetesses. In the final part of the tazkira, the author presents a biography of himself and his father, bringing the book to a close. Since the emergence of *Pata Khazana*, some people have also started spreading baseless claims, alleging that *Pata Khazana* is a fabrication and forgery. Although responding to such unfounded accusations is often considered a waste of time, if these critics were truly proficient in Pashto and studied *Pata Khazana* carefully, they would never entertain such unreasonable and baseless doubts. This is because *Pata Khazana* exhibits such literary excellence that surpasses the abilities of many contemporary writers, and it contains historical evidence found nowhere else. (*Rafi'*, 1350 [Solar Hijri]: 52) The original manuscript of *Pata Khazana* was written by the author himself, who notes at the end of the manuscript: "The book was completed on Friday, the 24th of Shawwal, year 1141 AH in

Kandahar, and the author Muhammad Hotak was relieved and grateful – Alhamdulillah, much praise."(*Hotak, 1339 [Solar Hijri]: 202 Pata Khazana* was copied for the second time in 1265 AH by Noor Muhammad Khroti for Sardar Mehrdul Khan as a handwritten manuscript. Additionally, the third copy of *Pata Khazana* was made by Muhammad Abbas Kasi in Quetta in 1303 AH for Haji Muhammad Akbar Hotak.

Discussion

Afghanistan is an ancient country with a rich historical heritage. Unfortunately, the majority of its historical documents have been lost due to the ravages of time. The surviving records from various wars and conflicts are too numerous to count. In this article, the book is compiled of fragmented historical sources. Similarly, like other languages, Pashto has a considerable number of Tazkeri (biographical anthologies), yet most of these are not in our possession. Only a handful of such Tazkeri currently exist, and this article discusses those available works. Therefore, through critical analysis, historical documentation, linguistic examination, and literary research, we highlight and explore the contribution of these Tazkeri to the history of ancient Pashto literature.

Conclusion

The role of ancient literary Tazkeri in Pashto literature holds not only historical significance but is also considered a fundamental element in the preservation, compilation, and development of literary and cultural heritage. Furthermore, Pashto literary Tazkeri serve as vital historical sources for future generations of the Pashto language. Only a few such Tazkeri remain today, yet they have historically and literarily positioned Pashto language and Pashtun history and literature alongside those of the region and the world. These literary Tazkeri provide valuable insights into the lives, personalities, styles, thoughts, and cultural values of our early poets, writers, Sufis, and rulers.

Ancient literary Tazkeri are an inseparable part of Pashto literature. Without them, much of the history of ancient Pashto literary heritage would remain in darkness, and we would have little to no information about it today.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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