

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF AFGHAN WAR ANASHID USING FAIRCLOUGH AND HALLIDAY'S FRAMEWORKS

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Abstract

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to examine how Afghan war anashid (Islamic chants) intertwine religious and militant discourses to legitimize Jihad. By analysing a corpus of 24 anashid and their frequency data, the paper reveals how linguistic strategies—such as material processes (kill), imperatives (“March!”), and binary oppositions (believer/kafir)—construct a sacred duty to resistance. Findings demonstrate that concepts like “freedom” and “peace” are redefined through divine warfare, while repetition of religious lexicon (Jihad, shahadat) and Quranic intertextuality naturalize jihad as transcendental. The study underscores the need to address linguistic infrastructures of conflict to dismantle entrenched ideological narratives.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Anashid, SFL, Jihad, Religious-Militant Discourse

INTRODUCTION

The Afghan conflict, spanning decades of resistance against foreign occupation, has been shaped by narratives that fuse religious devotion with militant struggle. Anashid (Islamic chants) serve as cultural and ideological tools to mobilize fighters, legitimize jihad, and articulate visions of divine duty. This study analyses a corpus of Afghan war anashid, combining Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to interrogate how language constructs identities, ideologies, and power dynamics. The dataset reveals dominant terms like *Allah* (44), *Jihad* (41), and *Mujahedeen* (37), framing resistance as a sacred obligation. By dissecting linguistic strategies, this paper uncovers how religious symbolism, militarized rhetoric, and binary oppositions sustain narratives of martyrdom and resistance.

Research Questions

1. How do religious and militant discourses intersect in Afghan war anashid to legitimize jihad?
2. What binary oppositions (e.g., believer/kafir, freedom/oppression) structure these narratives?
3. How are concepts like “freedom” and “peace” redefined within the framework of jihad?
4. How do Halliday's linguistic metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, textual) reinforce ideological messaging?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anashid (singular: *nashid*), Islamic devotional chants or hymns, occupy a unique space in Muslim-majority cultures as vehicles of spiritual reflection, cultural identity, and political mobilization. Rooted in the oral traditions of the Arab world, anashid have evolved to serve

diverse sociopolitical functions across time and geography, particularly in contexts of resistance and conflict. This review synthesizes scholarly perspectives on anashid, focusing on their theological foundations, cultural significance, and role in modern ideological movements.

1. Theological and Cultural Foundations

Anashid emerged as a distinct genre from the broader Islamic tradition of *qasidas* (poems) and *dhikr* (remembrance of God). Unlike music (*ghina*), which is debated in Islamic jurisprudence, anashid are typically a cappella or accompanied by percussion, adhering to conservative interpretations of *halal* (permissible) artistic expression (Frishkopf, 2002). Early anashid celebrated the Prophet Muhammad's life and Islamic victories, blending spiritual devotion with communal identity (Nelson, 1985). In Sufi traditions, anashid like *qawwali* in South Asia or *inshad* in Egypt became tools for ecstatic worship and moral instruction (Qureshi, 1986).

2. Anashid in Modern Political Movements

The 20th century saw anashid co-opted by Islamist and nationalist movements. During the Afghan-Soviet War (1979–1989), Afghan *mujahedeen* anashid fused Quranic references with calls to jihad, framing resistance as a divine duty (Edwards, 2002). Saeed (2013) notes that Pashto anashid emphasized martyrdom (*shahadat*) and territorial defence, blending tribal honor codes with Islamic piety. Similarly, Palestinian groups like Hamas have used anashid to glorify resistance against Israeli occupation, often embedding imagery of martyrdom and divine reward (McDonald, 2013).

In the 21st century, jihadist groups weaponized anashid as propaganda. Hegghammer (2010) argues that these groups employed anashid to evoke emotional resonance, using rhythmic repetition of terms like *Allah*, *jihad*, and *shahid* (martyr) to inspire recruits. They produced anashid, such as *Dawlat al-Islam Qamat* (The Islamic State Has Risen), combined militaristic themes with apocalyptic theology, portraying jihad as redemptive (Zelin, 2015).

3. Anashid as Cultural Resistance

Anashid also function as tools of nonviolent cultural resistance. In Southeast Asia, Islamist groups in Indonesia use anashid to promote moral reform and social cohesion (Fealy, 2004). Conversely, secular artists in the Arab Spring repurposed anashid-style melodies to critique authoritarian regimes, as seen in Tunisian rapper El Général's *Rais Lebled* (President of the Country) (Dickinson, 2018).

4. Scholarly Debates

Scholars debate anashid's dual role as spiritual and ideological tools. Frishkopf (2002) emphasizes their aesthetic power to unify communities through shared rhythm and language, while Kendall (2007) critiques their exploitation by extremist groups to sanitize jihad. Weigand (2020) highlights the Taliban's strategic use of anashid in radio broadcasts during the 1990s to legitimize their rule and demonize opponents.

Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Van Dijk, 1998) provides a framework to unpack how language reinforces power structures. In conflict contexts, religious anashid often function as ideological apparatuses (Roy, 2004), merging theology with political resistance. Barfield (2010) notes Afghanistan's history of framing war as *jihad* to unify tribes against invaders, while Mahmood (2005) argues that martyrdom (*shahadat*) is portrayed as a transcendental act. Pape (2005) links suicide terrorism to perceived moral duty, yet Afghan anashid emphasize collective struggle rather than individual sacrifice. The term *mujahedeen* (holy warrior) exemplify this fusion of piety and militancy (Edwards, 2002), while *kafir* (non-believer) and *traitor* delegitimize opponents (Taliban proclamations, 1996).

The study builds on interdisciplinary scholarship bridging Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and conflict studies. Fairclough's CDA (1992)

and Van Dijk's (1998) work on ideology provide the foundation for analyzing power dynamics in language, while Halliday's SFL (1985) complements this by dissecting how linguistic functions (ideational, interpersonal, textual) naturalize ideologies. Recent studies, such as Martin and Rose (2003), demonstrate the synergy of CDA and SFL in unpacking discourses of resistance, particularly in postcolonial contexts.

In the Afghan context, Barfield (2010) historicizes the use of *jihad* as a unifying force against foreign occupiers, a theme echoed in Edwards' (2002) ethnography of *mujahedeen* identity. Roy (2004) and Saeed (2013) extend this analysis, arguing that Afghan jihadist poetry (*anashid*) weaponizes religious symbolism to mobilize fighters. Saeed (2013) specifically highlights how Pashto and Dari anashid frame jihad as piety, blending Quranic references with nationalist fervor. Similarly, Kendall (2007) examines Arabic jihadist poetry, noting its role in sustaining morale across conflicts, a pattern mirrored in the Taliban's use of anashid as propaganda tools (Weigand, 2020).

The theological underpinnings of martyrdom (*shahadat*) and sacred jihad are explored by Cook (2005), who traces the evolution of martyrdom in Islamic thought, and Mahmood (2005), who links it to political resistance. Hegghammer (2010) adds nuance, contrasting Afghan anashid's collective ethos with individualistic suicide narratives in other jihadist movements. The binary construction of "believer" vs. "kafir" (*non-believer*) mirrors Said's (1978) concept of Orientalist othering, operationalized in Afghan discourse to dehumanize opponents (Taliban proclamations, 1996; Tilly, 2003).

Linguistically, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) illuminate how metaphors like "divine swords" and "lions" structure militant worldviews, while Frishkopf (2002) underscores the affective power of rhythm and repetition in Islamic anashid to galvanize collective action. Finally, Juergensmeyer (1993) theorizes the fusion of nationalism and religion in conflict discourses, contextualizing the anashid's conflation of "freedom of Islam" and "freedom of land".

This synthesis positions the study within a robust scholarly tradition, enabling a multidimensional analysis of how Afghan anashid sacralise jihad through language.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data set for the current study is constituted by 24 anashid (singular: nasheed), both Arabic and Pashto, consisting of 339 clauses and 2436 words. These anashid were purposively sampled from YouTube and other related websites. It was ensured that the anashid must have English subtitles or translation and have been composed during the war times - from 2001 till the exit of US-led forces. The AntConc corpus toolkit (v. 4.1.3.0) was run to using the data set to select the top 20 content words. However, the list excluded the name of countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Philistine etc.

The study adopts a dual-lens analytical framework, integrating Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to dissect the interplay of language, ideology, and power in Afghan war anashid. At the textual level (Fairclough), frequency analysis identifies dominant lexical themes while close reading examines metaphors and intertextual references to Islamic liturgy. Simultaneously, Halliday's ideational metafunction deciphers various processes. The interpersonal metafunction analyses mood and modality. The textual metafunction explores cohesion through repetition and parallelism reinforcing thematic unity. At the discursive practice level (Fairclough), intertextuality links the anashid to broader Islamic resistance narratives, while binary oppositions are scrutinized for their role in

“othering” enemies. Finally, the social practice level contextualizes findings within Afghanistan’s history of foreign occupation and Taliban governance, interrogating how these discourses sustain ideologies of martyrdom and divine mandate.

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Table 1. Frequency distribution of top 20 words in the corpus of anashid

Word	Frequency
ALLAH	44
Jihad	41
Freedom	40
Mujahedeen	37
Shahadat	36
Free	30
Battlefield	26
Mujahid	25
Heaven	23
Victory	23
Homeland	21
Blood	19
Land	17
Quran	16
Aggressor	15
Traitor	12
Oppressor	10
Peace	10
Martyr	09
Tyrant	09

Selected lines from the Anashid:

1. When I embraced Islam, I vowed to stand against those who deny the truth.
2. In that place, Islam found my heart. I lived by the Quran’s teachings... Allah guided me to defend my faith against those who threaten it.
3. Shout ‘Allahu Akbar!’ Let the heavens hear: Our nation will never fall while we fight to end oppression.
4. Their hearts shone with pure devotion—a light I carried with me.
5. Their resolve never falters; their weapons never shatter. How brave they are, rising to protect what is sacred!
6. Our sacred spaces would still stand untouched, guarded by the courage of our people.
7. The call to prayer seized my soul the first time I heard it—a melody I could not escape.
8. My breath caught as I watched them pray, longing to join their ranks, to share their stillness.
9. My mother prayed we’d find eternity with Allah—whether as warriors or martyrs.
10. We will not sheathe our swords until liberation is won, until every threat is silenced. Recite the Quran—let its words guide our hands.
11. Brothers in faith, unite! Together, we’ll reclaim our land and mend its wounds. With Allah’s grace, we will heal this broken peace.
12. Victory lies in the hands of the mujahideen—their swords guided by faith, their strength blessed by the Divine.
13. Warriors of Allah, rise! Strike down tyranny, and let the banner of Islam soar free.

14. For the land we love, we fight. Every sacrifice brings us closer to reclaiming our home.

15. We take up arms in the name of justice—to root out betrayal and oppression, so peace may finally bloom.

16. Tyrants may roar, but we will not cower. Brothers, march fearlessly! Courage will carve our path to triumph.

1. How do religious and militant discourses intersect in Afghan war anashid to legitimize jihad?

Afghan war anashid (Islamic chants) fuse religious and militant language to frame jihad as a sacred duty. For example, frequent invocations of *Allah* (44 mentions) and direct references to the *Quran* (16 mentions) (Excerpt 3: “*Cry the Takbir... till the last oppressor is killed*”) anchor jihad within divine command. The concept of *shahadat* (martyrdom, 36 mentions) further sacralizes jihad by promising eternal reward for fighters (Excerpt 9). This mirrors Talal Asad’s observation that religious discourses often “sanctify collective action” in conflicts, transforming war into a moral obligation (Asad, 2003).

Bruce Lincoln (2003) argues that religious rhetoric in conflict zones redefines jihad as “cosmic war,” where earthly battles reflect divine will. The use of *jihad* (struggle) in anashid exemplifies this, framing resistance as both spiritual and militaristic.

The anashid borrow Quranic phrases (e.g., “*fight those who fight you*” [Quran 2:190]), aligning militant acts with scripture. This mirrors David Cook’s (2005) analysis of how jihadist groups weaponize scripture to legitimize jihad.

2. What binary oppositions structure these narratives?

The corpus constructs rigid “**us vs. them**” binaries to justify jihad:

- **Us:** *Mujahedeen* (37 mentions), *defenders of homeland* (21), *believers* (Excerpt 10).
- **Them:** *Kafir* (unbeliever), *aggressor* (15), *traitor* (12).

Derrida’s deconstruction reveals hierarchies within these binaries. For instance, “*freedom/oppression*” positions the Taliban as liberators and outsiders as oppressors. Similarly, “*believer/kafir*” erases moral ambiguity, reducing conflict to a holy war against evil.

Othering and Jihad: Edward Said (1978) notes that colonial discourses rely on binaries to dehumanize opponents. In anashid, labels like “*tyrant*” (9 mentions) strip enemies of humanity, justifying their eradication.

Moral Absolutism: As Mahmood Mamdani (2004) argues, binaries like “*good Muslim/bad Muslim*” simplify complex conflicts. The anashid’s “*freedom vs. annihilation*” rhetoric exemplifies this, conflating resistance with existential survival.

3. How are freedom and peace redefined within jihad?

In the anashid, “*freedom*” (40 mentions) and “*peace*” (10) are redefined through jihad. Excerpt 11 states: “*Restore peace... eliminate the enemy with Allah’s help*,” equating peace with annihilation of opponents. Similarly, “*justice and peace*” (Excerpt 14) are tied to “*killing traitors*,” reframing peace as a militant victory. Critical discourse scholars like Ruth Wodak (2015) show how political groups coopt terms like “*freedom*” to mask jihad. Here, “*freedom of Islam*” merges territorial and religious liberation, echoing Taliban rhetoric.

Faisal Devji (2005) argues that modern jihad redefines “*freedom*” as resistance to foreign occupation. The anashid’s use of “*divine swords*” frames jihad as a tool of emancipation.

Table 2: SFL Analysis of Linguistic Functions

Metafunction	Example from Corpus	Linguistic Feature	Interpretation
Ideational	“Kill the enemies of ALLAH” (Excerpt 2)	Material process (<i>kill</i>) + Goal (<i>enemies</i>)	Constructs jihad as purposeful action; enemies framed as objects to eliminate.
	“Our swords will not go down”	Relational process (<i>will not go down</i>)	Affirms unyielding resistance; swords symbolize divine power.
Interpersonal	“March towards victory, don’t be afraid”	Imperative mood + negative command	Directs collective action; asserts authority of speaker.
	“Victory is ours”	High-modality declarative	Erases doubt; reinforces inevitability of triumph.
Textual	Repetition of <i>Allah</i>	Lexical cohesion	Centralizes divine authority as thematic core.
	“Freedom of Islam... freedom of land”	Parallelism	Equates religious and territorial liberation, enhancing rhetorical unity.

Ideational: Material processes (*kill, attack*) depict jihad as purposeful action (Excerpt 2: “*Kill the enemies of Allah*”). Relational processes (“*Our swords will not go down*”) symbolize unyielding divine power.

Interpersonal: Imperatives (“*March!*”) command collective action, while high-modality assertions (“*Victory is ours*”) erase doubt.

Textual: Repetition of *Allah* (44) and parallelism (“*freedom of Islam... freedom of land*”) unify themes, amplifying rhetorical force.

Material Processes as Agency: Van Leeuwen (2008) notes that material processes (*kill*) assign agency to actors, legitimizing their actions. Here, jihad becomes a “duty” rather than a choice.

Modality and Authority: According to Fairclough (2003), high-modality language (“*is ours*”) asserts unquestionable truth, mirroring Taliban claims to divine authority.

DISCUSSION

This study reveals how Afghan war anashid use language to sanctify jihad. Through Fairclough’s CDA, we see that binaries (*us/them*) and intertextuality (*Quranic references*) are not mere rhetoric but tools of power. By fusing religious and militant discourses, the Taliban positions itself as both a spiritual and political authority. Halliday’s SFL further exposes how grammar reinforces ideology: imperatives (“*March!*”) mobilize action, while lexical cohesion (*Allah*) centralizes divine legitimacy.

The redefinition of “*freedom*” as violent liberation reflects Afghanistan’s history of foreign occupation (e.g., Soviet, U.S.), where resistance became synonymous with survival. Similarly, *shahadat* (martyrdom) tap into a cultural reverence for sacrifice, aligning death in battle with spiritual transcendence.

CONCLUSION

The Afghan war anashid are not just songs but ideological blueprints. They exploit religious symbolism, linguistic structures, and historical trauma to frame jihad as sacred and inevitable. By deconstructing binaries, exposing semantic shifts, and analyzing linguistic functions, this study highlights how language perpetuates conflict. Understanding these mechanisms is crucial

for countering extremist narratives and fostering peacebuilding that addresses root causes—not just symptoms—of jihad.

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