



## A Lefebvrian Reading of Khaqani's "Prison Poems"

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### Abstract

Informed by Henri Lefebvre's "Production of Space" theory, this study aims to explore Khaqani's representation of prison in his "Prison Poems" in the light of the perceived, imagined, and lived space dialectics. This research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach and employs library sources. The results of this study show that in the perceived space, the poet, informed by phenomenological and critical perspectives, reinterprets the material space of the prison by confronting the veil and recognising the implicit mechanisms of power; in the imagined space, echoing the prescriptive knowledge of the discourse of power, the poet, as the subject, adopts a forced understanding of the space, which reveals the power and role of other groups in Khaqani's imprisonment; in the lived space, the poet, echoing an implicit resistance against the discourse of power, employs his imagination and poeticity to create a different space within the realm of possibilities, which has no material correlation with the real prison but only adds a utopian meaning. This study concludes that the material space of the prison, the imprisoned poet as an active subject, and the discourse of power affect the ambience of Khaqani's "Prison Poems."

**Keywords:** Henri Lefebvre, Khaqani, Prison Poems, Space Production

### Extended Abstract

#### 1. Introduction

Khaqani was a major Persian poet and prose writer of the twelfth century. He was born in Transcaucasia in the historical region known as Shirvan, where he served as an ode-writer for the Shirvanshahs. One can categorise some of his

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poems as prison literature. His "Prison Poems" are poems composed in imprisonment. Among the many reasons for his imprisonment, one can highlight his conflicts with Sharvanshah. In addition to a vivid description of the gloomy and dismal space of the prison, Khaqani also criticises the political and societal factors which contributed to his imprisonment. The poet's orientation in confronting the prison space creates a unique ambience informed by his dialectics. In this respect, Henri Lefebvre's "production of space" theory creates a propitious platform for analysing Khaqani's imagery and representation of prison.

## **2. Methodology**

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach and employs library sources. This study incorporates Henri Lefebvre's "production of space" and his aesthetics theory to analyse Khaqani's "Prison Poems."

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

Informed by phenomenology and critical perspectives, Henri Lefebvre theorises his "production of space" in three dimensions: perceived space, imagined space, and lived space (Schmid, 1393 [2014]: 155).

The spatial act is in accordance with the perceived space, which produces the material space. Echoing Merleau-Pontian Marxist and phenomenological views, Lefebvre argues that the spatial act is as tangible as the five senses, though depending on power structures.

The representation of space is in the domain of imagined space and produces wisdom. In this respect, the produced knowledge and wisdom are in accordance with the discourse of power. This space is the domain of those who selfishly influence space in the mind. Lefebvre, on the other hand, highlights the generality and universality aspects of power (Lefebvre, 1395 [2016]: 118). Therefore, those groups with unrestrained access to power affect the representation of space.

The representational spaces correlate with the lived space and the production of meaning. In this respect, poeticity and horizons of imagination fabricate new meanings for the space. The representational spaces are employed by artists who aspire to describe their own description of a utopia. In his literary theories, Lefebvre argues that the utopic aspect is the essence of any work of art (Lefebvre, 2019: 65). Additionally, these spaces, according to Butler, are places for resisting or undermining the authority of power (Butler, 1399 [2020]: 72-73).

#### 4. Discussion and Analysis

##### 4.1 The Perceived Space of the Prison

The poet's phenomenological and critical views are important. His agonising experiences in the prison, from a phenomenological perspective, lead to passive actions such as crying and weeping. The implements of torture, in his view, move beyond neutrality toward a dialectical active relation with his body, which, in turn, creates a unique ambience. His critical views, on the other hand, directly affect his understanding of the prison. His imagery is affected by the discourse of power.

##### 4.2 The Imagined Space of the Prison

In the imagined space, echoing the prescriptive knowledge of the discourse of power, the poet, as the subject, adopts a forced understanding of the space. Informed by his belief in predestination, Khaqani surrenders to the discourse of power. In other words, the poet, as the subject, submits to common beliefs and traditions, all of which reveal the power and the role of other groups in his imprisonment.

##### 4.3 The Lived Space of the Prison

The poet, reflecting an implicit resistance against the discourse of power, employs his imagination and poeticity to create a different space within the realm of possibilities, which has no material correlation with the real prison but only adds a utopian meaning.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the poet's worldview correlates with his description of the prison. These descriptions make a dialectical connection between the poet, as the subject, and the space of the prison. In this respect, the material space of the prison, the imprisoned poet as an active subject, and the discourse of power affect the ambience of Khaqani's "Prison Poems."

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