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## The Poetry of Amir Khusrau: An Embodiment of Sufism and ‘Divine Love’

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### Abstract:

Amir Khusrau, the Sufi poet of medieval India, became at an early age a disciple of great Sufi Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya; it had a great impact on Khusrau’s poetry. Subsequently, Khusrau produced the poetry of Devotion, Spiritualism, Self-denial and Divine Love. His poetry bears the message of True Reality in the atmosphere of courtly life of medieval India. Khusrau immensely contributed to Sufi music, developed some musical instruments and almost invented *qawwali* as *Samā*. This paper analyses the Sufi intones and immortal Divine Love that Khusrau’s poetry carry, an attempt is made to unveil the Unity behind the seemingly woman-beloved. Khusrau talks about a beloved who is transcend of any human quality, both in appearance and spirit.

**Keywords:** Devotion, Divine Love, Spiritualism, Sufi, Unity.

Amir Khusrau (1253-1325), his full name was Abu’ul Hasan Yamin ud-Din Khusrau, was a Sufi poet, musician and scholar. He is a widely known and acknowledged figure in the cultural history of Indian subcontinent. A Sufi and a spiritual disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, Khusrau is credited of inventing certain musical instruments but there is very bleak documental support for it. He was the master of Persian language, in which he wrote his most poetry, but Khusrau was really dexterous in Hindavi. Amir Khusrau was born in Patiyali in Etah, Utter Pradesh. His father, Amir Saif-ud-Din Mahmud was a Turkic officer and a member of the Lachin tribe of Transoxania, Central Asia. At the invasion of Genghis Khan Saif-di-Din migrated from his hometown, Kesh, near Samarkand, to Balkh. Shamsuddin Iltutmish, the sultan of Delhi, welcomed them to Delhi and provided the shelter to the exiled. Saif-us-din married the daughter of Rawat Arz, a famous person in the Rajput tribe of Utter Pradesh. Khusrau was proud of the lines, a Turk and a Rajput. He wrote “I am a Turk of Hindustan, I answer in Hindavi/ I don’t have Egyptian sugar to speak Arabic”. Former became the reason that his master Nizamuddin Auliya called him the “Turk of God”. He is also famously known as the “Parrot of India”.

Khusrau was an intellectual giant of many languages, with the knowledge of Turkish, Arabic, Persian and north Indian vernaculars. Khusrau was an expert of many styles of Persian

poetry which developed in the medieval Persia, from *Qasida* (ode) to *Khamasa* (set of five poems). According to *Encyclopaedia of Iranica*, Khusrau used 11 different metrical schemes with 35 distinct divisions. He has written in many verse forms including ghazal, *masnavi* (long poem in rhyming couplets), *qata*, *rubai* (poem in quatrains), *do-baiti* (two-versed short epigrammatic poem), and *tarkib-band* (literally means "composite-tie"). He is regarded as the "father of *Qawwali*" (a devotional music form of the Sufi's in the Indian subcontinent), and "introduced the ghazal style of song into India, both of which still exist in India and Pakistan" (Latif 334). Khusrau is also credited with introducing Persian, Arabic and Turkish elements into Indian music and was the originator of the *khayal* (literally means "imagination") and *Tarana* (a song) styles of music. Allama Shibli Nomani declares in his book *shir al-Ajam (1920)* that Hazrat Amir Khusrau, while improving the old tunes and rhythms, invented many new ones by blending Persian and Hindi rhymes and rhythms in such a fine way that they revolutionized the entire world of music. They reached such a height of the perfection that even after the lapse of seven hundred years, it could not be excelled.

Khusrau remained a royal poet all his life, he enjoyed the court life of seven Sultans, starting from Sultan Aalauddin who was much more concerned about the righteous nature and moral wellness of the people under his empire, consequently all the intoxicants from his kingdom were banned. Khusrau's Sufi disposition instigated him to contribute to the movement. Khusrau played an important role in this movement. He contained people from the evils and worked to purify them. He accepted all kind of people, irrespective of their social status and economic rank. It is said that his role was such influential that even a shopkeeper obviated from lying or cheating for extra profit. He even entertained the scholars from every walk of life and discussed mysticism with them. These discussions of the mysticism were based on the well-established books of mysticism at that time. Khusrau also catered the cause of the peaceful co-existence of Hindu-Muslim in the society.

Amir Khusrau is the only poet who has the merit of being a court poet and a Sufi simultaneously, and has written several *Qasidas* in the praise of the kings. In medieval India, poetry had a great appeal for the elite and it was principal means for any ruler to bring poets in his service and through them propagate the cultural and political legitimacy. The court poets were always rewarded for their service, but they were looked upon unfavorably since they were expected to change alliance and sell their service to anyone who offer height price. Amir Khusrau himself admitted that praising a ruler is a tiresome job even if it results in fine poetry. Staying under a patron was a compulsion for these poets because they had to make a living out of it. But he stayed spiritually close to Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya even "Amir Khusrau was a genius but his career was polished and nourished by his spiritual Sufi guide" who advised him in the matters of *Tasawwuf* (mysticism) and divinity (Amil 6).

## Amir Khusrau's Sufi Poetry

According to Mirza Waheed, Amir Khusrau became the disciple of the famous saint of Delhi, Nizamuddin Auliya in his early youth. But it is famously believed that Amir Khusrau stepped in the door of *Khanqah* (sofi abode) of Nizamuddin Auliya at the age of eight, he was accompanied there by his father. In the Introduction of *In the Bazaar of Love* (2011) Losensky and Sharma argue that “it was at his grandfather’s house that Amir Khusrau met the young Sufi Nizamuddin Auliya, who had just come to Delhi for his education” (xv). Nevertheless, it was only *Khanqah* that functioned as a quintessential Sufi abode where the Sufi poetry was produced and performed away from the elitist culture and atmosphere of royal court. Khusrau was a Sufi poet whose poems were performed in mystical context. As Amir Khusrau became the disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya he became affiliated with Chishti order of Sufism. Khusrau celebrated his spiritual master (*Pir*), who was known as *Mahbul-i Ilahi* (Beloved of God) in poems written in all the genres available to him. Khusrau recites:

Make me turn away from the world  
to reach your presence without fear.  
Since the character of your slaves is pure  
wouldn't it be proper to call you pure?  
Khusrau is prostrate before the *pirs*,  
and you are the absolute limit of his affairs.  
(11-16)

According to *Encyclopedia of Islam and Muslim World* (2003) the term Sufi is connected to “safa” means purity, emphasizing the psychological dimension of purifying (*Tazkiya*) the heart and the role of divine in choosing the saintly. Amir Khusrau yearns for breaking all the shackles of this world and turn his face away from the glories of this world, and become completely indifferent to hustle and bustle of life. Khusrau desires from his *pir* (Sufi master) the purity of the heart and soul.

Sufi poetry has an extreme devotion and smitten submission before God, and “the goal of Sufism is not to acquire intuitive knowledge of reality, but to be a servant of God. There is no stage higher than the stage of servanthood (*abdiyat*)” (Bilqies 62). Khusrau’s poetry consistently places the Beloved (*Mashooq*) in celestial spheres, a heavenly creature who deserves devotion without any limit. Khusrau writes the poem *abr mibarad u man mishavam az yar juda* and goes on to say

I will no longer need the gift of sight  
after my eyes are parted  
from the gift of the sight of you. (21-23)

The need of the sight is only to see beloved, for the eyes of a Sufi this is the biggest gift of the world. On the one hand the poet is insignificant and on the other hand the beloved has been sculptured as the precious gift.

I saw the door of paradise open  
upon her exquisite face, and now  
that I know nothing of my countless pains, (9-11)

The beloved represents the salvation from the evils and evil-doing of this world, her face is akin to the gates of paradise. When poet says that he can see paradise upon the face of her beloved that relieves him from countless pains, sorrows and agonies; the poet himself is nothing but reduced to the dust of his beloved's feet.

I rubbed my eyes all night against  
my lover's feet; for once my eyes  
were soothed, though surely her feet ached. (17-19)

Here the feet of beloved are more fragile and exquisite than the eyes of the poet-lover, rubbing eyes against feet will ache the feet and sooth the eyes. Shahida Bilqies argues that "Sufi considers that the world is not a mere illusion or ignorance but exists as self-revelation or the other self of the reality" (63).

According to *Encyclopedia of Islam and Muslim World (2003)* "their [Sufi's] piety often included deliberate critique of the excess of wealth and power" (685). Amir Khusrau, in his ghazal *muflisi az padsha'i khushtar ast* (Poverty is more pleasant than majesty), elevates depravity and poverty and considers it "more pleasant than the Majesty". All the comforts of this world are a cause that takes us away from the God. Humans who are more in the glories of the world like kings and rulers, they experience very less or no intimation with divinity. In many cultures Sufis lived in the caves in jungles and mountains to avoid the temptation of the worldly things and achieve and embrace the oneness with divinity. These traditional Sufis lived on a very little food, depending on whatever this secluded place offered and "renouncing the corporeal world or 'lower' life" (Haneih 8). But Amir Khusrau belonged to an urban city like Delhi, became a court poet and the ablution at the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, all added to his complex sensibility, but his Sufi bent was dominant on courtly one. Amir Khusrau writes in this poem:

Majesty has its headaches, and when  
last I looked, beggary was more pleasant,  
since kings let no one approach them,  
being indignant among the poor  
is more pleasant. (3-7)

There is a Sufi temper at work that bestows value to a humble life among the poor rather than riches of majesty. Beggary, the killing of self-ego; the Sufi must sacrifice his “I” in order to live in God similar to the moth that is drown to cast itself into the flames in order to become part of the flames.

### Amir Khusrau’s Divine Love

Hassan Abu Hanieh says “*Mahabba* or Divine Love or love of God holds a central place in Sufi philosophy and is closely linked by Sufis to the spiritual station of gnosis or *ma’rifa*” (67). Carl W. Ernst writes in the entry *Tasawwuf* in *Encyclopedia of Islam and Muslim World* (2003) that “Sufis, with its rejection of the corrupt world, came to be tempered by the quest to find God through love” (685). The source of this divine love is like the source of the oceans seemingly invisible, but vast and cosmic. Mehraj argues that “God, the absolute beauty is the ultimate cause of all love”, he further adds that “love is of three kinds: The divine love, the spiritual love, and the natural love” (451). Sufi emphasizes an intimate and even passionate relationship with God. So Khusrau meditates *diwana mikuni dil-u jan-i kharab-ra* (You drive my ruined heart and soul insane):

You drive my ruined heart and soul insane.  
Don’t twirl your hair in sport  
and break those chains of pure musk. (1-3)

The poet, “separated from the Divine Beloved, has to undergo great tribulation and a painful purification process” (Asani 86). Khusrau again writes: *dil raft u arzuyat az dil namishavad*

My heart left me, but longing  
for you won’t leave my heart.  
My heart broke apart, but pain  
for you won’t diminish. (1-4)

The beauty of this divine beloved is such that it drives the lover mad, the effect is irresistible. Hanieh argues that “Divine Love for the Sufis, is desire and fear turned into a passion that overwhelms hearts and their existence. This discourse of Divine Love was that of God being the Beloved” and the center of all worship (68).

For this intimate and ultimate love, the beloved has been rendered an immortal (*la-fani*) but has all the beauty and charms of a woman. “In the case of Persian poetry” argues Viitamaki “this has been the case since the twelfth century when Sufis adapted the imagery of profane love poetry into their discourse of divine love”, he adds (127). The Persian and Urdu Sufi poets saw beloved the most beautiful woman (used as a metaphor) whose charms function to create an intimate relation between the Sufi and God. Therefore, the divine love seems indistinguishable from the profane love in Khusrau’s Persian poetry. Another metaphor that has been used throughout the Persio-Urdu Sufi poetry is ‘wine’, for the intoxication of love, longing and

separation from the divine love. Amir Khusrau uses the expressions like *bi-masti* (drunkenly), *mast-i tura* (one drink), *sharab* (wine) and so on.

Furthermore, another attribute of Sufism has been *Fana* (extinction in God) is the ultimate goal of a Sufi's quest to attain that stage in the divine love where there is oneness (*vahdat*) between the lover and the beloved. And all the True Realities appear that are hidden behind the empirical world. Emersion in the divine Presence in divine love is desirable for Sufi, Khusrau clamors *dil zi tan burdi u dar jani hanuz* (you took the life from my body/ and still you dwell in my soul) that his soul and the divine love are one, absorbed in each other. "The practice of the extinction of 'ego' in the divine *Self*", says Eric Geoffroy "Sufis have expressed it in terms of *fanā*", the Hindus in terms of *nirvāna*, and Christian mystics have spoken of the 'annihilation of the heart in God'" (35).

### **Sufism and Devine Love through *Qawwali***

Music has always been an integral component of Sufism; Maulana Rumi is endorsed for developing a particular type of Sufi music called *Samā*. *Samā* is a "Sufi contemplative music recitals" and expression of divine love (Hanieh 217). "*Samā*" says Eric Geoffroy "is still maintained in forms such as Indo-Pakistani *qawwali*" (173). Viitamaki has similar findings, he claims that "in contemporary India and Pakistan, one particular musical genre, *qawwali* (*qavvali*), has become so intimately associated with *samā* that Urdu and Hindi speakers frequently use the words interchangeably to denote both the musical genre and the performance occasion" (12). Chishti order of Sufism in India always embraced *qawwali* as one of the methods by which one 'strives to attain ecstasy'. Amir Khusrau's role in the development of *qawwali* is significant. He contributed both to the written word, many of his poems are often sung in *qawwali*, and music. Khusrau's Persian poems have become a basic standard of *qawwali*, a touchstone. The tradition of *qawwali* has fostered in last few centuries, from its mesmerizing mysticism at the shrines of Delhi and Ajmer it was imported in Lahore and Karachi. The invention and training of first generation of singers is often ascribed to Amir Khusrau. It expresses the extreme devotion of a Sufi for his divine love. This form of devotional music may have been existed before Amir Khusrau in one form or the other, or in a music form resembling *Samā*. Undoubtedly, present state of *qawwali* as a unique and distinct form of the devotional music has emerged in India and became ritualistic in all South Asia and popular in whole world.

Sufism attempts a union (*visāl*) between individual and transcendental Unity (*Wahdat*), and music has played a significant role in it. Khusrau's whole poetry is of extreme devotion, of painful separation from divine love, of intolerable distance from beloved and extreme necessity to have a glance of the beloved. Khusrau writes *khaboram shud-ast k-imshab sar-i yar khvahi amad* (I heard the news that you will come):

I heard the news that you will come  
to see your friend tonight.  
I offer my head, a sacrifice  
to the road dawn which you ride. (1-4)

This is the form of highest devotion to beloved where only the news of her coming will compel the lover to sacrifice his head to that road through which the beloved is supposed to come. It becomes a Sufi practice of spiritual listening rather than music in a *qawwali* claims Geoffroy and depends on the intense repetition of words and lines that emphasize the worthiness of beloved or the devotion of lover (171). Khusrau venerates the invaluable beloved for whom the lover is reduced to the state of a slave. Khusrau complaints: *man banda-yi an ruy ki didan naguzeerand* (I am enslaved by the face):

I am enslaved by the face  
no one's allowed to see  
Driven mad by the ringlets  
no one is allowed to touch. (1-4)

The beloved is divine whom no one is allowed to see or touch and possesses the sublime qualities of eternity. The power to rejuvenate is inherited in her.

I am about to breath my last  
come, so I may live.  
What good will it do for you  
to come once I am no more? (5-8)

Khusrau's beloved is a divine Being (*al-wujūd*), when poet is about to die, the visit (*deedar*) of the beloved will bestow him with a new life. "*Samā* reveals things to the practitioner" same is true of *qawwali* (Geoffroy 172). The union (*visāl*) with the beloved is likely to avoid even the death. *Qawwali*, in the form of Sufi music and song, is like *Samā* a spiritual awakening. The Sufi's beloved, even her single glance, delivers the lover at once from the agony and he enters the world of eternal peace. *Qawwali* in Sufism play a hypnotic function to facilitate the union with the beloved. In the context of Indian subcontinent, *qawwali* uses verses from Persian, Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi literatures. This amalgamation of languages makes *qawwali* to have an equal effect on non-Muslims and as well as Muslims. And Khusrau's dexterity of using Hindavi and Persian in poems like *zihaalay miskeen makun tagaful* is a great achievement.

## Conclusion

Amir Khusrau's personality was a blend of many things, his blood was Turk and Rajput, his origin Turkish and Indian, his languages were Persian and Hindavi, a Sufi and a courtier, all this complex mosaic of entities worked together and developed a culturally enriched person, poet and



Sufi. He rose as a morning star of the Persian literature in Indian subcontinent. His assimilation of Ganga-Jamni culture through the blending of Persian and Hindavi in his poetry is a great linguistic innovation. His Sufism was not bound to a particular religion neither his Divine Love confined. He was innovative Sufi poet, he contributed to classical music of Indian subcontinent, and his role in the development of *qawwali* is significant. In Indian subcontinent *qawwali* in Sufism enjoys the echelon as high as *Samā*. Khusrau's contribution to Indian culture and tradition can be measured through his Hindavi poetry which has a fragrance of folklore and oral vernacular traditions.

**NOTE:** the translation of the poems from Persian to English is by Paul E. Losensky and Sunil Sharma from *In the Bazaar of Love: the Selected Poetry of Amir Khusrau* published by Penguin Books India 2011.

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