

Understanding the Non-Muslims in Medieval India: Amir Khusrau and Identities of Composite Culture

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Abstract

The history of Medieval India had long been interpreted on two grounds basically- the age of destruction of Indian civilization by the central Asian invaders and the growth of composite culture. But the above terms reflect contradictory sense because if the advent of foreigners fully eliminated India's glorious past then how could there be an amelioration of cultural assimilation during our period of study. In this regard, communalist modern scholars of this period can be held responsible who sought to disseminate unscientific viewpoints on both Hindu and Muslim superiority or at best with a so-called notion of "community crisis". In fact, it is not even so hard to identify the biasness of Marxist scholars who set up dominance in medieval Indian history writing by excluding many impartial treatments. However, as a chief offshoot of this composite tradition the mystic literary practice had thrived out of Bhakti and Sufi movement which imparted the idea of love and devotion for God, simultaneously emphasized the harmonious social relationship through the spiritual dissemination of human relationship with extra-mundane world. This paper will attempt to describe the understanding of non-Muslims through the literary aspects of Delhi Sultanate period, by which the composite cultural scenario can be discernible in the making of Indian heritage. As a part of my discussion, therefore, I have decided to provide a critical analysis about the most prominent mystic author of this age- Amir Khusrau.

Keywords: Delhi, Sultanate, Amir Khusrau, Composite, Hindu.

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INTRODUCTION

The Islamic civilization during the days of its origin didn't provide much impetus towards cultural activity as the holy Quran sternly insisted upon the prohibition of ostentatious and luxurious life [1]. So, at that time it was natural that there was no exertion for literature. In the course of time, Islam began to spread in different corners of the world and gradually with variation of regions Muslim life associated with cultural thought, even Islam changed the character itself. Rightly pointed out by Prof. K.M. Ashraf "the teaching of Quran appears to have worked more or less satisfactory in the tribal surroundings and the strong democratic traditions of Madina. But as soon as Islam began to expand beyond the limits of a city state, the 'inspired word of God' failed to be elaborated for the working of a more extensive political structure ..."[2]. But, with beyond dispute the assumption may not be wrong if we think that there was a regeneration of Muslim world in terms of material development, in this regard we can allude the name of Baghdad which had become the glorious cultural center of middle east. This

period can also be seen as a discourse of romantic, social and morality-oriented composition by many central Asian scholars like- Firdausi, Saadi and Hafez who had broken the conservative ideology of Muslims and were renowned for their diverse thematic works.

The Turks brought their own heritage in Indian civilization which was far different from Arabian culture. In terms of daily speaking and administrative purpose the Persian had become their common language. Thus, during 13th century onward Lahore emerged as the first center for the cultivation of the Persian language. A notable characteristic of this period was the translation of many texts from Sanskrit to Persian and Persian to Turkish. Khawaja Zia Nakhshabi, one of the most distinguished scholars of that time, was the first to translate Kok Shastra from Sanskrit to Persian; also he had another famous composition Tuti Nama (Tells of Parrot). Under Sultan Zainul Abidin of Kashmir the translation of Rajtarangini and Mahabharata translated into Persian [3]. Although there is various allegation from the side of Hindu nationalist historians about the destruction of

Indian heritage by the medieval rulers. In this regard they have opined that Sanskrit had lost its value in both Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Period, presumably these scholars failed to observe that large numbers of great Sanskrit work had been composed during 11th century or 12th century onward than that of previous ages. We have numerous instances of commentaries and digests on the Hindu law that generally called Dharmashastras said to have prepared between 12th and 16th century [4]. Immediately after the emergence of Bhakti movements, precisely following the great Sankara, the works in the field of Advaita philosophy by Ramanuja, Madhava, Vallabha and also few ancient texts like Ramayana and Mahabharata had been continued to be composed from 11th and 12th century onward. Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq who have been regarded as the fanatic monarch and apparently hostile towards the Hindus, even he was curious to explore the ancient texts [5]. During his time the Indian classical work Ragadarpan was rendered from Sanskrit to Persian. Same example can also be alluded for Sultan Alauddin Khalji [6].

In this paper my related study is on the diverse composite perception of Amir Khusrau as well as his approach towards the non-Muslims which has been manifested through his literary practice. Amir Khusrau was born on 1253 at Patiali in modern Uttar Pradesh. In the context of authorship, he disseminated patriotism by enumerating numerous micro beauties, heritage and cultural offshoots of Hindustan, Perhaps, the sole appropriation of his love for homeland entrusted him with a prestigious designation “*Tuti-yi-Hind*” (parrot of India). Simultaneously, Khusrau marked his reputation as an innovator of Indo-Persian literary genre and also placed his greatness among the famous poet-laureates of this age. The poetry of Amir Khusrau can be identified with his diverse incorporation of linguistics; in fact, we may claim that his writings engendered a compound of many foreign, indigenous and local dialects which appeared to be a dynamic effort of medieval intellectual world. Amir Khusrau mentioned different languages these are varied from region and styles of this land. Through the literary texts of Khusrau we can find the existence of several forms such as-Sindhi, Lahauri, Kashmiri, Kubri, Dhur-Samandri, Tilangi(Telugu), Gujar(Gujrati), Gauri(North Bengal), Bengali, Awad, Delhi [7]. Khusrau expressed his pride through many of his poems and statements about the pluralistic nature of Hindustani linguistics. In this respect, we can observe one of his poetry-

*“The people of Khita, Mongol, Turks and Arabs
In speaking Indian dialects get sewn lips
But we can speak any language of the world
As expertly as a shepherd tends his sheep [8].”*

He even opined in “*Nuh Sipih*” about his versatile acquaintance with all such forms of languages

*“In most of these people’s languages
I have gained knowledge
I know them, enquired about them and can speak them
And to an extent, more or less, have been enlightened
by them [9].”*

During our period of study, as mentioned earlier we have observed many instances of translation works or cultural exchanges through classic and canonical texts. But the uses of various ‘words’, ‘terms’ and dialects were hardly visible among them except the compositions of Amir Khusrau. We can analyze this aspect through the examples of his poetries

*“aaj rañg hai ai mahā-rañg hai rī, aaj rañg hai
ai mahā-rañg hai rī , mere mahbūb ke ghar rañg hai
rī...ai torā rañg man bhāyo nijāmuddīn ..maiñ to torā
rañg man bhāyo nijāmuddīn muñh māñge bar sañg hai
rī maiñ to aiso rañg aur nahīñ dekhī sakhī rī ai
mahbūb-e-ilāhī maiñ to aiso rañg aur nahīñ
dekhī..”[10].*

The word Rang or Rung is generally used as ‘colour’ in Hindi and most of the north Indian language it’s not a Persian or Urdu term. Same goes to another statement ‘maiñ to aiso rañg aur nahīñ dekhī sakhī rī ...’. Next word ‘*Mahbūb-e-ilāhī*’ is a combination of Urdu and Arabic although this phrase was popularized by Khusrau’s master Nizamuddin Auliya.

In this respect we can also allude of his poem –

*“Tarah tarah kay phool lagaaye, lay gādhwa
haathan mein aaye. Nijamudin kay darwazay
par...”[11].*

This is a tributary couplet written in Indo-eastern Bhojpuri language and a romantic description of his beloved master Seikh Nizamuddin Auliya. There are numerous examples scattered in his compositions which ascertained the diverse familiarity and the dealings of Khusrau with these linguistic genres.

The period of 13th century can be characterised by the development of mutual understanding between Hindus and Muslims in terms of sociological behaviours because of the dynamic effort made by the mystic cults through their dissemination of religious tolerance. Amir Khusrau should be regarded as the forerunner of this approach. It would be recognizable if we look into several of his poetry and individual quotes about how he explored the culture, rituals and practices of the so called ‘infidels’(Kafir) of Hindustan. One may be astonished looking towards his perception because when other notable authors of that time like-Zia-uddin Barani, Minhajuddin Shiraj who had completely ignored and directed many narrow opinions against the non-Muslims, even in such condition Khusrau remained exceptional by imparting the Hindus into his subjective study. In this regard, what I think as

the whole human beings is bounded by different socio-religious impositions. But despite living in many extreme dissensions on the ground of race, ethnicity and religion they are psychologically always curious toward their opponent community. That's why, this emphasis may not be inappropriate that Amir Khusrau had such soft-corner and large-hearted personality to reach in more intimacy with those alien counterpart Hindus. Here I am alluding few of his poetical excerption to facilitate the analysis properly.

*'I grew pale before the Hindu idol.
Alas, he had no idea of my distress.
I told him, 'I want to kiss your lips.'
He laughed and said, 'Nahi Nahi', a proscriptive no [12].'*

The term *Nahi* used here for rejection or prohibition of Khusrau's offer in a utopian sense. During that age hardly the Muslims could visit the Hindu temples and idols as they were swayed by many hide-bound customs, wherein, for Khusrau it was very natural. Now another joke can be appended here.

*"One day I was strolling by a stream
When I saw Hindu lass on the bank
I asked, 'my pretty, how much for your hair?'
She cried, 'A pearl for every strand,'
Or 'Get Lost, you wretch' in the Hindavi sense [13]. "*

Most recently we have a popular book of Audrey Truschke in which she used the term "Culture of Encounters" as a title of this book [14]. Here, the culture referring to non-Muslims literary participations in Mughal court. In fact, Audrey Truschke brought a new relevant aspect about the psychological competition of contemporary Hindu and Jain Sanskrit scholar for getting the favourable position in Mughal imperial house. Now, such intention of discovering the 'encounters' i.e Hindus had cantered round in Amir Khusrau's thematic works. We should examine one of his couplets about how he defined the comparison of a devoted Jogi boy with the famous Muslim annal Laila and Majnu-

*"The young Jogi boy was sitting in the dust,
Face pretty as Laila's, mind mad as Majnun's.
His beauty was really enhanced by the dust
A mirror is brighter when polished with grit [15]."*

Our discussion about Amir Khusrau would be incomplete beyond the perusal of his idea of Hindusthan which has a deep co-relation with his commendation of motherland and realization of other faith. In that case, we must remember that there was no sense of unified nationalism in Medieval India as the term 'nation' and 'nationalism' is apparently a modern concept. Prof. Syed Nurul Hassan in his "Problem of Nationalities in Medieval India" has pointed out the various evolutions behind the growth and development

of territorial national consciousness [16]. However, for Amir Khusrau the notion of patriotism has to be regarded as an outcome of his curious mind and deepest compassion about the peoples, nature and culture of India. At least, we have to consider this through an emotion-centric mind set up for mother-land which commonly inculcated to every human character. But, in the context of historical comparison one should not argue that there was an existence of broad patriotic approach irrespective of caste, creeds and regional variation when Khusrau was imbibing such prosperous introspection through his compositions.

Amir Khusrau didn't exclude a single theme of material Hindusthan from his observation. Moreover, one can recognize the presence of numerous micro beauties, sub-themes which are related as the core subject of his authorship to overpraise the less valuable corners of Human life as well as the poet's cordial interaction with commoners and ordinary Hindus. Very interestingly, he has justified the love of motherland 'Hind' depending upon the dictum of prophet Muhammed "Hub al watan min al-iman" (the love of motherland is an essential part of the true faith), even he ascertained that this is an inevitable part of faith [17]. Above all he argued about the superiority of motherland. In this respect, he defined two reasons- firstly, to be his birth place and secondly, the prophetic tradition arrived in this land of infidels for which they would receive reward hereafter. He quoted –

"Hind was a paradise for the unbelievers since the advent of Adam till the coming of Islam. Even in recent times, these infidels have had every pleasure of heaven like wine and honey [18]."

In most cases, the mentions of Indian foods, animals had also been delineated. Here I am eluding few his couplets and their inner significance-

"Last night my pan-sellers were up to his tricks, as he slowly prepared pan leaves in his shop... [19]."

"The rose prefers no other beauty to yours, that's why it always laughs at everyone else. My Hindu flower-seller, cover your face. It's your fault the rose seems to wear a sacred thread [20]."

The previous poetry mentioned about Pan i.e. betel leaf which was probably a high price commodity at that time, therefore, mostly the elite classes used to receive its taste. In the second couplet, one hand it reflecting about his familiarity with flower, basically an element of idol worship and on the other hand his continuous relationship with Hindus. Indeed, Khusrau felt comfort and certainty within the milieu of non-Muslim inhabitants as like as Malik Muhammed Jaisi, a 16th century narrator of India. By eulogizing Indian beauty, he said, "it is so moderate that a poor peasant

spends the night in the pasture-land grazing his flock with only a single worn out cloak wrapped around him, a *Brahman* can take his bath in the cold water of the river early in the morning, where a mere branch of tree is enough to shade the poor of the country [21]”.

The tendency of Amir Khusrau was always to prove the greatness of Indian heritage for which he used to praise her community, customs and festivals. He regarded Sanskrit not merely an ancient language but simultaneously emphasised upon its richest literary tradition. By remarking his comparison, he stated –

“This language has the quality of a pearl amongst pearls. It is inferior to Arabic, but superior to Dari (Persian)[22]”.

Now the question here that why Khusrau expressed his soft-corner for Arabic as psychologically he was bounded by theological sphere. So, conventionally he had to inheriting the same motive. Hence, not Sanskrit but Arabic was superior because it has conjunction with the fear for heaven or hell wherein Persian was comparatively less valued. Amir Khusrau’s work is replete with the desire of searching Hindusthani mood of knowledge. He over-praised the Brahman class about their versatile wisdom and exalted honour. Even described them proudly - ‘the scholars from all corners of the world come to India for acquiring knowledge but the Brahmans never leaves the boundaries of India for pursuing wisdom as there is no need for them’. We should look his statement in this regard-

Brahman in their knowledge and intellect are far superior to the knowledge of all the books of Aristotle ...Whatever the Greek revealed in philosophical thought to the world, the Brahmans have a greater wealth [23]”.

While talking about the Brahmans he has remarked their nature and brought them in a special category whose knowledge remained conceal from mundane universe. No one could penetrate to realize their qualities. However, Khusrau tried to explore them in some angel-

“As nobody had tried to learn from the Brahman. They have remained unrevealed. But I to an extent have done a bit of research in this matter. And after putting a stamp of confidence on their heart. Have gained some insight into their secrets of learning. Whatever I could grasp has not been contradicted so far [24].”

Through the above discussions we come to know about the different aspects of Amir Khusrau’s understanding of pluralistic Hindustan in terms of imagination, or at best, in a level of person -centric visualization. Now, I will portray some divergent viewpoint of this legendary author. One can raise issue

that why his negativity should include because he was, perhaps, the only progressive figure of medieval intellectual world who said to have modelled the backbone of harmonious Indianness. In that case I sought to stand with scientific historical objectivity where a historiographer must remain in impartiality on the basis of adequate sources, and thematically argumentative or counter-argumentative. Rightly pointed out by leading historian R.C. Majumdar “The ascertainment of truth, so far it can be ascertained...is the one object, the one sanction, of all historical studies [25]”. Prof. Aziz Ahmed was the first to trace the shortcomings of three medieval Scholar- Amir Khusrau, Muhammed Isami, Malik Muhammed Jaisi in his “Epic and counter Epic in Medieval India [26]”. Here it has been expounded that Muslim rule in India contributed two literary growths one is the Muslim epic of conquest and another is the Hindu epic of resistance. Now these literatures had psychological roots of the contemporary authors who sought to glorify specific communities and war heroes. The Muslim narratives developed through *Qasidas* (panegyrics) mostly which were developed on the occasion of campaign by the Muslim kings in various Hindu kingdom. Now in medieval period we have few examples of notable compositions about the annals of Muslim victory. In this regard, Amir khusrau’s *Miftah al Futuh* is the first war epic (*Razmiya*), it alluded four victory of Jalal-Al-Din Khalji, two of them against Hindu raja. The next work of Amir Khusrau, *Khazain al Futuh* was written in prose form and the conquest of Turks against the Hindus had been glorified. The Khalji campaign of Deccan was exalted as bravado of iconoclasm. Khusrau’s next epic “*Ashiq*” was courtly (*Bazmiya*) in subject, related to the love story of Alauddin Khalji’s son Khizr Khan for the Hindu princess of Gujrat, Dewal Rani. Here one psychological perspective is apparent that is the recognition of conquers right of possession upon the dominated Hindu beloved. Khusrau, beyond dispute as a poet laureate, is the only individual figure of medieval century who said to have represented the pluralistic depiction of Hindustan and his genius authorship incorporated both the major and micro beauty of Hindustan’s culture, peoples, nature and environment. But one may surprise to see his quotation about how he provided a Muslim majoritarian tendency

“Happy Hindustan, the splendors of religion, where the (Muslim holy) law finds perfect honor and security.... the strong men of Hind have been trodden under foot and are ready to pay tribute. Islam is triumphant and idolatry is subdued [27].”

Amir Khusrau’s last epic Tughluq Nama had an actual objective to signify the re-establishment of Muslim power in India by his hero Ghiyath al Din Tughluq. Following, such cases one may be confused for his contrary approach. However, through these all critical overview we should interpret Amir Khusrau as visionary, literary genius and harbinger of nation’s

pluralism. Similarly, we must not abstain to evaluate Khusrau on the ground of his majoritarian intention towards the Hindus. But, one thing I have to point out here that the Indo-Persian historiography as well as medieval literary traditions often used the term “infidel” for non-believer that doesn’t actually means to narrowly representing other counterparts. At best, we can project them as the mind set up circle of Muslim authors, otherwise, there is no dissidence to regard Amir Khusrau far more superior than that of the contemporary scholars about their treatment of Non-Muslims.

The formation of Indian heritage has been a long-drawn process from far ancient period. Our culture absorbed each and every element of whole universe which gradually became the principle of Indian nation. There might have been numerous advents of foreign powers, rise and fall of royal dynasties, political turmoil but altogether the deep-rooted homogenous socio-cultural relationship had never been threatened on the manner of political institutions. Perhaps, this is the most exalted disposition of this sub-continent. In the same mode, we should also elucidate the insight of Amir Khusrau who dedicated his generous espial in the creation of composite culture. Hence, in later period his footsteps had been followed in many notable aspects of Indian culture. Precisely, in the field of recognizing the other faiths still we have no more examples like Amir Khusrau.

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