

# AMIR KHUSRO

(1253—1325 A.D.)

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Qamar Rais

Amir Khusro is one of those illustrious sons of India of whose patriotism, artistic and literary achievements one can justifiably feel proud. Through his creative genius the elements of the highly advanced civilizations of India and Central Asia were transmuted into new visages and forms. For the past seven hundred years his melodies and lyrics have resounded in the air of our country and have affected the cultures of the Persian-speaking world such as Iran, Afghanistan and areas of Central Asia. He has been a strong pillar in the history of Persian literature. Amir Khusro initiated the thought and ideas of religious tolerance, fraternity amongst human beings and brotherhood. This tradition was later carried on by Nanak, Kabir, Waris Shah and other poets and saints. He was a prominent litterateur, poet and also an expert musician and an authentic historian of his day. In many of his prose writings and long poems, the political, social and cultural life of India of the thirteenth and fourteenth century emerges with striking vividness. Almost all the writings of Amir Khusro are replete with descriptions of the flora and fauna, seasons, customs and traditions, and way of life of his country and his profound affection for the people of India.

Amir Khusro's father Amir Saif-uddin Mehmood who was a resident of Shehar Kash (Green City) came to India at the time of Altutmish. He was married to the daughter of a famous Amir who was also Balban's Defence Minister, Amar-ul-mulk. Khusro was born to this Indian mother at Patiali in the Dist. of Etah but after the death of his father when he was only eight years old, his maternal grandfather Amal-ul-mulk bore the burden of his education and upbringing. Due to his grandfather's eminent position he had access to the scholars, saints, nobles and artists' *mehfils*. His natural creative abilities soon achieved brilliance. He started writing poetry at the early age of nine and when he was nineteen his first *Diwan* (collection) *Tafka-Isazhar* was published. This includes reverential verses describing the 'glory of the famous saint of Delhi, Hazrat Shaikh Nizamuddin.' This is a proof that his

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Transted from the Urdu by J.N. Kaushal

reverence for Hazrat Nizamuddin started at that early age and continued till his death and this influence brought about many changes in his thought and ideas. In that age of religious fanaticism, war and confusion, the Saint was a symbol of religious tolerance, brotherhood, unity and peace for all. At the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin, who was a life-long guide to Khusro, thousands of people of all castes and creeds used to come without any restriction to receive instructions to lead a pious, peaceful and better life. Khusro also learned his lessons of love for the people and Humanity as a whole at this shrine, inspite of his association with the nobles and with the court of rulers. Even otherwise, tribes hailing from Central Asia to whom he belonged, did not favour feudalism or segregational ideology but mixed with commoners and liked to remain close to the common people and their culture. Perhaps Khusro's closeness to and liking of, Hazrat Nizamuddin and his mission, was influenced by the fact that the Hazrat's grandfather, Khwaja Ali, had also come from Central Asia (Bokhara) and the scholar Shamas-ul din, who taught Khusro, also belonged to Khwarzam.

Amir Khusro's writings as a scholar or Poet are a priceless treasure of Persian literature. His works are estimated around nine hundred but the larger part of these are lost to us. The number of his known works is around twenty and some of these are not yet published. Many scholars in India, the Soviet Union and Iran are engaged in the task of compiling, editing and publishing his works.

Unlike most of the Persian or Urdu poets Khusro's creative genius did not confine itself to only one classical form of expression. He was equally at ease with the forms *Masanavi*, *Qaseeda*, and *Gazal*. Eminent Persian poets like Sadi, Urfi Hafiz Jami, and Ali Shernawai have greatly praised the genius of Khusro. No one could match the excellence with which Khusro wrote an answer to Nizami's famous *Khamsa* (five *masanavies*). Khusro not only had a remarkable flight of imagination but also a command of the language and a match-less style of expression. When he gives a picturesque account of some event or narrates human feelings with his realistic approach, he achieves a force in his poetry which gives pleasure even today. His famous *masanavies* regarding the history, culture and life of India are amongst the best in Persian literature. This is not an occasion to enumerate the literary qualities of his Persian works or his influence on Persian literature nor am I capable of it. Even then it will not be out of context to say that these works are full of the poet's patriotic sentiments. Specially in *Na Sepher* and *Ishgia* or *Deval Rani* — *Khizar Khan* he has narrated the glories of Indian culture in detail and with reverence. In one of his chapters in *Na Sepher* he has called India the paradise and has given ten arguments to prove India's edge over others and its greatness. He says that India has surpassed all other countries in knowledge and in the achievements of science. People from different parts of the world come here. People of India are capable of learning every language of the world. India is more advanced than other countries of the world in the art of music.

India's inventions include the game of Chess. And the Zero, is also a contribution of India to the world of science. India has revered books like the Vedas, which contain everything, religion, politics, culture, music. He speaks of *Panchatantra*, a tale of India as having been translated into Arabic, Persian, Turkish and other languages. His last argument is engaging: that India is great because a poet like Khusro who is a magician of the world, lived here !

In the same *Masanavi*, Khusro has written about the languages of India. He has also written about the flora and fauna, seasons, and landscapes in minutes detail. Among flowers of India he speaks highly of Sasan Bala, Juhi, Keora, Maulsri, etc. and says that above all the flowers Champa is the best. 'The fragrance of this flower is such as though some one has mixed Kasturi in wine. It is delicate like the Chameli-skinned beloved and its colour is yellow like the face of a lover.' At one place he writes: "I love my country because this is my motherland, secondly Hazrat Mohammad has said that to love one's motherland is part of one's creed". He also calls India the paradise, because Adam was placed on this land and the snakes and peacocks are here which originally were available in paradise. Khusro's love for various things Indian is reflected in many ways. He was proud of being Hindustani and he also took pride in the fact that Hindi or Hindavi was his mother-tongue.

In one couplet he says : "I am an Indian Turk, I speak Hindavi. I do not have the sweetness to speak in Arabic."

And again : "If you want to know the truth, I am an Indian (Tooti) Parrot tell me to talk in Hindavi so that I am able to speak with felicity and beauty."

Khusro has himself said that he knew Sanskrit and other Indian languages apart from Hindavi. A thorough study of his works would prove that his love for the civilization, culture and the people of India was not superficial. Khusro's whole personality was immersed in it. Deep imprints of Indian thought and philosophy are evident in most of his writings, his moral and social thought. He presented the sensitiveness and beauty of Iranian and Central Asian thought wrapped in the garb of the vividness of Indian culture. To him India was one unit from north to south which was breathing the same air in the historical and geographical context. The same soul pulsates in its music, dance, knowledge of the arts and philosophy; where people had the same habits, temperaments and wore the same kind of clothes and had common customs. Khusro toured almost all parts of India. He stayed for a long time at Devgir in South, in Bengal, in Multan and Awadh. He discovered the greatness of his motherland by going to the villages as well as its cities.

Another proof of this is his poetry in Hindavi or Hindustani. It is true that the poetry which is available under his name is not all his own writing

but many others have also contributed to it. This is evident from the idiom used and other proofs. Through the ages there have been additions and subtractions. But there is ample proof that Khusro wrote thousands of couplets. For centuries Indians have known Khusro as a poet of the people. In Northern India his lyrics, melodies, *Mukarnian*, *Anmils*, *Dohe*, *Dhakosle* and *Do-Sukhane* have been sung through the centuries. In these he has depicted the day-to-day life of the people; their passions. The style of language is the spoken language, Khari Boli, which evolved into Hindi and Urdu in the years to come. This became the language of a common heritage for Hindu and Muslims and serves as a beautiful example of unity. In Urdu poetry, the first *Gazal* is supposed to be famous *Gazal* of Khusro's which is half in Persian and half in Hindi :

*"Zehal Miskin Makuntaghaful duraye nainan banave batian  
Keh taab bijran na daram aye jaan na lehu ka he laga chhatian".*

In this manner Khusro's couplets in mixed language are very famous. He used both Persian and Hindi metres. There are many legends which have come down through the generations about his poetry.

In the first history of Urdu poetry *Aab-e-Hayat* Mohd. Hussain Azad has written : "Once four village maidens were drawing water from a well. Khusro came that way and wanted to drink water as he was thirsty. One of the girls recognised him and told the others that Khusro was coming towards them. They asked, 'are you Khusro whose riddles, *mukernian* and *anmils* are so famous and whose songs we sing?' He replied in affirmation. One of them said, 'tell me something about *Kheer* (sweetened rice). The second asked about *Charkha* (spinning wheel), the third said *Dhol* (Drum) and fourth decided on *Kutta* (a dog). Khusro told them that he was dying of thirst but the maidens wanted to hear some couplets on the subjects given by them before obliging him.

He replied : "*Kheer pakai jatan se, Charkha dia Jalai  
Aya kutta kha gaya; tu baithi dhol baja  
La pani, pila.*"

(With great difficulty was sweetened rice prepared by burning the spinning wheel; a dog came and ate it up and now you sit and play a drum! Water, give me water!)

This kind of couplet in which things of divergent nature were coupled together were called *anmils*.

There are many such couplets ascribed to him which are a sample of his popular poetry. It is likely that such stories are just a figment of the imagina-

tion but it is not difficult to assess the popularity of Khusro amongst the people for his Hindavi poetry. His couplets, *mukarnian* etc. were house-hold words.

It is said that at the death of Hazrat Nizamuddin he instantaneously composed a couplet which is even now sung by *Qawals* on the annual Urs :

*Gori sovey sej par, mukh par darey kes  
Chal Khusro ghar aapne, rain bhai chahu des*

Riddles, *mukarnian* and other poetic contributions attributed to Khusro have endeared him to millions of people down the ages. *Qawwals* and musicians have been singing his compositions. He not only wrote songs but set them to music as well. One of his famous songs is: "*Jo piya aawan keh gaye, ajhun na aye swami ho*". Khusro composed this in *Burva Raga* and for centuries it has been sung the same way. Khusro's creative mind invented new *ragas* for Indian music. In this field also it has not been possible to distinguish between fact and fiction. In his time, Indian music like other arts, also came under the influence of Iranian and Central Asian music. On many occasions Khusro mentioned his interest in and knowledge of Indian music which is verified from other sources as well. Khusro tried to bring it out of a rut and to give it new life. There is not much substance to the legends regarding his invention of the sitar and other instruments, but Khusro gave many new *ragas* by inter-mingling Central Asian and Indian musical traditions. Shibli Naghmari and Dr. Waheed Mirza have referred to many such *ragas* whose origin is ascribed to Khusro; for example *Raga Majhar Sazgiri*, *Raga Yaman Kalyan*, *Raga Ushag*, *Tarana*, *Raga Parghana* etc. The fact is that Indian classical music was stagnant as was society at that time. Isolation and seclusion had given a mechanical aspect to culture which did not suit the dynamic temperament of the Central Asian people. It was but natural that Indian music like other spheres of life should change and develop. To give music a sort of poignance and make musical instruments more flexible to encompass the nuances of music, efforts were made during Khusro's time to improve them. And Khusro, who was one of the pioneers among the builders of this new synthesis of cultures, must have contributed his share. He must have invented a few things. And others may have been ascribed to him because of his towering personality.

The roots of Khusro's creative works were deeply imbedded in the land of his country and its divergent traditions and customs. This is the reason why his works have been equally popular with the elite and the masses for more than six hundred years. Very few artists or poets have achieved his eminence and his universal popularity.

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