

Amir Khusrau and His Poetry in Indic Languages

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Many stories and legends have accumulated around the figure of Amir Khusrau. Perhaps among the better-known and more popular ones are those concerning his relationship with his spiritual guide, Nizam al-Din Awliya. So close was this relationship that Amir Khusrau is said to have been totally overwhelmed by grief when he heard the news of his *murshid*'s death.¹ Tradition asserts that Amir Khusrau, a poet who once confessed that he simply could not stop the spontaneous flow of his Persian poetry,² gave vent to his sorrow in a famous verse :

Gori so'e sej par mukh par dare kes,
Chal Khusrau ghar apne, rain bhai chaun des.³
(The fair one lies on the couch, with her [black] tresses scattered on her face,
O Khusrau, go home now, for night has fallen all over.)

That Amir Khusrau, an accomplished poet of Persian, should have chosen to express his deepest emotions and feelings in an Indic vernacular language, a language he called Hindawi, was in a certain way unusual. Unusual because the *ashraf*, the learned, intellectual and religious elite, consisting almost entirely of immigrants from Iran and Central Asia, to which Amir Khusrau belonged, wrote exclusively in the classical languages of Arabic and Persian; they considered writing in the local Indian vernaculars to be a disgrace. They did not want to contaminate their scholarly works with substandard and common languages.⁴ So strong was this disdain that up to A.D. 1600, the few writers who dared to write in an Indic language found it necessary to apologize to their readers and urge them to look beyond the medium to the meaning, beyond the external to the

1 Almost all popular accounts of Amir Khusrau's life describe, quite dramatically, his reaction to his Shaykh's death but these descriptions appear to be based on legend rather than contemporary eyewitness accounts.

2 In the introduction to the *Baqiyah Naqiyah*, his fourth diwan, Amir Khusrau writes : "I improvise so swiftly that ere one can utter the name of bait I finish a verse and even the quick imagination cannot overtake my improvisations for many a quatrain have I completed ere I had time to imagine and think." (Quoted by M.W. Mirza, *The Life and Works of Amir Khusrau* [Punjab University Press, Lahore, 1962], p.167.

3 Several variants exist of the second line of this verse, which is still recited at Amir Khusrau's 'urs (death anniversary commemoration). For example, it occurs as "chal Khusrau ghar apne, sanj bhai chaundes" in K.H. Nizami, *Tadhkirah-i-Khusrawi* (Khwajah Aulad Kitab Ghar, Delhi, 1973), p.20, while in M.W. Mirza's *Life and Works of Amir Khusrau*, p.36, the same line reads : *chal Khusro ghar apne, rain bahi sab des*.

⁴ According to Mawlawi 'Abd al-Haqq, it was the Sufis who first dared to break this taboo, preaching that "great things can develop from the most contemptible things. (*Urdu ki Ibtida'i Nashwo Numa men Sufiya-i-Kiram ka kam* [Anjuman-i-Taraqqi-i-Urdu, Hind, Aligarh, 1968], p.76.

internal.⁵ This negative attitude towards the vernacular was symptomatic of a broader trend : an anti-local, anti-Indian habit of mind generally prevalent among the elite, who were “Arabian” and extra-territorially oriented in their loyalties.⁶ Within the elite circles, contempt for things Indian was so great that even Indian converts to Islam were victims of racial discrimination and contemptuously called *ajlaf*, “low, mean, ignoble.”⁷ The historian Diya al-Din Barani, who incidentally was a great admirer of Amir Khusrau, went so far as to recommend that these “low-born” Muslims should not even be taught reading or writing lest it bring honour to their mean souls.⁸

In contrast to most of his learned contemporaries, Amir Khusrau seems to be a zealous patriot, dedicating a significant portion of his work *Nuh Sipih* to extolling the virtues of the subcontinent, the achievements of its ancient civilization and the superiority of Indic languages. He is proud of his partial Indian origin and makes no apologies for his love of Hindawi and composing verses in it. “I am an Indian Turk,” he says in the introduction to the *Ghurrat al-Kamal*, “and can reply to you in Hindawi. I have no Egyptian sugar to talk of Arabia and Arabic.” In the same introduction he says, “I am in fact the Parrot of India, question me in Hindawi that I may talk sweetly.”⁹ Tradition has persistently attributed to Khusrau compositions in Hindawi/Hindi that include *dohas*, riddles, songs, *qawwalis*, *ghazals* with alternate Persian and Hindawi lines, and even a small tract, *Khaliq-i-Bari*, that provides Arabic, Persian and Hindi synonyms.

⁵ Typical of such apologies is the one found at the beginning of Shams al-'Ushshaq Miranji's *Shahadat al-Haqiqat*, a Hindi poetic treatise on Sufism composed in the late 15th century. In his apology, the author states that the work had been written in Hindi because many people do not understand either Arabic or Persian. According to him, one ought not to go by the external (*zahir*) but should look at the internal (*batin*). Whatever the language, one ought to ponder the meaning. To further convince his readers he presents two examples : (a) One should attach oneself to the essence and not be overly concerned with externals such as words in the same manner in which one finds gold after sifting through dirt; (b) when a diamond that is buried in a dunghill is uncovered by rain, a rational person does not consider it to be filthy and throw it away. As quoted in Mawlawi 'Abd al-Haqq, *Urdu ki Ibtida'i*, pp. 41-42, S.S.Hussain remarks on Bengali Muslim authors being similarly apologetic about their literary ventures in *Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts* (Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Dacca 1960), p. xix.

⁶ Professor Annemarie Schimmel has discerned two powerful strands in Indian Islam : a Mecca-oriented prophetic – separatistic one and a more nationalistic Indian one which she calls mystico-syncretic. See “Reflections on Popular Muslim Poetry,” *Contributions to Asian Studies*, vol. xvii (1982), p.18. For a similar analysis, see also Yohanan Friedmann, “Islamic Thought in Relation to the Indian Context,” *Collection Purusartha*, vol.9 (1968), pp.79-91.

⁷ On the tensions between the *ashraf* and the *ajlaf*, see Imtiaz Ahmed. “The *Ashraf-Ajlaf* Dichotomy in Muslim Social Structure in India,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol.iii (1966). Richard Eaton discusses this dichotomy among the Muslims of the Deccan in *Sufis of Bijapur 1300-1700* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978), pp. 42-43, 90-91.

⁸ Diya' al-Din Barani, *Fatawa Jahandari*, f.130a, as quoted by K.A. Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the 13th century* (repr. 2nd ed., Idarah-i-Adabiyati-i Dilli, Delhi, 1978), p.108.

⁹ As quoted by Yusuf Husain Khan, “The Origin and Growth of the Urdu Language in Medieval Times,” *Islamic Culture*, vol. xxx, no.4, 1956, p.355.

Some of his fans assert with a great deal of enthusiasm and exaggeration that the extent of his vernacular compositions exceeds that in Persian.¹⁰ Rather than enter here into the scholarly debates that have taken place over the authenticity of Amir Khusrau's Hindawi works, we should remark that these controversies have been sparked off by one fundamental factor: neither Amir Khusrau, his positive attitude towards Indian vernaculars notwithstanding, nor his literate contemporaries seem to have made any concerted effort to record these Hindawi compositions in writing. Consequently, we cannot firmly establish the authenticity of almost the entire Hindawi corpus that tradition attributes to him.¹¹ As one scholar puts it, "...we can say perfectly happy position to identify which compositions are genuine. Only the Hindi words and phrases occurring in Persian lines are definitely his. For others we have to keep our fingers crossed."¹²

There is one plausible explanation for this state of affairs. Amir Khusrau did not consider his Hindawi compositions to be equal in status to his Persian and Arabic ones or worthy of the same literary attention. They are pieces not commissioned by any of his numerous patrons. Rather they are products of leisure time activity, partly produced for his own amusement.¹³ He has said very little regarding them. "I have scattered among my friends a few chapters of Hindawi poetry also, but I would be content here with a mere mention of his fact."¹⁴ In spite of his love for Hindawi, for Amir Khusrau, as for his equally famous 18th-century compatriot Ghalib who lies buried in the same compound,¹⁵ Persian was the literary language worthy of serious attention and by which he wished his literary skills to be judged. Professor Gyan Chand Jain is correct when he states, "In those days of Persian sway, we could not expect an eminent Persian poet to take pride on (sic) his Hindi verse."¹⁶ Hence when native speakers of Persian associated with the courts criticized such Indian poets as Amir Khusrau for daring to write in Persian, he defended himself by claiming that while the Persian language had lost its purity in its original homeland, the Persian used in India was in its pure and original form. Indian Persian, he

¹⁰ See, for example, Taqi Awhadi, *Arafat al-Arifin [or 'Ashiqin]* as quoted by Mawlana Shibli Nu'mani, *Shi'r al-'Ajam* (Ishrat Publishing House, Lahore, 1966), p. 86 and N.S. Gorekar, *Tutiyan-e-Hind* (Writers Emporium Ltd., Bombay, 1974), p.45.

¹¹ Incidentally, the tradition of attributing Hindawi poetry of Amir Khusrau is a long-standing and respectable one. It can be traced back to at least 1606 when Taqi Awhadi, an Iranian poet and prose-writer at the Mughal court and the author of a major *tadhkirah* on poets, mentions Khusrau's Hindawi poetry. (Y.H.Khan, p.355).

¹² Gyan Chand Jain, "Ameer Khusrau and Khari Boli," *Life, Times and Works of Amir Khusrau Dehlavi*, ed. Z. Ansari (Seventh Centenary National Amir Khusrau Society, New Delhi, 1975), p. 320.

¹³ M.W.Mirza comments in this regard: "The production of Hindi poetry was to him a mere pastime, a diversion from his more serious efforts in Persian ... the language of his ancestors ... which could never be equaled in importance by the language of Hindustan, whatever the poet's sentimental regard for it might have been." (*Life and Works of Amir Khusrau*, p.229)

¹⁴ Introduction to *Ghurrat al-Kamal*, as quoted by Yusuf Husain Khan, p.354.

¹⁵ Ghalib, whose present-day popularity rests ironically on his Urdu verse, explicitly states that Persian was *par excellence* the language of literature, and that Urdu, by contrast, was an inferior medium for poetry and no medium at all for prose. Consequently, he regarded or sometimes professed to regard his Urdu poetry as of little significance. (Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, *Ghalib: Life and Letters* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Ma., 1969, p.27.

¹⁶ Gyan Chand Jain, p.308.

argued, possessed such uniformity and superiority of idiom that it was but natural that Persian poetry composed by Indians should be superior.¹⁷ Amir Khusrau was too steeped in the Perso-Arabic-oriented cultural tradition to break away from it completely or even substantially.

While it was extraordinary for a person of Amir Khusrau's stature and rank to defy literary convention by composing poetry in the vernacular, it was by no means without precedent. When viewed within the wider panorama of the development of Indic vernaculars, Amir Khusrau's Hindawi poetry, far from being a literary innovation, is in consonance with ethos of the time. As early as the 11th century we can witness the beginning of a literary tradition in the vernacular in the area extending from the subcontinent to Turkey. In the subcontinent, vernacular dialects such as Braj, Punjabi and Rajsthani were beginning to be freely used in composing patriotic ballads and songs as well as for religious literature among non-Muslim groups such as the Buddhist Sahajiya Siddhacharyas, the yogis of the Gorakhpanti movement, the *sadhus* and the *bhaktas*.¹⁸ This was the case among Muslims too. For example, both Amir Khusrau, in the *Ghurrat al-Kamal*,¹⁹ and 'Awfi, in the *Lubab al-Albab*,²⁰ affirm that the famous poet Masud Sa'd-i Salman (d.c.1131), who was born in Lahore, wrote in Hindawi besides Arabic and Persian and had left a *diwan* in that language, a *diwan* that has not survived. This same poet, inspired by the indigenous poetic genre of the *barahmasa*, also introduced a new Persian poetic form, the *duwazdahmaha*.²¹ But a far more important use of vernacular under Muslim auspices was taking place among the Sufis who, in the process of mingling with the population and preaching their precepts, found they could not spread their message effectively through Persian alone. Consequently they began employing vernaculars such as Hindawi. Amir Khurd in the *Siyar al-Awliya* mentions that Shaykh Farid al-Din Shakar (d.1265) wrote a few verses²² which some later scholars claim, correctly or incorrectly, are preserved in the Sikh scripture, The Adi Granth Sahib.²³ Hindawi or Hindi was not only employed in the households of early saints like Shaykh

¹⁷ Introduction to *Ghurrat al-Kamal*, as quoted by M.W.Mirza, pp.160-61.

¹⁸ Zaheer Fatehpuri, "The Influence of Amir Khusrau on the Development of Indi-Aryan Languages," *Amir Khusrau Critical Studies* (National Committee for the 700th Anniversary of Amir Khusrau, Lahore, 1975), p.98.

¹⁹ M.W. Mirza, p. 228

²⁰ Muhammad 'Awfi, *Lubab al-Albab*, ed. E.G. Browne (2 vols. ; E.J. Brill, Leiden 1903), part ii, p.246. See also A. Sprenger, "Early Hindustani Poetry," *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, vol.22, no.5, 1853, pp.442-44.

²¹ Mahmud Shirani, "Urdu ki Shakh : Haryana Zabani Ta'lifat," *Maqalat-i-Hafiz Mahmud Shirani*, arr.by Mazhar Mahmud Shirani (Majlis-i Taraqqi-i Adab, Lahore, 1966), pp.391-92. Cf. *Diwan-i-Mas'ud Sa'd-i Salman*, ed. Rashid Yasmi (Teheran, 1939), pp.659-69.

²² Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliya* (Chiranjilal, Delhi, 1885), p.367.

²³ Cf. K.A.Nizami, *The life and Times of Shaikh Farid-u'd-din Ganj-i-Shakar*, (University Books, Lahore, 1976), Appendix C, "Baba Farid and Guru Granth," pp.121-22.

Hamid al-Din Nagawri (d. 1274) and Abu'Ali Qalandar (d.1323) but was also used in the *dhikr* formulae recited during meditation sessions.²⁴

As the names mentioned above suggest, the most important proponents of the vernacular were connected with the Chishti order, an order with which Amir Khusrau had a close affiliation through his *murshid* (spiritual guide) Nizam al-Din Awliya, the most famous of the Chishti saints of India. Several scholars have remarked that Amir Khusrau's Hindawi poetry received nourishment as a result of his association with this saint.²⁵ Nizam al-Din Awliya a fondness for the *sama*' and Hindustani music must have played some role in encouraging his talented disciple to composed *qawwalis* and Hindi *dohas*.²⁶ More significantly there exist several traditions asserting that the saint had ordered his disciples to incorporate local idioms in their works. In one such tradition, Nizam al-Din Awliya had asked Amir Khusrau in particular, to write poetry in a composite language such as Hindawi, since not all of the people who came to the Chishi sanctuary were familiar with Arabic and Persian.²⁷ Nizam al-Din Awliya's spiritual successors continued this policy of promoting the vernacular wherever they went. Thus, after the conquest of Deccan by 'Ala' al-Din Khilji, the Chishtis became responsible for introducing Hindawi in that region. It was in the Deccan that first Sufi prose work in Hindi, the *Mi'raj al-Ashiqin*, was written.²⁸ Tradition attributes the work to the Chishti teacher Gesudaraz (d.1422), who spoke of Hindi as being a particularly elegant language, fitting for songs.²⁹ This saint was instrumental in establishing a tradition of writing in the vernacular a tradition which was followed by his successors and which laid the foundation of the Deccani school of poetry that flourished somewhat later in the kingdom of Golconda and Bijapur.

In Northern India, Chishti patronage of the vernaculars was to have important consequences. First, it led to the appearance of Sufi literature which was bilingual, that is, utilizing Persian in combination with an Indic vernacular. A particularly interesting examples of this genre is 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi's *Rushdnamah* which has a predominantly Persian text that is rather heavily ornamented with Hindi verse.³⁰ Second, it influenced the development of epics, particularly mystical-romantic ones, in the various North Indian dialects. Mawlana Da'ud (late 14th century), a disciple of the Chishti saint,

24 Mawlana 'Abd al-Haqq, pp.13-14; Yusuf Husain Khan, p.356; S.A.A. Rizvi, A History of Sufism in India (Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1978), vol.i, p.327.

25 See, for example, Zaheer Fatehpuri, p.109

26 Mawlana 'Abd al-Haqq remarks that in addition to their contribution in the literary field, many Sufis, through their love for music, also made a major contribution to the development of Hindustani music ('Abd al-Haqq, p.15). The historian Firishtah notes that Shaykh Nizam al-Din's fondness for music brought him into confrontation with several shaykhs who were jealous of his stature and anxious to defame him.

Consequently the shaykh was forced to justify his conduct in the presence of the Tughluq ruler. (Abu al-Qasim Firishtah, Gulshan-i Ibrahimi [Nawal Kishore, Kanpur, 1884], vol.2. p. 397)

27 K.A. Nizami, Tadhkirah-i Khusrawi pp.25.26.

28 The *Mi'raj al-'Ashiqin* has been edited by Mawlana 'Abd al-Haqq.

29 S.A. Rizvi, pp.326-27.

30 Composed around 1480, this treatise attempts to accommodate Yogic concepts within a Sufi theological framework Cf. Simon Digby. "Abd Al-Quddus Gangohi (1456-1537 A.D.) : The Personality and Attitudes of a Medieval Indian Sufi," Medieval India, vol. 3. (Asia Publishing House, New York, 1975)

Shaykh Zayn al-Din, skillfully illustrated in his Awadhi epic Chandayan the incorporation of mystical symbolism in Indian folk romances.³¹ This epic, which was famous during the time of Akbar and was praised by the historian Badauni for its ability to capture human hearts when recited by the “sweet singers of Hindustan,”³² initiated a brilliant literary tradition in Hindi poetry that was to continue until the early 20th century, producing such masterpieces as Kutuban’s *Mrigavati* (composed in 1503), Malik Muhammad Ja’isi’s *Padmavat* (composed in 1540) and Manjhan’s *Madhumalati* (composed in 1545).

However, not all Sufi groups were as favorable as the Chishtis toward the use of Indic languages and the general indigenization of the Islamic mystical tradition. The Suhrawardiyah, the other major Sufi order during Amir Khusrau’s time, was generally sober and conservative in its approach. Favouring a more tradition-bound attitude, members of this order looked with great dismay and disapproval at the “contamination” of Islam local Indian elements. One of their leading shaykhs, Makhdum-i Jahaniyan Jahangasht (d.1385) urged his followers to resist the tendency to call God with Indian names such as *gosain* and *niranjan*.³³ But in later times, even these conservative Suhrawardis were to turn to the vernacular for their compositions, as was the case in Gujarat with Qutb-i Alam (d.1453), a descendant of Makhdum-i Jahaniyan, and even more so with his son Shah-i Alam (d.1515) who strongly influenced several Gujarati sultans including Mahmud Begada.³⁴

Hindi or Hindawi and associated dialects were by no means the only Indic vernaculars that were beginning to develop as literary languages during the 13th and 14th centuries. By the mid-15th century, Punjabi Sufis such as the Chishti Shaykh Ibrahim Farid had already produced the first major compositions of a literary tradition that was to extend well into the 19th century.³⁵ Some scholars of the vernacular tradition in the Punjab specifically identify the Chishti saint Farid al-Din Ganj-i Shakar as first to initiate this trend in the Punjabi language, and for this reason maintain that he “has a special place in the hearts of the people of Punjab.”³⁶ Moving south from the Punjab, we find a group of Muslims other than the Sufis utilizing the vernaculars, namely, the Isma’ili *da’is* (preacher saints) who were active in disseminating Isma’ili ideas in the region.³⁷ Attributed to one of these

³¹ Cf. Shyam Manohar Pandey, “Maulana Daud and His Contributions to Hindi Sufi Literature,” *Annali Instituto Orientale Napoli*, vol.38, 1978, pp.75-90 . See also Naseem Hines, *Maulana Daud’s Candayan: A Critical Study* (New Dehli: Manohar, 2009)

³² ‘Abd al-Qadir Bada’uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, tr.S.A. Ranking (Calcutta, 1897), p.333.

³³ Annemarie Schimmel, “Reflections on Popular Muslim Poetry,” p.18.

³⁴ M.I Dar, “Gujarat’s Contribution to Gujarati and Urdu,” *Islamic Culture*, vol. xxvii, no.1, 1953, pp.19-21. One of Shah-i-Alam’s royal disciples, the Gujarati sultan Ahmad Shah (d 1442), is alleged to have written Hindi verses in praise of his spiritual guide. Sakhavat Mirza, *Tadhkirah-i-Hadrat Sayyid Jalal al-Din Makhdum Jahaniyan Jahangashti* (Institute of Indo-Middle-East Cultural Studies. Hyderabad, India, 1962), p.148.

³⁵ Cf. Lajwanti Krishna, *Punjabi Sufi Poets A.D. 1460-1900* (Oxford University Press, 1938).

³⁶ Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Baba Shaykh Farid Shakar Ganj* (National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1974), p.1.

³⁷ For the history of the Ismaili movement in the subcontinent, see Azim Nanji, *The Nizari Isma’ili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (Caravan Books, Delmar, N.Y., 1978) and Ali Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: Ismaili Devotional Literatures of South Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002)

preachers, Pir Shams (c.13th century), are *ginans* (religious hymns) in the Multani dialect, while to the 14th century preacher, Pir Sadr al-Din, are ascribed several compositions in Sindhi, one of which is possibly the oldest recorded specimen of that language.³⁸ An even earlier preacher, Pir Satgur Nur, focused his activity in the 12th century on the region of Gujarat, composing several *ginans* in archaic Gujarat. It was to the region of Gujarat that a large number of people from the north emigrated after Timur's invasion of 1398. Included in this group of immigrants were the Sufis Shaykh Ahmad Khattu (d.1445) and Qutb-i Alam (d.1453) both of whom are credited with using Hindi as a vehicle of expression, though the influence of Gujarati forms can also be discerned in verses attributed to them. These two Sufis set the stage for the rich contribution that Gujarat would make to the development of Urdu.³⁹ By the late 15th century, the movement towards the vernacular in Gujarat had grown so strong that even Sayyid Muhammad of Jaunpur (1443-1504), the leader of the Mahdawiyyah movement, and his successors are believed to have composed Hindi and Gujarati verses.⁴⁰ Moving north to Bihar, we find Sharaf al-Din Yahya Maneri (d.1380), the foremost saint of the Firdawsiyyah orders, also credited with Hindi *dohas*, *falnamahs* and talismans.⁴¹ This saint was, however, aware that frank Hindi expressions would have too powerful an effect on the spiritual novice.⁴² Further east in Bengal, by 1350 Bengali had become a common language in Sufi circles and Bengali songs were allowed in the *sama*.⁴³ A song written in Bengali and recording the miracles of the Sufi Jalal al-Din Tabrizi (d.1225) very likely predates this period.⁴⁴ With independence from central authority in Delhi, Muslims in the area began to patronize Bengali language and literature. By the late 14th century, Shah Muhammad Saghir had already composed his Bengali romance based on the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha, laying the groundwork for Zayn al-Din, the poet laureate of Sultan Yusuf Shah. Zayn al-Din's *Rasul Vijaya* became a model for several Bengali compositions intended to extol the virtues of Islam and its heroes before the Bengali masses.⁴⁵ In short, Amir Khusrau's era was one during which the use of the vernacular languages by Muslim poets was becoming quite widespread throughout the subcontinent.

38 Cf. Nabi Bakhsh Khan Baloch, *Sindhi Bolia ji Mukhtasar Ta'rikh* (Hyderabad, Pakistan, 1962), pp.106-14; Ghulam 'Ali Allana, "Sumaran ji daur ji Sindhi sha'iri," *Mihran*, vol.9, nos. 1 and 2.

39 M.I. Dar, p.19

⁴⁰ Mawlawi 'Abd al-Haqq, pp.25-27, M.I. Dar, p.31

⁴¹ I'jaz al-Haqq, *Sufiya-i-Bihar awr Urdu* (Academy of Educational Research, Karachi, 1972), p.24.

⁴² After a recitation of Hindawi songs, the 14th century saint is believed to have said : "Hindawi compositions are very forthright and frank in expression. In purely Persian verses, there is a judicious blend of allusions and what can be fittingly expressed whereas Hindawi employs very, very frank expressions. There is no limit to what it explicitly reveals. It is very disturbing. It is extremely difficult for young men to bear such things. Without any delay they would be upset ..." *Mukh al-Ma'ani, Majlis* 35, as quoted by A.Schimmel, *As Through a Veil, Mystical Poetry in Islam* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1982), p. 135.

⁴³ Syed Ali Ashraf, *Muslim Tradition in Bengali Literature* (Islamic Foundation, Dhaka, 1983), p.32.

⁴⁴ For more details on this rather unusual song which is found in a work entitled *Shekh Shubhodaya*, see Muhammad Enamul Haq, *Muslim Bengali Literature* (Pakistan Publications, Karachi, 1957), pp.28-29.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp.52-58. For further information on this literary tradition, see Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984).

Poetry is not the only literary genre associated with Amir Khusrau. Riddles (*paheliyan*) constitute a substantial portion of his Hindawi compositions.⁴⁶ As is the case with his poetry, grave doubts have been cast on the authenticity of Amir Khusrau's riddles and they have often been dismissed without greater study. But here too Amir Khusrau, especially in view of his connection with the Chishti mystics, continues a tradition that goes back to Vedic times, for Indian mystics and yogis composed riddles not merely for entertainment purposes but as a means to convey mystical meanings to the initiated.⁴⁷ The experiences of the spiritual world are such that they make it necessary for mystics to warp ordinary human language into crooked forms such as paradoxes, ambiguities, absurdities and the like.⁴⁸ Mystics the world over have resorted to riddles and paradoxes to intimate the contents of the religious experience not only when the use of direct language was impossible but also as ways by which the human mind can rationalize the non rational, and "understand the otherwise non understandable."⁴⁹ In the subcontinent the riddles of the Gorakhpantis, the mysterious statements and puzzles found in the to Kabir are all manifestations of this trend – a trend which, incidentally, is also known in Turkish mystical literature the most famous example there being the *Tekerleme* attributed to Yunus Emre, a contemporary of Amir Khusrau.⁵⁰ Bearing in mind Amir Khusrau's mystical affiliation with the Chishti order, it would be worthwhile to examine the Hindawi riddles that tradition so persistently attributes to him with a view to discern any possible spiritual content.

As we contemplate and reappraise Amir Khusrau's Hindawi compositions, both poetry and riddles, within a larger literary and cultural context, we find him sensitive and perceptive to the trends prevalent in the indigenous literary tradition of his time but by no means unique or without parallel. Yet as evidenced by the substantial quantity of Hindawi compositions, for the most part incorrectly ascribed to him, myth and legend have served to crystallize and focus these trends around him. He has become a symbol, a representative of an epoch rich in its cultural potential.⁵¹ Popular imagination has insisted that as a man with a remarkable personality and considerable achievement, Amir Khusrau must have played a pioneering role in the cultural innovations of his time, be they in language, literature or music. The same tendency is apparent in the case of his contemporary in Turkey, Yunus Emre, and somewhat later in the case of his compatriots Kabir, Mirabai and even the Isma'ili preacher, Pir Sadr al-Din.

⁴⁶ Professor Gopi Chand Narang has recently published a manuscript, from the Sprenger collection in Berlin, that contains riddles attributed to Amir Khusrau. (Gopi Chand Narang, *Amir Khusrau ka Hindawi Kalam* [Ameer Khusrau Society of America, Chicago, 1987]).

⁴⁷ Cf. S.B.Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 3rd ed. (Calcutta, 1969), "Enigmatic Language of Old and Medieval Poets," pp.413-24.

⁴⁸ D.T. Suzuki, *On Indian Mahayana Buddhism* (Harper Torchbook, New York, 1968), p.243.

⁴⁹ Michiko Yusa, "Paradox and Riddles," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M.Eliade et al. Macmillan, New York, 1987), vol.ii, pp. 189-95.

⁵⁰ On the use of paradoxes in Muslim vernacular literatures, see A Schimmel, *As Through a Veil, Mystical Poetry in Islam*, pp.163-69.

⁵¹ Cf. Yusuf Husain Khan, p.356

We should not, however, overlook one important fact about this great poet. With the sole exception of Amir Khusrau, Persian writing poets of the time restricted themselves to conventional subjects and themes, laboriously imitating the style of the old masters. Amir Khusrau outshines his peers for although he shows a mastery of conventional Persian poetry, he also ventured into the territory of local Indic literary traditions, forbidden by convention, in search of new themes, new ideas, new subjects.⁵² He was the first and one of the very few Indo-Persian poets who alluded to Indian customs such as *sati* in his lyrics, incorporated a number of Indian stories in his romance *Hasht Bihisht*, dedicated the centre of his *mathnawi*, *Nuh Sipih*r, to India and introduced his *diwan* with a typically Indian idea from indigenous poetry : regarding the rainy season as the season of love and yearning lovers.

Abr mi barad o man mi shawam az yar juda

Chun kunam dil beh chunin roz za dildar juda.

The cloud rains and I am separated from my friend

On such a day how can I distract my heart from my friend

⁵² Cf. Ayaz Ahmad, "Amir Khusrau-The Tuti-i-Hind," *Indo-Iranica*, vol.24, no.3-4. 1971, p.85