

Amir Khusro Through an ‘Intellectual Stare’: A Metaphorical Reading of

‘Chaap Tilak’

Manali Dogra

(Ph. D Student, USHSS, GGSIP University)

manalidogra18@gmail.com

Abstract: Mentally nourished to address the tangibles and the intangibles with a lens of limited information one possesses; it is human nature to map, bound, signify, and thus limit the scope of the unrestrained meaning of any word. The basic understanding of the term ‘religion’ is often deemed synonymous to ‘spirituality’; thus, the proposed paper shall aim at distinguishing between the two. It shall talk about exploring the metaphorical renditioning of ‘Chaap Tilak’ by Amir Khusro as an expression of the sublime, rather than rendering it as a religious and cultural identity. The paper shall also try to read, rather re-read the immortal *kalaam* of Khusro by locating it within the contemporary radicalised environment.

This relocation provides a unique locus to approach a Sufi *kalaam*, or as an extension a radical praxis that is, Sufism. The contemporary discourse distorts and as a consequence dislocates the *sahaj pravaah* of variability within the given canon. The argument is based on a close reading of ‘Chaap Tilak’ to create and assert the human agency and its limitless yearning for spiritual, rather than a linear alignment towards rituals.

Keywords: Religion, Spiritualism, intellectual disgrace

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After Buddha was dead, people
showed his shadow for centuries afterwards in a
cave,—an immense frightful shadow. God is dead:
but as the human race is constituted, there will
perhaps be caves for millenniums yet, in which
people will show his shadow.—And we—we have
still to overcome his shadow! (Nietzsche)

The need to create, yet time and again reassert the human agency that defines ‘religion’ through the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, has overpowered the essential expression of the sublime; rendering it a social structure of culture and identity. The journey of experiencing the harmonious self that ends up calming the restless souls is often deemed as an offset of religion or being religious; but there lies a need to understand it beyond the set rituals.

On a fairly sunny day, strolling along the wheat fields on his way to home, Khusro caught a glimpse of a group of women, radiantly chirping and almost marching, carrying their earthen pots of water in their flaring attire back to the village; humming amongst themselves a song, catchy enough to retain Khusro’s attention, unfortunately the lyrics of which he could not understand. Mesmerised by what he heard, he whirred the tune stuck in his head trying to decode what the words could possibly mean. The possibilities entangled him for hours. Moreover, the notion of how a group of women of a particular culture in their local vernacular, unpremeditated, could naturally sing and convey the essence of what his heart understood

despite the barrier of language. It is in moments like these that the ephemeral stances of languages and their untainted heritage of oppositional religion or culture give way to the aesthetic enchantment felt. This made him pursue writing in a language other than Persian, that is, Hindwi. In order to understand Khusro's work as we try to re-read his poetry, it becomes important for one to let go of the political clutches, to spare some time out solely for the text, free from any constraints of pretext that limits it.

Bal bal jaaun main

tore rang rejava,

apni si rang deeni re,

moh se naina milayke.

Chaap tilak sab cheeni rey,

Mosey naina milai k.

Amir Khusro, in his work ushers the same notion of awe and sublimity with which he wrote for his murshid, Nizamuddin Auliya. The writings are not restricted as subservience to his *murshid*, but are universally appealing. His poetry is relevant because it not only conveys Khusro's expression of enlightenment imparted from his guru, but also expresses that indefinable feeling that one experiences as though eagerly waiting to be set free, to resonate in the contemporary and days to come. These lyrics have their resonance that are visible as they echo in the music of the poem. It reverberates, and carries the tone that is essential in a world, that according to Wordsworth is "out of tunes". The emotive content of the composition that is undertaken in the form of a journey beyond the tangibles, is what enables the unification with the eternal, the unknown.

The multi folded lyrical spectacle of the poem transfigures from being a reservoir of the collective memory of *dua* (invocation) for the present and generations to come. The paper attempts to convey how the immortal *kalaam* cultivates the central theme of love, spiritual

essence, and an eternal longing for union with the divine, rather than being a propagandist extension of religious ideology. Khusro's use of 'chaap' and 'tilak', do not emphasize upon the mark on forehead of a hindu or a muslim, or the dominance of one over the other. Poets, and more specifically the sensitive ones, have long pricked this dynamic dependence of simultaneously occurring dejection and celebration of an unmet eternal longing as though of a lover and a beloved, or a *murshid* and a *mureed*. Of what is expected to be a 'chhavi' (reflection of an image), be it of the murshid, the lover, or the divine; it tends to leave one spellbound by its mere sight. When Khusro says, "mohe suhagan ki ni rey, mose naina milai k", each moment in the history becomes a memory, a trace of the turmoil of a past that became universally appealing to each and every person irrespective of their denomination, where the mankind collectively yearns for this feeling of being more and more incomplete to attain oneness; as conveyed in :-

Khusro dariya prem ka,
jo uli waah ki dhaar,
Jo ubhra, so doob gaya,
jo dooba so paar.

The idea of any religion has a denoted colour with connotative value of its pious exuberance. It is in the absence of any colour, that white is there; that is often understood as the sacred colour of heaven or the bright light as though in paradise. It is even categorised as the eight colour, symbolic of that dimension of life which is as empty as a blank canvas. However, the white light that one sees contains all the seven colours that eventually refracts each of the colour. Love has no religion or colour. It reflects to, and from each colour, a metaphorical interpretation.

Khusro rain suhag ki
jo main jaagi pee ke sang,

Tan mora man piya ka,

jo dono ek hi rang.

The 'rang' or colour of any substance is not based on what it is, rather it is solely what it gives away or reflects; an object does not appear to be 'green' because it is 'green', but because it holds back everything that the white light contains, thus, reflecting green. For every wavelength of visible light is perceived as a spectral colour in a continuous spectrum and named through a division that is arbitrary, but the colours constitute as metaphors that speak volume.

Gori gori baiyaan,

hari hari chudiyaan,

Bahiyaan pakad har leeni re,

moh se naina milayke.

The metaphor of *Hari Chudiyaan* weaves within it a story of romance, of an impact cast so deep that no other feeling has been able to, even remotely come close to this felt experience, exhibiting it in a dialogic form to the future generation; "*apni si rang deeni re, moh se naina milayke*". There shall always exist a relationship between the colours of nature and humans who tend to relate to each wavelength of light in a different manner.

The Sufi relationship between the 'guru' and his disciple, or that between a lover and his beloved, desperately waiting to unveil this experience for a glimpse of the unique and the profound feeling; with a realisation that this experience can not be undone, and it shall change his life forever. The end result of this glimpse is the elevation of the soul that leaves one awestruck by its impact. It imbibes in one the intensity that stimulates their very existence into a trance of the sublime.

It is through the metaphorical rendition that one understands; nothing, but change shall be the only constant in one's life. Time shall shatter the grandeur of the material

just like the composition do not conform to any religion, society or culture. *Chaap tilak*, thus, becomes a monument of the musical, the literary ,and the artistic; with infinite entry and exit points.

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