

Sufism:
A Ground of Theatricality of Rituals and
Religious Morality in Indian Theatre

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Theatre, ritual and religion have been intertwined since the beginning of human society. The performing arts are believed to have originated in ritual and are deeply tied to religion, either as an important and respected part of a culture's spiritual life or as a disturbing and forbidden threat to a society's moral fabric. Since ritual is linked to religion, it gives the opportunity to express in a physical way the personal and spiritual power one feels at times, especially during important life events or at certain seasons of the year. Rituals during life events also express growth, change, respect and joy. The mysticism is another aspect of rituals, which creates an extra attraction added into their spectacular glamour further intensifying its mystic world.

Sufism is also one such mystic interpretation of Islamic life within the bonds of religious orthodoxy, which was initially launched by God-fearing people of Perso-Arab world. They renounced the world and devoted themselves to His service. As the seekers of *Tawhid* (Unity in God) they helped in spread of Islam through mystic movement with intellectualization of *Sunnah* (The orthodox customs of Islamic world) as one of its basic principles.¹⁾ "Mysticism is a practical spiritual discipline based on the insight of illuminated seekers after truth".²⁾ It is in fact a mission of higher religious order of any faith, which disdains strife and conflict in any form. Joy of self-realization being the essence of religion is experienced after a long spiritual practice. The mystics discard outward form of religion once they attain such joy.

1) *Encyclopedia of Islam*

2) Saiyied Athar Abbas Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, Volume 2, 1992, Page 178

The concept of Sufism was therefore, to focus the mystic power on the spiritual dimension of Islam with a view to shield the believers from the outwardly and unrealistic dogma of the faith. They adopted rather a liberal view in propagating the religious order of Islam suitable to the cultural and social environment of the land.

There are numerous definitions, which can answer this question, but may be the most appropriate one is that "He is a person who possesses nothing and nothing possesses him". "Revealing the Concealed" a book written in Persian during the 11th century that was considered one of the first most credible works that tackled the subject of Sufism. According to the science of Etymology, the word Sufi had no origin but it was commonly believed that Sufi was derived from the word "*Safaa*". Another saying stated that the word was derived from "*Sufi*" which implied that a Sufi is a person who wears rough clothes as a sign of his asceticism. While others thought that the word was related to the Greek word "*Sofia*" which means the holy wisdom. Whatever was the etymological origin of the word, Sufism is a very precise systematized group within the more comprehensive context of the Islamic society and it clearly affected the skeleton of the whole Indian society. Some said that Sufism was an outcome of the historical Islam, while others believed that it developed as a reaction to the Islamic concept itself. Also many are still asserting that Sufism comprised an evident effect of the Indian, Christian and Chinese creed. Yet it is well-known that Sufi principles and ideas and even its literary texts are a source from which many drew their instructions, for instance Saint Joan, Saint Teresa and Guru Nanak. Many Sufis asserted that their instructions were found thousands of years ago and there were evidences of the relation between Sufism and the Pythagorean, Monasticism and Platonic currents. But what is the essence of Sufism? It might be said that Sufism means self-denial and self-isolation as if a person is being born once again. Sufism might be also considered as a deep process of change within the effect of a "Divine Presence". It is not a religion or a philosophy; it is not a creed or a group of rituals but a sort of training on the Supreme rational knowledge. However, "the numerous Sufi religious establishments in India were the major means of spreading Islam and adapting it to indigenous cultural tradition".³⁾

The practice of Sufism and the performance of its rituals is full of theatricality, which is closely associated with their mystic philosophy and the life style. If closely

analyzed, the Sufis are the men of the highest morality. They are the people who behave according to the need of the time. The shackles of rituals and customs do not bind them. Religion for them is important only so long as it does not hinder spiritual progress. The greatest religion for them is love for the humanity and concern for anyone's feelings. Their objective is to evolve as a complete man by improving one's character and conduct. The principles and practices adopted by them revolve around these central ideas and are to be seen in this light. A Sufi seeker has to complete his journey to self-realization. He has to find his Beloved within himself, for He can be found only in a heart that has been purified by the fire of love. The distance, however, can be covered in a moment; the Truth can be realized in a moment, if one wants it as desperately as a drowning man wants the air. People generally consider religion as a matter of devotion and faith where reason or argument has no role to play. This is not the right attitude. Faith can be considered as that state of mind where one considers the matter put before him to be right in all respects. It could be possible that one may not be able to comprehend all aspects of that matter but supported by conjecture or inference one believes in its truth. Faith, therefore, can be said to be based on reasoning and analysis. The objective of the religion is to enhance human experiences so that the principles they have been following to guide their lives should gradually lead them to realization and their lives be based on the truth.

Theatricality and Rituals:

The basic principles of Sufism were given by Abdul Khaliq al-Ghujdawani, who was one of the greatest Sufi Masters of the Naqshbandi Sufi Order. In his book *Faslul-Kitab*, Shaikh Muhammad Parsa, a friend and biographer of Shah Naqshband, said that the method of Shaikh Khwaja Abdul Khaliq al-Ghujdawani in *dhikr* and the teachings enunciated in his Eight Principles were embraced and hailed by all the forty *tariqats* (Sufi Orders) as the way of Truth and loyalty. These eight principles further added with three more by Muhammad Baha'uddin Shah Naqshband are the

3) *Islamic Mysticism in India* by Nagendra Kumar Singh, former Chairman, Islamic Research Foundation, Delhi.

important moral guidelines for the human being but at the same time, they consist the elements of theatricality in themselves. The inherent theatricality motivates the follower or the performer of the 'sufi' rituals for a dramatic behaviour. The force of the theatricality of these principles is so powerful that even the spectator cannot resist himself from being moved. These principles are:

(i) *Hosh dar Dam* (Conscious Breathing) —The true seeker should always be alert that he does not take any breath devoid of God's remembrance. He must remain in God's Presence with every breath. Every breath taken consciously is alive and every breath taken in heedlessness is to be considered to have been lost. One should ensure with every breath that he does not indulge in doing a wrong or a sin. Shah Naqshband said, 'This Order is built on breath. One, therefore, must safeguard his breath in the time of his inhalation and exhalation and in between.' Similarly, Ubaidullah al-Ahrar said, 'The most important mission for the seeker in this Order is to safeguard his breath.' In his book, *Fawatih al-Jamal*, Shaikh Abul Janab Najmuddin al-Kubra said, '*Dhikr* is flowing in the body of every single living creature by the necessity of their breath—even without will—as a sign of obedience, which is part of their creation.' It is, therefore, necessary to be in the Presence of the Almighty with every breath, in order to realize the Essence of the Creator. It is, however, difficult for seekers to secure breath from heedlessness. Therefore, they must safeguard it by seeking forgiveness, which will purify and sanctify it and prepare them for the Real Manifestation of the Almighty everywhere.

(ii) *Nazar bar Kadam* (Watch Your Step) —Each step moved forward should be taken consciously i.e. one should not do anything which may drag him down or which may obstruct his spiritual progress. It also means that one should avoid looking here and there aimlessly as the mind by seeing frames impressions. This is why Sufi saints ask their followers to look at their feet while walking. As the mind becomes more and more purified by various practices, it becomes more and more prone to be afflicted; a spot on a spotless clean sheet is more likely to be visible and noticed than on a dirty sheet. The first glance is, however, harmless but a second look i.e. a deliberate look forms an impression on the mind. One should therefore,

take each step forward in His remembrance.

(iii) *Safar dar Watan* (Journey Homeward) — This means that the seeker must move from the world of creation to the world of Creator. Moving away from worldly desires and human weaknesses and acquiring godly characteristics is known as '*Safar dar Watan*.' The Naqshbandi Sufi Order divides this journey into two parts. The first is external in which the seeker desires and searches for the Master. The internal journey begins with the blessing and grace of the Master. The internal journey leads to the purification of his heart and makes him eligible to receive the Divine grace.

(iv) *Khilawat dar Anjuman* (Solitude in the Crowd) — '*Khilawat*' means seclusion, both external and internal. External seclusion requires the seeker to be away from people, staying by himself and spending his time in the remembrance of God. This helps in gaining control over sensual perceptions and reaching the state of internal seclusion. The internal seclusion means whether amidst a crowd, walking or doing anything else, one should constantly have his mind attuned to the Almighty. This is the state of Sufi adept that they remain constantly in the Presence of the Almighty. Worldly affairs do not disturb them, as Shaikh Ahmad Faruqi has said, 'Perfection is not in exhibition of miraculous powers, but perfection is to sit among people, sell and buy, marry and have children; and yet never leave the presence of *Allah* even for one moment.'

(v) *Yad Kard* (Essential Remembrance) — '*Yad*' means remembrance and '*kard*' means essence of remembrance. To keep oneself continuously engaged in reciting the '*japa*' (the internal practice as directed by the Master) and in such a manner that the seeker starts feeling the presence of the Master or the Almighty in his heart is the Essential Remembrance.

(vi) *Baj Gasht* (Returning) — The literal meaning of '*Baj Gasht*' is to return back to the origin. In its true sense, however, it refers to developments during internal practice when the seeker may come across different experiences such as sighting of light, activation of the mystique centers, acquisition of miraculous powers etc. These

experiences may often result in the downfall of the seeker due to arousal of the ego. The great Masters of this Order have, therefore, recommended the seekers to keep on praying the Almighty at intervals that He alone is the objective of the seeker; He may give strength to the seeker to be happy in whatever condition He keeps and beg Him for His love and knowledge.

(vii) *Nigah Dasht* (Attentiveness) —The seeker should always keep an eye on his internal condition so that no doubt or ill thought ever arises and he constantly keeps on remembering the Almighty. If ever such a thought arises, one should immediately check that thought, otherwise if it once stays in the mind, it may become difficult to clear it later. Sufism is to protect one's heart from bad thoughts and from worldly inclinations.

(viii) *Yad Dasht* (Recollection) —It means continuous remembrance. When the seeker through practice becomes so apt that the remembrance continues in the heart effortlessly on its own, it is called *Yad dasht*.

(ix) *Wakoof Zamani* (Awareness of Time) —The seeker must watch that the time at his command is spent in the remembrance of the Almighty and he must make all efforts to make progress on the path of spirituality. The seeker must recount his actions and deeds and seek His forgiveness for the wrong doings.

(x) *Wakoof Adadi* (Awareness of Numbers) —According to the principle of *Wakoof Adadi*, one should while holding the breath recite the name of the God, feeling His Presence in the heart, in odd number i.e. 5, 7, 9, 11, 21 etc. The real meaning of *Wakoof Adadi*, however, appears to be that the Almighty is One and He likes Oneness. It perhaps also means that one should remember the Almighty alone.

(xi) *Wakoof Kulbi* (Awareness of the Heart) —The seeker should always have an eye on his heart (*Kulb*) so that his attention is always towards the Divine Presence and it may not be diverted elsewhere.

Training Method:

Sufis consider their spiritual training as a journey and the seeker is addressed as a wayfarer, who travels the path, passing through various stages and experiences. Although different Sufi Orders (*tariqats*) state them differently but most of them agree on the basic tenets. The first step for the wayfarer to prepare himself for the higher stages of spirituality is '*tauba*' (to repent) for the sins committed by him in the past knowingly or unknowingly. This is the awakening from unconsciousness. The wayfarer becomes alert and keeps an eye on his actions. He repents for his past sins and wrong doings and makes a firm resolve not to indulge in them again. However, if he is not committed to refrain from such actions in future, he is not to be considered as a true repentant.

These principles remind us the various aspects of western theories of acting as well as the methods of actors' training in the oriental theatre. The concentration, the self-control, emotion management, body control, awareness of time, place and action, etc. are not very different from the general principles of theatre acting. Knowingly or unknowingly, the Sufi performer trains himself for the stage performance and to face the audience effectively with a purpose. There are various methods of Sufi training to achieve control over the body and the mind of a 'Sufi' practitioner who is called '*sant*' (saint). All these methods are very close to the methods of training an actor. The following examples of the 'Sufi' practice provide us ample ground to understand the elements of theatricality.

Many Sufi orders consider breathing exercises as an important component of various practices for enhancing their spiritual experiences. For them to hold the breath for a while helps in getting rid of thoughts. *Chishtia*, *Kaabardia*, *Shutaria* and *Qadaria* Orders consider breathing exercises as an essential component of the spiritual training.⁴⁾ The breathing exercises condition the body by regulating the breathing. If, therefore, one practices remembrance with regulation of breathing, *Pranayam*⁵⁾ may help in reaching the state of '*ajapajaap*' (remembrance without recital) and ul-

4) *Naqshbandis* neither consider it to be essential nor do they question the usefulness of breathing exercises. *Suhrwardis*, however, do not approve of breathing exercises.

5) Term used in *Yoga* for breathing exercise and to acquire control over breathing.

timately to the state of Presence. However, one has to be extremely careful in practicing *Pranayam* under a competent teacher, though it is difficult to find a competent teacher nowadays. The spiritual progress, however, is not at all dependent upon physical conditioning of the body. The breathing exercises are, therefore, of no particular importance from the spiritual point of view.

In the language of Sufis, keeping a watch over the mind is known as meditation. Watching the mind, in fact means to ensure that no other thought except that of God enter the mind. Sufis consider irrelevant thoughts entirely undesirable. There are three causes of thoughts entering the mind. The first is the tendency of the mind to indulge in affirmation or negation; the second is the thoughts occurring on their own without any will or control of mind, known as danger (*Khatra*) in the language of Sufis; and the third is the thoughts occurring as a result of exercising various faculties such as seeing, listening, smelling, touching or tasting or as a result of acquiring their knowledge. Sufis consider *jikr* or *japa*⁶⁾ extremely helpful in getting rid of thoughts. For getting rid of the thoughts occurring as a result of exercise of will, remembrance of God in the Absolute form (such as *Allah* or *Om*) is very helpful. For the thoughts occurring on their own without any will or control of mind, one should remember any of the Names of the God with His Qualities and Attributes and focus his attention on his Master.

The essence of meditation, however, is that one should keep his attention focused on the God, keeping an eye on the mind. When one remembers the God one should be able to think of His Qualities and Attributes as the Creator, the Preservation and the Dissoluter. Not everyone, however, has the capacity to focus one's attention like this. One may, therefore, think of the God as an ocean of light and himself absorbed and dispersed in that light; or one may think of Him as an absolute darkness and his own-self a shadow, since the shadow gets completely absorbed in the darkness.

The ways of teaching by various preachers may differ, the practices and methods taught by them may also differ; they may provide different explanations and may tell their experiences in different words; but the purpose behind all this is to arouse the longing for the Truth in the heart of the disciple and to guide him to the Truth.

6) A constant recitation of the holy words.

Dervish and the Sufi Performance:

Some Sufis consider that music and dancing act as a catalyst to produce in them the state of ecstasy. They consider that music rock their hearts by echoing the reverberations and reminding them of their relationship with the God. The effect produced by music, however, depends upon the nature and state of evolution of the listener (and also of the musician). If the seeker has not yet overcome his worldly passions, it may even harm him. But for a Sufi adept, music may stir up in his heart greater love towards the God. It may also lead him into spiritual vision and ecstasies. It is said by them that music produces such purity in their heart that is not possible by other practices. The states of ecstasy may, however, vary according to the emotions predominating in the seeker i.e. love, repentance, fear, et cetera.

The Dervish dance is an evidence of rare theatricality of ritualistic body movements, which has been performed for over 700 years by the Sufi. A story is narrated of a tradesman in a small village in the East who sat on his knees in his little shop, and with his left hand he pulled a strand of wool from the bale, which was above his head. He twirled the wool into a thicker strand and passed it to his right hand as it came before his body. The right hand wound the wool around a large spindle. This was a continuous motion on the part of the old man who, each time his right hand spindled the wool, inaudibly said "*la illaha illa'llah.*" There could be no uneven movement or the wool would break and he would have to tie a knot and begin again. The old man had to be present to every movement or he would break the wool. This is awareness. This is life. Sufi means awareness in life, awareness on a higher plan than on which we normally live.

The Persian word *darwish* (literally: the sill of the door) is accepted in Arabic and Turkish (*dervish*) to describe the Sufi who is the one who is at the door to enlightenment. Some say the label Sufi (in Arabic *suf* means wool) grew from the woolen cloaks worn by these holy beings. Others like to think that its origin is from the Greek word *sophos* that means wisdom. But in fact, many of the dervish performers one sees in Egypt and elsewhere are performers and not truly of the Sufi order. There are some traveling Sufis, particularly from the Mevlana sect, who are indeed *Sufi Dervish*, and they perform the dance in a more or less traditional manner.

But most of the more colorful performances are entertainers.

Originally, the dance, actually more accurately a “movement” was performed in *tekkes* that were dervish schools that existed in communal fashion and considered a prayer lodge. The dervishes walk around a particular religious structure representing the tombs and their worldly attachments three times wearing black cloaks. Upon removing the cloaks, they presume their alienation from the material world.

Traditional Sufi Dervish may be seen chanting a *dhikr*, which is the repetition of “*la illaha illa'llah*” (there is no god but God). However, some Dervish may only repeat “Allah” because they know man can die at any moment, and they want only the name of God on their lips and in their hearts. The left foot of the whirler should never be raised, but sometimes is in a fit of ecstasy. Whether the performance is by a true Sufi, or simply a performing artist, it is nevertheless entertaining, and even amazing. The performer “turns” or whirls endlessly while manipulating skirts in a colorful display and the concentration and training is obvious. Actually, both the quality of the performance and the abilities of the performer can vary greatly, so look and ask around before deciding on the show you will attend.

The whirling Dervishes from the Galat Mevlevi Music and Sema Ensemble of Turkey are brilliant and spin the audience’s emotions into a vortex of spirituality. According to the group leader Nail Kesova, the real message behind the whirling dervishes is peace and humanity, which was given by Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi 700 years ago.⁷⁾ He firmly believes that the *dervish* dance is based on the movements of the universe, as everything was constantly turning in a certain direction and that *dervishes* copied the motion in God’s remembrance. “It is not a dance, as called by the West. It is the remembrance of God,” he said, adding that the West had its own materialistic image about the dance, as they did not understand spiritualism.⁸⁾

According to the great Sufi saint Hazrat Inayat Khan; the music is a celestial art. Artists have pictured the angels playing on harps; and this teaches us that the soul

7) Maulana Rumi was a great scholar and an Alim but one spiritual encounter with Shams Tabriz, a wandering Sufi from Persia, transformed Rumi completely. Rumi gave up his high status as an alim and began to roam around madly in love with Shams Tabriz and it was in this state of total involvement with Shams Tabriz he composed his poetry.

comes on the earth with the love of music. He narrates a story, which emphasizes the importance of music for the human life.

In Arabia there is story that when God commanded the soul to enter the body, the soul refused saying that this body seemed to be a prison. Then God asked the angels to sing and dance; and as the soul heard this music it was moved to ecstasy, and in that ecstasy it entered the physical body.⁹⁾

This might be an old story, yet it gives the key to the secret of music: that it is not after being born on earth that man learns to love music, but that the soul was already enthralled by music before it came to earth. The Sufi thinkers consider the human body a combination of tone and rhythm. The most important thing in the physical body is 'breath, and the breath is audible; it is most audible in the form of voice.'¹⁰⁾ They consider tone and rhythm as an evidence of the principal signs of life in the physical body, which together make music. Rhythm appeals to man because there is a rhythm going on in his body. The beating of the pulse and the movement of the heart indicate this rhythm.

Quavvali – The Ecstasy in Music

The rhythm of the mind has an effect upon the rhythm, which is going on continually in the body, and in accordance with its influence it effects the physical body. The notes appeal to a person because of the breath, which is a sound and its vibrations reach every part of the body, keeping it alive. Therefore, in having an effect on the vibrations and on the atoms of the body, sound gives us a sensation. This might be only an explanation of the appeal of music to the physical body, could be seen very common, but the Sufis consider that the music reaches further than the physical body, though it depends upon the quality of the music. Pointing to the development

8) By Shoaib Ahmed - *Daily Times - Pakistan*, Saturday, April 15, 2006, <http://sufinews.blogspot.com>

9) Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Sufi Message*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1990, p. 221

10) *Ibid*, p. 222

of the languages in the world, Sufism has underlined the importance of the tonal quality of the languages. According to them the first language of the world consisted of music, then came the language of the words. Even now among primitive races, the language of sounds plays an effective role. The more musical languages of the world are more expressive, whereas the languages, which have less music in them, are less so. It is not only words that convey a meaning; very often the tone of the voice conveys it much better, and sometimes the same word can have two or more meanings depending on the tone in which it is spoken.

When Persian music, with its artistry and beauty was brought to India, it was wedded to Indian music. This fusion created a wonderful art. The desire of the people of the classes and ages has always been and still is, that music, no matter whether it is technical or non-technical, theoretical or non-theoretical should touch the soul deeply, otherwise, it does not appeal to them. The Sufi philosophy put an extra emphasis upon the direct appeal to the masses. According to them it was often been very difficult even for the great masters of music who had developed the technique and science of music, and who were masters of rhythm and tone, to please the audience; because the audience, irrespective to its genre wants only the appeal to the soul from the voice, words, and melody. Everything expressed in music should be appealing to the soul.¹¹⁾

Although Islam did not approve of music and dancing as religious practices, but with the passage of time these have found a firm footing in some of the Sufi Orders. These Sufis consider that any practice that arouses in the seeker the remembrance of God is an act of devotion, and music and dancing are such acts that stir up in their hearts greater love towards the God. Shaikh Saadi has said that beauty pleases mind and the music pleases soul. Music relates to sound and sound has the power of attraction. Beauty relates to form and form light also has the power of attraction. Both the sound and the light attract one's attention and take the soul to a higher level. If, however, the focus of one's soul is on the lower level i.e. mind, intellect and ego, then both the beauty and the music will not have any spiritual influence on the viewer or the listener. Mind is the station of illusion and, therefore, what it experi-

11) Ibid, p. 227

ences is carnal pleasure. If the seeker has made spiritual progress and has risen to higher spiritual levels i.e. above the spiritual center of heart, then he would be able to derive spiritual benefit from them. Even if he listens to worldly music, such a seeker would be benefited spiritually, though temporarily, as it cannot influence one's inner being for long and on a permanent basis. For the adept seekers due to the effect of their inner light and sound, even worldly music rocks their heart and for some time they experience its spiritual impact.

The tradition of performing the religious music is called *qawwali*, a popular form in India and Pakistan, which is inextricably linked to the Sufi tradition. The Koran instructs man to remember God. This remembrance, known as *dhikr*, may be either silent or vocal. The *qawwali* may be viewed as an extension of the vocal form of this remembrance. By the end of the 11th century, there arose the tradition of the *sama*. The *sama* was often a spiritual concert, which included a vocalist and instrumentalists. These *samas* took place under the direction of a spiritually respected man (*shaikh*).¹²⁾

Amir Khusru, a great medieval poet inspired by the famous Sufi Saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia, is so important to the development of *qawwali* that he is often said to be the inventor of it. It is said that he mixed the various musical elements from Turkey, greater Persia and India together. Even today, we find the curious mixture of Persian and Indian music. The development of the *qawwali* up to the latter part of the Mogul empire closely parallels the development of the Hindu religious song known as *bhajan*. We find parallels in musical form and social settings. The degree of cross influence is so great that some musician / saints such as Kabir (circa 1440-1518) are to this day revered by Hindus and Muslims alike. The tradition of *qawwali* has had numerous ups and downs.

The collapse of the Mogul empire and political fragmentation under the British was both good and bad for the *qawwals*. On one hand the political disarray meant that a major suppression of their art form was impossible, yet it also meant that their patronage was also uneven. The rising film industry in the middle of the 20th cen-

12) The use of music as a spiritual force was discussed in great length by al-Gazali (1085-1111).

ture was a major vehicle for the rise in popularity of the *qawwali*. There was a period when a *qawwali* was a mandatory part of the formula Hindi films. The film industry influenced the development of the *qawwali* in several ways. It is interesting to note that since the environment of the cinema house precluded the artist / audience interaction, it set the precedent for the more detached quality that characterizes modern performances. The secularization of the *qawwali* is an interesting phenomenon. One can see that the seeds of its secularization are inherent in the *qawwali* itself. Themes of *qawwali* have traditionally revolved around very mundane or even coarse occurrences. However, the coarseness of the situations has always been interpreted as the coarse spiritual existence of our daily lives.

The performance of a *qawwali* is typically a group situation. This is different from a classical performance, which revolves around one person. Within this group situation, there is one main vocalist or *qawwal*, and a group of supporting vocalist. The audience too is considered as a participant in this event. The musical accompaniment is varied; harmonium, *tabla*, *dholak*, *sarangi*, *saringda*, and *rabab*, are common instruments.¹³⁾ Furthermore, a simple clapping of the hands is a ubiquitous rhythmic support. There are several *tals* in common use in the *qawwali*. The most common is the fast *dadra tal* of 6 beats or the fast *kaherava* of four or eight beats. Unlike the more cerebral, classical forms these *tals* are played in such a way that they produce a driving hypnotic beat. Although the *qawwali* is not a classical form of singing, it does have some common elements. The structure of the *qawwali* is also similar to the classical forms. It typically starts with the *alap*. This portion has no rhythm and is intended to create the right environment. One then moves into the main portion of the performance; this is usually in a medium tempo. The pace slowly increases until a state of extreme excitement is produced. It is very common for audience members, moved by their state of ecstasy to give money to the performers. The performance continues without stopping for hours and hours.

13) These are the popular instrument used commonly in *qawwali* and other devotional music. *Tabla* and *dholak* are the drums, while *sarangi* and *saringda* are the string instruments similar to the violin. *Rabab* is also a string instrument of Persian origin played by the finger strokes on the strings, unlike the other two, which are played by the bow.

There is a very specific psychological process, which a *qawwali* follows. One starts with the singing of the song. In this psychological state the song is received in a manner that is not unlike standard forms of musical expression. The words are sung, quite repeatedly with variations intended to bring out deeper means of the lyrics. After a while there is a repetition to the extent that the words cease to have a meaning. It is the goal here to lead the listener and performer alike into a trance. In the ideal situation the participant is moved to a state of spiritual enlightenment.¹⁴⁾

Religious Morality and Conflicts

In due course of time *Qawwali* became the powerful instrument of inducing spiritual trance. It is so soothing to the human soul that it enables to transport one into the inner world. More the Sufis acquired popularity; more they came to be opposed by the orthodox *Ulema*.¹⁵⁾ In fact orthodox *Ulema* considered them to be heretics. Moreover the *Ulema* jockeyed for positions in king's court and maintained their distance from the poorer masses denouncing them as 'impure' and bad Muslims. They held these Sufi saints responsible for keeping them 'impure' and polluted with un-Islamic way of life. They also denounced the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (Unity of Being) as un-Islamic as it demolished religious boundaries between Muslims and Non-Muslims. This opposition gradually acquired a political colour. Also, the *Wahabi* Islam, founded by Abdul Wahab in 18th century in what is now known as Saudi Arabia (*Najd*), opposed Sufi Islam and denounced it as *kufir* (unbelief) and all those Muslims who visit Sufi mausoleums as *kafirs*. Abdul Wahab was a well-known reformist in Arabia who denounced visit to *dargahs* (shrines) and mausoleums and gave slogan for 'back-to-the-Quran'. Thus there is direct clash between *Wahabis* and *Sufis*. *Wahabi* doctrines are rigid, narrow and lay stress on 'purity' and denounce any deviation for rigid dogmas as *kufir*. It is interesting to note that poor masses never accepted narrowly interpreted *Wahabi* Islam but readily accepted Sufi Islam with all its openness and liberality. Thus Sufi *dargahs*, as pointed out above, till today remain shared sacred spaces.¹⁶⁾ Thus Sufi Islam which is opposite of political and legal

14) David Courtney, *Islamic Devotional Music*

15) *Ulema* are religious leaders in Islam.

Islam, is much more appealing to the people than rigid, doctrinaire orthodox Islam. And it is this spiritual appeal of Sufi music, which stirs our soul.

Since Sufi Islam lays stress on spiritualism, rather than on rigid dogmas it is becoming more acceptable in western countries despite their hatred of political Islam. The Sufi music because of its strong appeal to heart and soul is becoming so popular. As *bhakti* (devotion in Hinduism) always attracted lower caste Hindus throughout ages in history, Sufism appealed to the poorer masses. The fast and tense pace of life in modern societies makes Sufism a soothing balm for the soul. Consumerism of modern capitalist society brings more tension rather than happiness in life. Instant pleasure of modern consumerism cannot provide inner and lasting happiness. Thus Sufism becomes popular both for idle classes in modern society as well as to poor suffering masses.

Sufis consider *Uns* (selfless love) for God as the shortest way to reach Him. The mother loves her son with no self-interest; she does not look at his vices or his goodness, nor does she live on any hopes from him. Even if she has any expectations, which are belied, her love for the son does not become any less. It is possible that at times the mother may get annoyed with the son but it does not mean that her heart would not melt seeing him in any difficulty. If one loves God in the same manner then there is no veil left in between. The only veil is that of self-interest, if that is not there, all the distance is traveled and one reaches his destiny immediately.

The most distinguishing feature of Sufism is the Master-disciple relationship. Sufis regard the place of their *Pir-o-Murshid* (the Guide or the Master) to be the highest. One who wants to join esoteric practices is bound to follow the lead of some spiritual director called a *Pir* or *Guru*. The seeker in order to attain his goal must follow the directions of his Master, who may lay down for him certain rules and practices, and guide him in every detail of his life. The teacher knows that the requirements of individuals vary. Not everyone is at the same stage of evolution, nor is the nature of everyone alike. No two disciples are, therefore, treated in the same manner. Human beings are unique. The Master knows his job. He will treat them according to their possibilities, their character and their past conditioning. The teaching is given accord-

ing to the time, the place and the state of the evolution of the disciple. The Master, however, does not go against any religion, all religions for him are alike, they are only different roads to the One Truth.

To close this paper, it is emphasized here that the theatrical elements and the social impact of Sufism as a strong source of rituals and its religious connotations, reflected in the popular theatre of India, which is commonly seen not only in the religious performances but in the mainstream theatre of the country also, as well as in the popular films of the Bollywood.¹⁷⁾ The journey of the Sufi performer (whether *Qawal* or *Dirvish*) has always proved a potential motivation to an actor in order to develop and become the character into the worlds of imagination, an inner journey into the psyche to find those aspects, which correspond to the people and actions of the play in the perspective of socio-religious theatre. Sufi singers like Abida Parveen of Iran, the late Nusrat Fateh Ali of Pakistan, Sabri brothers of India and several others have made Sufi singing tremendously popular because of their theatricality and ritualistic manner, and their cassettes and CDs sell by thousands in the market, and yet they maintain its spirituality. The same is the case of Dervish dances of India, Pakistan, Turkey and Egypt, which have a very strong popular appeal as well but are still considered more of rituals performed in the process of reaching closer to the Almighty.

17) Bombay film industry is popularly known as Bollywood on Hollywood pattern.