

REVIEWING QAWWALI: ORIGIN, EVOLUTION AND ITS DIMENSIONS

Shaheer Ellahi Khan¹, Abid Ghafoor Chaudhry², Haris Farooq³, Aftab Ahmed⁴

¹Lecturer, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bahria University Islamabad, ²Incharge Department of Anthropology, PMAS-Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi, ³Anthropologist, Department of International Development Studies, Iqra University, Islamabad,

⁴Anthropologist, Pakistan Association of Anthropology, Islamabad,

Corresponding Author's Email: huda.aftab@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: All over South Asia there is *Qawwali*, for all over South Asia there are Muslims; where there are Muslims; there are Sufis; and where there are Sufis, there is *Qawwali* – not the popular version of *Qawwali* adapted for entertainment in clubs and on the screen, but the authentic spiritual song that transports the mystic toward union with God. Research firstly explored the origin of *Qawwali*. Secondly it studied the importance of *Qawwali* in Sufi Music. Thirdly different phases of *Qawwali* evolution were analyzed followed by the assessment of the difference of *Mehfil-e-Qawwali* and *Mehfil-e-Sama*. This research was based on the literature review and can be a guide to recognize the origin, evolution and characteristics of *Qawwali* by exploring different dimensions of earlier studies and literature.

Key Words: Qawwali, Mehfil-e-Sama, Sufi Music, ethnomusicology, Qalandar, Dhamal

INTRODUCTION

One of the subfield of cultural anthropology is ethnomusicology “ethnomusicology, is devoted to the study of musical traditions in various societies throughout the world. Ethnomusicologists record and analyze music and the traditions that give rise to musical expression, exploring similarities and differences in musical performance and composition” [1]. Music like religion and spirituality is distinct in its total social phenomena. But having interaction based relationship; music is part of religion and spirituality, and religion and spirituality are intermingled with music. A complex relation exists between music, religion and spirituality in South Asia. “Qawwali is a recognized musical genre in the Indian subcontinent. It shares general traits with the light classical music of North India and Pakistan, but has unique characteristics related to its religious function. The term Qawwali itself applies both to the musical genre and to the occasion of its performance, the devotional assembly of Islamic mysticism-or Sufism- in India and Pakistan. Like all the other Sufi practices *sarna*’ too is performed under leadership of the sheikh or the teacher, who initiates and ends it with the recitation of *fatiha* or the opening chapter of the *Quran* and controls its every stage as well as duration. Very often it is performed on a Thursday evening and today’s *Qawwali* recitals at the shrines of the saints are a continuation of the same traditional practice. “Within the Sufi tradition, the main task of spiritual music is to touch the mystic’s soul gradually induce ecstasy (*hal*, *wajd*) during the course of concert (*sama*’) and bring him closer to God” [2]. “The Sufi’s poetry is the product of their manifold spiritual states (*Ahwal*) and, as such, is saturated with deep *Hal* (intoxicating influence). When such songs are sung by the expert Qawwals (singers), well-versed in Sufi technique, they produce the same *Hal* on the listeners and elevate them into ecstasies” [3].

“The songs of Qawwali are arranged in the following order to enable the seeker to pass through the above mentioned stages with the help of these songs plus the musical accompaniment and aid. First of all we begin with the praise of God, the Holy Prophet, and the saint of the *Urs*. This is followed by general love songs to create a storm of love in

the heart of the seeker which acts like a powerful rocket to carry him far beyond the sun and stars to the realm of Divine Nearness. Then the verses relating to *Fana-fi-Allah* are sung so that the seekers close their eyes and quietly go into *Fana-fi-Allah*. This is allowed to last for some time to enable the seeker to get firmly established in *Zat* (Absolute essence). The last stage of the spiritual journey is *Baqa-bi-Allah* and towards the end of the *mehfil* (sitting) the song of this nature are sung to bring the seeker back from intoxication (*Sukr*) to sobriety (*Sahw*). Thus they go on flying to higher and higher altitudes of Divine Proximity to which there is no end” [3]. “*Qawwali* is probably predestined more than any other Sufi musical form to touch the listener – whether mystic or common believer, arouse enthusiasm and to alter his state of consciousness. It brings tears to his eyes, opens his heart and empties it so Allah may flow in. The listener feels the dissolution of the ego. Such emotionally intense music compels participation, and collective conditions of mystical rapture, considered gifts of God, are frequent” [2]4. “to partake of the ‘spiritual nourishment’ of *Qawwali*, men – and, rarely, women – from all walks of life, and seekers of any spiritual station and persuasion, are drawn toward the *sama*’ ritual where it is most splendidly and abundantly practiced: at the shrines of the great Sufi saints of the past. There is no *Qawwali* experience more vivid and profound than the ‘*urs* of such a saint, the commemoration of his own final union with God on the anniversary of his death”. Within the Sufi tradition the main task of spiritualism is to touch the mystics soul and gradually induce the ecstasy (*hal*, *wajd*) during the course of concert (*sama*) and bring him closer to God. “Friends of God” and mediators to Allah are deeply venerated saints, such as Laal Shehbaaz Qalandar, Schal Sarmast and Pir Shams, who are known in the songs that are known as *Qalandari*. These Qalandar are well known in south and west Asia among the Muslim population and are the basic inspiration for the repertoire of mystical singers. Wine, love, inebriation and Qalandarism (*Masti-o-Qalandari*) merge with one other here. Music and dance creates an intensive intoxicating atmosphere at the shrines visited by Qalandars and Malangs [2]. Music and dance creates an intensive intoxicating atmosphere at the shrines visited by Qalandars and Malangs.

According to mystic symbolism the naqqara is beaten to announce the union between the divine lovers. Enchanted by the presence of God, the dervishes dance to the sound of dhool feeling God in their hearts. Following the pulse or heartbeat of the drum, they realize the moment of divine presence (waqt-i-Hal) and are overwhelmed by the love of God. This dance in honor of Laal Shehbaz Qalandar, called masto in Sindhi, frees the devotees and they move very spontaneously, making abrupt leaps etc. The typical rhythmic sequence of the drum, which is essential for inducing ritual ecstasy, called dhamal, a term which in vernacular is frequently used for dance itself means "boisterous", "noisy". The ecstatic dhamal dance takes place on various occasions at numerous shrines of saints in Indo-Pakistan. Sama (the mystic listening) and raqs (dancing) are not only practiced by itinerant dervishes, but since the end of the ninth century are also known in circles of orthodox Sufis. Sama and raqs are not required in the orders and should only be performed by spiritually mature mystics following a particular code of behavior (adab) [4]

Witteveen pointed out that to obtain spirituality is to realize that the whole universe is one symphony; in this every individual is one note, and his happiness lies in becoming perfectly attuned to the harmony of the universe. The universe consists of vibrations of many different kinds. Among them the vibrations of sound play a most important role in the creation of universe and in human life. Sound gives in to the consciousness an evidence of its existence [5]. Sufi music is found in all Muslim regions where Sufi poetry is recited, while dance is really a specialty of just one Sufi order, the Mevlevis. The local musical traditions employed very considerably, and they have long and complex histories that are in many cases hardly known to outsiders. Specialists in ethnomusicology have discussed the technical aspect of these different musical traditions in terms of musical theory and performance. One of the best known traditions of Sufi music is practiced by the Chishti school in India and Pakistan. Because of its wild popularity in contemporary circles far beyond those interested in traditional Sufi rituals. Persian and Urdu text written by Chishti authors used the term sama, nowadays this type of music is known primarily by the term Qawwali. An Arabic word meaning "recited", this name preserves an old terminology, since Arabic Sufi text from nine centuries ago refer to the receiver (Qawwal) of poetry as a central figure in musical rituals [6]. Singing in the melodious voice is generally called ghina, whereas the listening to verses thus sung is commonly termed as Sama. Sama is of two kinds: (a) that sung in accompaniment of musical instruments and (b) that sung without that instrument. The impact of music on human mind and emotions is universally acknowledged. Further adds that the Ulema and mystics belonging to the Chishtiya school of Sufism have of sort to prove the permissibility of Sama on the bases of about a dozen authentic Ahadith of the Holy Prophet (SAAW) [7].

This doctrine is related to the mind; but mystical doctrine, which corresponds to the Lore of certainty, is a summons to the mind to transcend itself. The divine name Allah is the

synthesis of all the truth and therefore the root of all doctrine and as such it offers certainty to the heart and to those elements of the soul which are nearest the heart [8].

The major portion of Sufi treatises throughout the ages has dealt with the spiritual which the adept experiences and passes through in his journey upon the way to God. The spirit is like the sky, shining and immutable above the horizons of the soul. It is the world which, although not yet God, is inseparable from Him so that to reach it is already to be in the front courtyard of paradise and the proximity of the divine. The body also bears in its objectives and natural existence [9].

Music is a controversial issue in Islam, in spiritual development; its benefits are of an over-whelming nature. The kind of music and singing which is prohibited in Islam is of the frivolous and corrupt type whose vulgarity is unwholesome in any society. The most charming expression of spiritual development is in spiritual poetry of the Sufis of Islam which have no parallel anywhere in the world and it is that poetry which provides the most captivating songs for Qawwali gatherings at the Sufi shrines during *Urses* and occasionally in private dwellings, as well. It may be mentioned that the Sufi poetry is the product of their manifold states (Ahwal) and as such saturated with deep hal. When such songs are sung by the expert Qawwals (singers), well versed in Sufi technique, they produce the same Hal on the listeners and elevate them in to ecstasies. To be overpowered in Qawwali is to invite digression. The more you resist the higher you go [3].

Audition is resting after the fatigue of the (spiritual) moment, and recreation for those who experience (spiritual) states, as well as a means of awakening the consciences of those who busy themselves with the other things. It is preferred to other means of resting the natural qualities, because the soul is unlikely to cling to it or repose in it: for it comes and goes according to God's decree. Those mystics who enjoy revelation and direct experience have no need of such help, for they have means which transport their hearts to walk in the gardens of revelation. When audition strikes the mystic it stirs the secret things of the heart and the man is then either confused because he is too weak to support the visitation or his spiritual states gives him the power to control himself [10].

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the research was to explore the origin of *Qawwali*, to study the importance of *Qawwali* in *Sufi* Music, to analyze different phases of *Qawwali* evolution, and to assess the difference of *Mehfil-e-Qawwali* and *Mehfil-e-Sama*. The study was aimed to answer the following major research questions through the review of available research and literature; to what extent the concept of *Qawwali* is contradicted and misinterpreted, what is the logic behind the misinterpretation of the concept of spiritual music. The spiritual healing aspect of *Qawwali* has also been highlighted in this study.

FINDINGS

The findings traced from the literature are discussed below in the light of above mentioned objectives.

Sufism is a phenomenon of the vast and diverse non-Arab Muslim World. South Asian Sufism is immersed in poetry, music and dance, and nowhere it has been as effective as in India where it made Islam thrive in a climate of religious pluralism and where Sufis came to be venerated by non-Muslims. Even today the shrine of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer, attracts both Hindu and Muslim pilgrims from all over the country. The age old mystique continues in Pakistan where shrines such as of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar and Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai in Sindh are equally revered by the Hindus of Pakistan. Let's not forget that Sufi saints themselves lived above religious and ethnic prejudices. Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi is known to have practiced yoga and meditation. Shah Abdul Latif of Sindh, traveled with the yogis to perform pilgrimage to Hinglaj Mata, the western most holy place of the Hindus. Sufi saints of Kashmir are even confused with Vedic rishis. The legacy of tolerance continues as the musicians from India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Trinidad and United States ended their concert in Columbus, Ohio, by paying tribute to Lal Shahbaz Qalandar of Pakistan [11-13].

Qawwali is a form of Sufi devotional music popular in South Asia, particularly in the Punjab and Sindh regions of Pakistan, Hyderabad, Delhi and other parts of India. It is a musical tradition that stretches back more than 700 years. Originally performed mainly at Sufi shrines or dargahs throughout South Asia, it has also gained mainstream popularity. Qawwali music received international exposure through the work of the late Pakistani singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, largely due to several releases on the Real World label, followed by live appearances at WOMAD festivals. Other famous Qawwali singers include Pakistan's Sabri Brothers, Bahauddin Qutbuddin and Aziz Mian.

The roots of Qawwali can be traced back to 8th century Persia (today's Iran and Afghanistan). During the first major migration from Persia, in the 11th century, the musical tradition of Sema migrated to South Asia, Turkey and Uzbekistan. Amir Khusro Dehelvi of the Chisti order of Sufis is credited with fusing the Persian and Indian musical traditions to create Qawwali as we know it today in the late 13th century in India. The word Sama is often still used in Central Asia and Turkey to refer to forms very similar to Qawwali, and in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the formal name used for a session of Qawwali is Mehfil-e-Sama.

The songs which constitute the qawwali repertoire are mostly in Urdu and Punjabi (almost equally divided between the two), although there are several songs in Persian, Brajbhasha and Saraiki. There is also qawwali in some regional languages (e.g., Chhote Babu Qawwal sings in Bengali), but the regional language tradition is relatively obscure. Also, the sound of the regional language qawwali can be totally different from that of mainstream qawwali.

Qawwalis are classified by their content into several categories: A hamd; Arabic for praise, is a song in praise of Allah. Traditionally, a qawwali performance starts with a

hamd, A naat; Arabic for description, is a song in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. The opening hamd is traditionally followed by a naat, A manqabat (plural manaqib, which means characteristics) is a song in praise of either Imam Ali or one of the Sufi saints. Manaqib in praise of Ali are sung at both Sunni and Shi'a gatherings. If one is sung, it will follow right after the naat. There is usually at least one manqabat in a traditional program, A marsiya Arabic for lamentation for a dead person is a lamentation over the death of much of Imam Husayn's family in the Battle of Karbala. This would typically be sung only at a Shi'a concert.

A group of qawwali musicians, called a party (or Humnawa in Urdu), typically consists of eight or nine men including a lead singer, one or two side singers, one or two harmoniums (which may be played by the lead singer, side singer or someone else), and percussion. If there is only one percussionist, he plays the tabla and dholak, usually the tabla with the dominant hand and the dholak with the other one (i.e. a left-handed percussionist would play the tabla with his left hand). Often there will be two percussionists, in which case one might play the tabla and the other the dholak. There is also a chorus of four or five men who repeat key verses, and who aid and abet percussion by hand-clapping.

As the main song begins, the tabla, dholak and clapping begin. All members join in the singing of the verses that constitute the refrain. The lyrics of the main verses are never improvised; in fact, these are often traditional songs sung by many groups, especially within the same lineage. However, the tunes are subtly improvised within the framework of the main melody. As the song proceeds, the lead singer or one of the side singers may break out into an alap. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan also popularized the interjection of sargam singing at this point. The song usually builds in tempo and passion, with each singer trying to outdo the other in terms of vocal acrobatics. Some singers may do long periods of sargam improvisation, especially alternating improvisations with a student singer. The songs usually end suddenly.

Women used to be excluded from traditional Muslim music, since they are traditionally prohibited from singing in the presence of men. These traditions have changed, however, as is evident by the popularity (and acceptance) of female singers such as Abida Parveen. However, qawwali has remained an exclusively male business. There are still no mainstream female qawwals. Although Abida Parveen performs many songs that are in the traditional qawwali repertoire, she does not perform them in the traditional qawwali style. Typically missing is the chorus which repeats key verses, as well as the handclapping.

The changing trends in the Sufi Music and power of music have been explained by Parveen Talpur in her article. She has explained that the music based on Sufi concepts can be calming and inspiring, it can be furious too [14].

Sufis and music go together. Sufi songs are hymns to the divine and odes to the beloved saints; set to music these can stir hysteria. Some of the Sufi saints have been poets and some of their disciples have written devotional verses that are still recited around their shrines and beyond. When Ustad Hidayat recited Amir Khusro's evergreen "chaap tilak

sub cheen lee mujh say naina milaikay” it mesmerized a versatile crowd mainly consisting of Indians, Pakistanis and Americans. If music is the universal language it can be the binding force between nations, we can turn the pages of history to confirm this. There is positivity, sense of tolerance and selflessness in the concept of Sufism and same is depicted in the Sufi Music. The love for The creator, Prophet (PBUH) and creatures of Allah is a clear depiction in the Sufi music and Qawali specifically.

Militant Islamist groups are certainly against this brand of Islam. In 2009 few days before bombing the shrine of Rehman Baba in Peshawar, they had warned the custodians to stop women from visiting the shrine. Three years later they have stooped to the level of targeting young girls who advocate education. Talibans eventually destroyed the Rehman Baba shrine, the grief and anger bought Afghanistan a step closer to Pakistan as the Afghan government responded by bearing the costs of reconstruction of the shrine. Rehman Baba is revered in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the tribal belt between the two countries; his poetry echoes in the Pashtun land.

The authenticity and significance of Qawwali can be well understood by the fact that Hazrat Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya r.a. also known as Mehboob-e-Ilahi One of the followers of the Chishti Tariqa used to acquire a great reputation for using music (Qawwali) in his devotional gatherings. One man who was inspired by Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya was Hazrat Amir Khusru. Amir Khusru was a legendary musician, statesman and philosopher. Hazrat Amir Khusru was so important to the development of Qawwali that he is often said to be the inventor of it. These great personalities are well known in serving the Islam and spreading the message of Allah to the folks. Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya r.a. is a highly revered Sufi Saint. He was so close to Allah s.w.t. that he was adorned with the title of Mehboob-e-Ellahi.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps no other aspect of Sufism has been more contentious and at the same time more popular, than the practice of music and dance. The Mevlevi sama ritual, developed in Turkey in close proximity to the Ottoman court, is now performed on concert stages as the dance of Whirling dervishes. A Pakistani singer trained in Chishti Qawali ritual, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, records in the world music genre and collaborates with American musicians on movie sound tracks [6].

The ultimate purpose of all genuine Sufi practices and particularly Qawwali is the experiential awakening into the infinite realities as they unfold in their own natural way within each heart. The sparks of light that emanate from within are innumerable and infinite in their combination and permutation, engulfing all attributes, and yet their essence is one. The listener realizes an outer state of knowledge, beyond the divine law, and seeks union with the inner truth through intoxicating over the rhythmic beat of the music and poetry, in deep respect of the saint and their message of universalism. The hypothesis can surely be applied under the light of current findings and the descriptive interpretation which indicates high commonalities among the earlier literature and contemporary research.

REFERENCES

1. Christopher R. DeCorse, Raymond Scupin, 2009. Anthropology: A Global Perspective, Sixth Edition Published by PHI Learning.
2. Frembgen, W. J. 2008. Journey to God. Oxford University Press, Karachi. p. 164-184
3. Rabbani, W. B. 2005. Islamic Sufism. Al-Faisal Nashran, Urdu Bazar, Lahore.
4. Mohammad, I. 1978. Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar of Sehwan Sharif. Royal Book Company, Karachi. 11 pp.
5. Witteveen, H. J. 1997. Universal Sufism, Element Books Limited Shaftesbury, Dorset. p. 125-140.
6. Ernst, C. W. 1997. The Shambhala Guide to Sufism. Rupa and Co. New Delhi, India. p. 179-185
7. Khan, F. M. 1998. Mihr-e-Munir. Pakistan International Printer, Lahore. p. 146-148
8. Lings, M. 2005. What is Sufism? Sohail Academy Printer, Lahore. p. 63-73
9. Nasr, H. S. 2005. Living Sufism. Sohail Academy Printer, Lahore. p. 56-57
10. Arberry, J. A. 2005. The Doctrine of the Sufis. Sohail Academy Publication, Lahore. p. 57-61, 166-167
11. Michon, L. J and R. Gaetani. 2007. Sufism (Love and Wisdom). Sohail Academy Printer, Lahore. p. 162-177
12. Haeri, F. S. 2005. The Thoughtful Guide to Sufism. Bhavna Books and Prints, New Delhi, India. 75 pp.
13. Dhau, L. 2004. The Sufi Shrine of Ajmer. Rupa and Co. Publications, New Delhi, India. p. 101-102
14. <http://parveentalpur.com/2012/11/02/the-mystique-of-sufi-music/>