

EXPERIENCING *QAWWALI*:
SOUND AS SPIRITUAL POWER IN SUFI INDIA

By

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To my beautiful and brilliant wife Zo,
without whose continual love, support, and encouragement
this project would never have been possible.

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LIST OF MUSIC TRACKS

(The music tracks are attached to this document)

Music track 1, Alim Nizami *Qawwal* and Party.

Music track 2, Salim al-Din Hafiz Fakhr al-Din Chishti Nizami *Qawwal* and Party.

Music track 3, Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* and Party.

Music track 4, Niyaz Rangeel *Qawwal* and Party.

Music track 5, The Hashmi Brothers and Party.

Music track 6, Mohammed Ahmed Warsi *Qawwal* and Party.

Music track 7, Mohammed Ahmed Warsi *Qawwal* and Party.

Music track 8, Mohammed Ahmed Warsi *Qawwal* and Party.

Music track 9, Mohammed Ahmed Warsi *Qawwal* and Party.

Music track 10, Torab Nizami *Qawwal* and Party.

Music track 11, Alim Nizami *Qawwal* and Party.

TERMINOLOGY AND TRANSLITERATION

I have attempted to achieve consistency throughout the text by standardizing the transliteration of terms. Non-English terms appearing in the text are Urdu, unless otherwise noted. Citations from the Qur'an refer to the standard reference form (e.g. 3:21 refers to sura 3, aya 21), and are taken from the Yusuf Ali translation (1983) unless otherwise noted.

INTRODUCTION



Figure 1 - Alim Nizami *Qawwal* gestures as he performs a *Qawwali* song.

Sitting in the darkened courtyard of a little known Muslim shrine in Ahmednagar, India, a thin, energetic 64 year-old man grimaces intensely. As he sings, he emphasizes his words with clenched fists and the sweeping movement of his arms. He is unable to project his voice with the power it once held in his youth, so he now compensates with broad dynamic gestures and a dramatic, expressive performance (Fig. 1 – 2; Music track 1). With his palms facing downward, toward the ground, he motions emphatically for his accompanists to lower the volume of their instruments. The harmonium player, Abu Bakr Bhai, responds with a series of soft, sustained notes. Hashulal and Sandar, the two *dholak* [hand drum] players in the darkness behind him, likewise respond with a softer touch as they lean forward in order to hear his words more clearly. The three accompanying singers, Shabaz Nizami, *Shaykh* Razak, and Asrarbhai cease clapping their hands, waiting expectantly for the signal to resume. It is now past midnight, the music program will continue for at least another two

hours. The soft fragrance of incense, which is kept burning throughout the evening, mixes with the scent of the spiced tea which has just been served. The singer's name is Alim Nizami *Qawwal*. "Alim" is the name that he generally answers to. "Nizami" refers to his spiritual ancestry. Its use states clearly that he places himself in the lineage of the great South Asian Muslim saint of Delhi, Nizam al-Din Awliya. The final portion of his name, "*Qawwal*," is a title which refers to his occupation: he is a *qawwal*, one who sings a variety of South Asian Islamic devotional music known as "*Qawwali*"¹. As the volume of the music drops, Alim's voice becomes more forceful and emphatic, building in intensity. "His eye is always upon you as you walk through this world!" is a rough English translation of the words that he is singing in Urdu, a South Asian language which is a blend of Hindi, Persian, and Arabic words. As his voice builds, he signals the group to join with him in singing the repeated couplet of the song which functions as the refrain: "Khwaja always watches over us, we sing praises of our great master!" As the intensity of the group singing continues to build, Asrarbhai can no longer contain himself. He begins spinning his head and clapping his hands wildly, he throws back his head and shouts "Gharib Nawaz! Gharib Nawaz! Allah!" Alim smiles approvingly and nods in response.

¹ Derived from the Arabic *qawl*, meaning literally "saying."



Figure 2 - Alim Nizami *Qawwal* (center), Shabaz Nizami and Shaykh Razak (left), Abu Bakr Bhai (harmonium player), Hashulal dholakmaster (behind Alim), Sandar dholakmaster (background, right), and Asrarbhai (right, in black shirt).

The word “Khwaja” in the song’s refrain means literally, “a respected man of distinction and high station,” but anyone in South Asia who hears the word knows to whom it refers. Alim is singing about the much beloved founder of Chishtiyya Sufism in South Asia, Khwaja Mu’in al-Din Chishti (d. 1233), the master and spiritual head of all South Asian Chishtis. Although a Muslim spiritual master, Khwaja Mu’in al-Din Chishti has always been loved and respected by Hindus and Muslims alike, especially among the most impoverished. When Asrarbhai shouts out “Gharib Nawaz,” he is using an affectionate nick name for Khwaja, a phrase which means literally, “patron of the poor.” A reference to Khwaja’s legacy of love and service to the poor of whatever caste or faith, a value still held in high regard by most Chishti Sufis today. Khwaja Mu’in al-Din Chishti has always been closely associated with *Qawwali*, as well. When I asked a friend from Pune, a Sufi man named Akbar Khan, about the origins of *Qawwali*, he replied, “*Qawwali* came from Gharib Nawaz, only. The *sama*’ [listening as a spiritual practice] came from Nizam al-Din Awliya, Delhi...in our *silsila* [lineage] there is

sama '...it is not compulsory, it is a traditional thing.²' In a few words, Akbar Khan traced the practice of listening to *Qawwali* back over a period of eight centuries, to the founder of the Chishtiyya order in India. It was Khwaja Mu'in al-Din Chishti's love for music, and his love for listening to music as an Islamic spiritual discipline, that has inspired his successors to continue the practice in the subcontinent.

Virtually every religion in the world uses music as a part of its expressions of devotion. Rarely, however, can one find a musical practice which has survived, in much the same form, over such an extended period of time as is the case with *Qawwali*. The Islamic practice of *sama* ' [Arabic, signifying hearing, usually translated as "listening," especially listening to inspired or sacred words accompanied by music], which can easily be traced back over more than eight centuries, is designed and enacted with the intention of focusing the attention of the listener upon the spiritual master as guide and exemplar. *Qawwali*³ texts praise the spiritual master and the lineage associated with him (or, occasionally, her), either explicitly, or metaphorically, in the form of a love song to the Beloved (God), who is in turn represented by the spiritual master in the *Qawwali* context. The musical sounds which accompany the song texts are constructed and performed with the explicit intention of guiding the listener into subjective states of religious experience.

This dissertation is an historical and critical study of sound as spiritual power in *Qawwali*, the Islamic devotional music of the Chishtiyya Sufi order of South Asia. My intention is to show that music and religion are, by both implication and design, coextensive in traditional

² Interview, July 19, 2005.

Qawwali performance. Although much effort is expended by Sufis to ensure that the sung text is primary in the performance of traditional, religious *Qawwali*, it is the transmission of *baraka* [spiritual power, or blessing] through musical sound that distinguishes *Qawwali* as the particular performance of expressive culture that it is. The explicit religious function of *Qawwali* is to act as a catalyst for ecstatic states of religious experience. In this context, the music itself is not simply a vehicle for the sung text, it is also a vehicle for the transmission of spiritual power [*baraka*]. According to many Chishtiyya Sufi saints [*Awliya*], spiritual music is identical with spiritual power, that is, it is coextensive with religious experience and communion with the divine. Using a combination of case studies from ethnographic fieldwork in Maharashtra, India, and a variety of textual sources on Sufism, in this study I contextualize the sounds of *Qawwali* as a cultural system of symbols in its historical setting, the South Asian *dargah* [Muslim tomb-shrine].

***Qawwali* as a distinct devotional form**

Qawwali is a genre of South Asian devotional music which has much in common with light classical music⁴ forms of the region. It also has several distinct features related to its religious function. A *Qawwali* group is called a party. The typical *Qawwali* party varies in size, but is usually made up of between four to eight members. The melody line of early *Qawwali* was performed on a stringed instrument called the *sarangi*. Although some still insist that *Qawwali* should only be played on the *sarangi*, few *qawwals* use the instrument today. The requirement of constant retuning has encouraged most modern *Qawwali* parties to substitute

³ The word “*Qawwali*” means both the musical form, and the occasion of its performance. “I am going to a *Qawwali*”, means that I am going to attend a performance dedicated to *Qawwali* music (Qureshi 1995:xiii).

⁴ Light classical, or semi-classical, music of the region are classical music forms which include elements of a variety of folk music traditions.

the harmonium (see Fig. 3), a small pump organ introduced to the subcontinent by European missionaries some time after the late 15th century. The harmonium is often played by the lead singer, with rhythm accompaniment usually provided by a small, barrel shaped, double headed, hand drum called the *dholak* (see Fig. 4), punctuated by hand claps provided by other members of the party. Modern, professional *Qawwali* parties often use *tabla*, the twin, single-headed drums used in North Indian classical music, or even electronic, synthesized drum, but most traditional groups still employ the *dholak*. A typical *Qawwali* song may last anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes, perhaps even continuing as long as an hour. The song will often begin with an introductory instrumental section, followed by the *alap*, a brief improvised section which outlines the melodic mode, or *raga*, of the song, or *gana*, and allows the singer to improvise a few vocal lines. This is followed by one or more verses, often improvised, sung by the lead singer, still without rhythmic accompaniment (Music track 2), sometimes with vocal response sections echoed by one or more members of the party. The main section of the song is signaled by the introduction of rhythm and rhythmic accompaniment consisting of the insistent beat of the *dholak*, and handclaps, as the entire party sings out the refrain of the song [*parti gana*]. A typical song may continue with a combination of vocal improvisations, call and response sections, and recurring sections of refrain, building to an intense climax, and then quickly dropping in intensity and volume just before the ending. A song may also begin the main section with either a verse or refrain section. If the program is held at a *dargah*, the party will face the doorway of the shrine (see Fig. 5), emphasizing that the party is singing directly to the saint entombed within (Qureshi 1995).



Figure 3 - *Qawwali* party with lead singer Salim al-Din Hafiz Fakhr al-Din Chishti Nizami *Qawwal* playing the harmonium, Shaykh Abdullah Abdul Ghani on dholak (in background), and singers, Bashir al-Din Salim al-Din (left), and Sayyed Ajarali Akbashari (right).



Figure 4 - Shaykh Abdullah Abdul Ghani playing *dholak*.



Figure 5 - Salim al-Din Hafiz Fakhr al-Din Chishti Nizami *Qawwal* and his *Qawwali* party sit facing the *dargah* of Raju Qattal, Khuldabad, Maharashtra, India.

Geographic setting: Maharashtra

Maharashtra is on the Western coast of the Republic of India (see Fig. 6 - 7). The coastline of Maharashtra borders the Arabian Sea, the geographic area to the east extends into the center of the subcontinent. The indigenous people are described in the earliest texts as “Hindu” in reference to the people of the Indus River valley which actually lies far to the Northwest of the area. Later texts refer to the inhabitants as “*Marathas*,” the local language is still known as *Marathi*. The first Muslims began to arrive in the area during the 11th century, establishing political and military centers of government in Ahmednagar, Aurangabad, and Hyderabad. The *Marathas* proved worthy adversaries and were never completely dominated by the foreign invaders. The British established power centers in Bombay [*Mumbai*] and Pune by

the 19th Century. At the time of Indian Independence in 1947, parts of the area of present-day Maharashtra became what was then called Bombay State. In 1960 Bombay State was broken up along linguistic lines (*Marathi* and *Gujarati*) into the present day States of Maharashtra and Gujerat. Maharashtra state is further subdivided into districts, each district usually centered around a large city. The base of my fieldwork was in the Ahmednagar district, at Meherabad, some 10 kilometers outside of the city of Ahmednagar. From Meherabad I made periodic research trips to the adjacent districts of Pune and Aurangabad, and also to Nagpur in the Northeast corner of the state.



Figure 6 - Map of India .

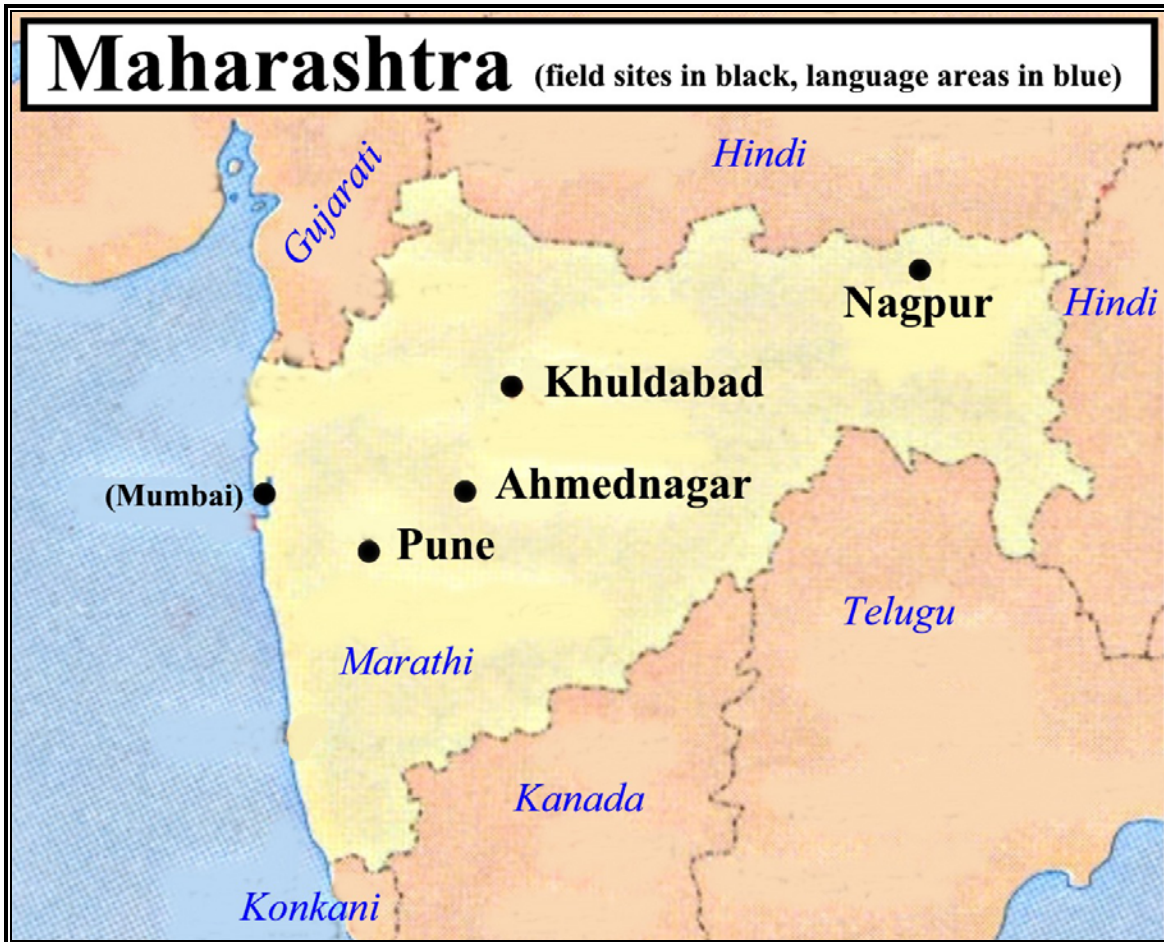


Figure 7 - Map of Maharashtra State, India, with field sites and language areas indicated

***Qawwali* in Maharashtra**

Qawwali has grown beyond its original religious function in South Asia to become a form of popular entertainment in the subcontinent and around the world. The beginnings of *Qawwali* in contemporary postcolonial Maharashtra date to the arrival of the Sufi *shaykh* Burhan al-Din Gharib (d.1324) at Khuldabad, near Daulatabad and Aurangabad, in the early fourteenth century. Although *Qawwali* has a considerable history in association with the Sufi practice of *sama'* prior to the 13th century, it was not always called *Qawwali*. The establishment of that particular variety of *sama'* known to us today as *Qawwali* is usually traced to the Sufi *shaykh*

Nizam al-Din Awliya (d.1325) of Delhi and his disciple [*murid*], the famed Muslim poet Amir Khusrau (d.1325). Burhan al-Din Gharib of Khuldabad was a *khalifa*, or successor, of Nizam al-Din for 30 years and a good friend of Amir Khusrau. Nizam al-Din Awliya gave Burhan al-Din spiritual dominion [*walaya*] over an area of the Deccan plateau region of the Indian peninsula which makes up the northern section of present day Maharashtra. Burhan al-Din traveled to the Deccan during the period when the Delhi Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq (d.1351) attempted to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad.

There is no evidence that any Sufis prior Burhan al-Din Gharib, and possibly his elder brother Muntajib al-Din (affectionately known as Zar Zari Zar Baksh), engaged in *sama*’ in the Deccan region of what is now Maharashtra state. Based on this observation, it seems safe to claim that *Qawwali* in Maharashtra began with the practice of *sama*’ in Khuldabad under the direction of Burhan al-Din Gharib⁵. This would place *Qawwali* in Maharashtra in direct lineage to what is widely understood as the traditional birthplace of modern *Qawwali*, the *dargah* of Nizam al-Din Awliya in Delhi. *Qawwali* in Maharashtra, however, includes a variety of contexts and manifestations that do not always conform with the original, established understanding of *Qawwali* as the formal practice of *mahfil-i-sama*’ [assembly for listening]⁶ practiced at Nizam al-Din Awliya’s *dargah*. The *mahfil-i-sama*’ is the most ritualized aspect of *Qawwali*, commonly found in the religious context of a saint’s death anniversary [‘*urs*’] and other highly structured religious observations, such as the *sama*’ practiced by Burhan al-Din and the early Sufis of Khuldabad. In addition to these formal

⁵ Oral accounts suggest that Burhan al-Din’s brother, Zar Zari Zar Baksh, may have preceded him in Khuldabad, in which case Zar Zari Zar Baksh may have initiated the practice of *sama*’ prior to Burhan al-Din’s arrival, although there is no historical evidence of this having happened. See Ernst (1992:235-236).

practices, over the centuries *Qawwali* has developed into a popular devotional expression for the local poor people of Maharashtra, as well as a popular, secular form of musical entertainment, and an international World Music phenomenon.

Fieldwork Setting

The first time I heard a live *Qawwali* performance was in Ahmednagar. I was enrolled in a field education unit there while pursuing my master's degree in theology. In the Spring of 2001 I made arrangements with the field education office at the Vanderbilt Divinity school to spend ten weeks of my summer at Meherabad, in Ahmednagar, working for the Meher Baba Trust. The Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust (AMBPPCT) is a charitable organization that offers a variety of free services, including healthcare, educational, agricultural, and other philanthropic programs for the poor people of the district. One of the main functions of the Trust is to accommodate over 30,000 pilgrims who come to Meherabad annually to pay respects to the tomb shrine of the Persian religious leader Meher Baba, the founder of the estate. Meher Baba founded Meherabad as an ashram in the 1920's. Born in India of Zoroastrian Persian parents, he later became a religious leader who claimed mentors and followers from a variety of faiths.

My primary supervisor while working at Meherabad was Stella Manuel, a local Catholic woman from Ahmednagar, and director of the Meher English School, a low-cost school for local poor children, primarily from neighboring Arangaon village. In addition to working with Stella, I also worked with Alan Wagner, the director of Performing Arts program at

⁶ The origin of the term is the Arabic *mahfil al-sama'*, but I have adopted the Persian transliteration which is more common in the secondary literature in the subcontinent.

Meherabad, and head of the Meherabad Music and Arts Center, as well as for Dr. Anne Moreigne, head of the Meherabad Hospital Camp program. Both Alan and Anne were Western volunteers like myself. Between the three positions I was able to fulfill the requirements of the Vanderbilt Field Education program.

Ahmednagar was founded in 1494 by Ahmed Nizam Shah and was once significant in terms of strategic location during the military struggle of the Mughals to control the Deccan. Although today the city predominantly Hindu, as is most of India, there remains a considerable Muslim population. Along the main road a Zoroastrian fire temple can be seen, as well as a Sikh temple, or *gurdwara*; upon leaving the main road at the Sikh temple and driving some distance into the permanent military installation (named a “cantonment” or “camp” by the British colonial authorities, and still referred to as such today by locals), one reaches the main Catholic church. Leaving Ahmednagar and driving out toward Meherabad, one will pass the Marathi mission school run by evangelical Protestants. Ahmednagar is thus distinguished by the presence of several major religious traditions, although there is little interaction between communities other than commercial, and little intermarriage or close social alliances.

During my first few weeks at Meherabad in 2001 I learned that a *Qawwali* party from Khuldabad had been hired to perform for a special, late-night *Qawwali* program at Meherabad. This development interested me a great deal. The first *Qawwali* I had heard was a recording by the famous Pakistani *Qawwali* party, the Sabri Brothers, and then, later, recordings of the great *Qawwali* master, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. It was well known that

Qawwali was Meher Baba's favorite type of music, and this was one of the reasons it was decided to have a *Qawwali* program at Meherabad. I knew a little about *Qawwali*, but I had never heard a live performance. I was particularly interested in its associations with Sufism, which I only vaguely understood at the time.

The Nur al-Din Nizami *Qawwal Qawwali* party arrived from Khuldabad in the early evening and performed to a packed house in one of the older buildings in Meherabad. The leader of the party was an old man named Nur al-Din Nizami *Qawwal*. He was introduced to the assembly as someone who had sung for Meher Baba on several occasions in the past. Though he was no longer as strong a singer as he had been in his youth, Nur al-Din gave an exciting and dynamic performance (Fig. 8). I was thrilled by the experience, but it was clear that the *Qawwali* program at Meherabad was not typical of the genre. There were only a few Muslims in the crowd, and the rest was a mixed group of Hindu, Parsi, and non-Indian men and women.



Figure 8 - Nur al-Din Nizami *Qawwal* and party at Meherabad, June 2001.

The experience increased my interest in *Qawwali* as a religious practice, however, and I wanted to know more. When I returned to Vanderbilt that Fall I had only one remaining class to take to complete my master's degree. The class I took was "Music and Religion" with ethnomusicologist Gregory Barz. At the time I didn't know anything about ethnomusicology, but by the end of the semester I had, with Barz's encouragement, begun the process of enrollment in the doctoral program in History and Critical Theories of Religion in the Vanderbilt Graduate Department of Religion, with the intention of writing an ethnomusicology dissertation. When Barz asked me what musical tradition I would be interested in studying, I immediately thought of *Qawwali*, though I thought it would be out of the question. At that time there was no one teaching courses in Islam at Vanderbilt. Also, *Qawwali* is usually sung in Urdu, Hindi, Persian, or Punjabi. None of these languages were being taught then at Vanderbilt, nor are any of them taught at Vanderbilt today. Barz continued to encourage me, though, and my application for further graduate study was accepted.

My original plan was to once again obtain permission to stay at Meherabad and then periodically travel to Khuldabad to make field recordings of Nur al-Din Nizami *Qawwal*. I had hoped that I could find a translator to assist me with interviews of Nur al-Din. The part of this plan involving Nur al-Din Nizami *Qawwal* had to be abandoned when Nur al-Din died in 2003. In the meantime I had already begun taking courses in Islamic studies with Vanderbilt's new Islamicist, Richard McGregor, I had obtained a grant from the University's Center for the Study of Religion and Culture for a fieldtrip to India in the summer of 2004, and I had received permission from the chairman of the AMBPPCT to stay at Meherabad

once again while I pursued my fieldwork. I left for India in May 2004 with considerably more understanding of Islam, Sufism, and *Qawwali* than I had in 2001, but with still no clear idea of who I would record or interview about *Qawwali*, or where I would record them. Gradually during my stay, through inquiries and numerous investigations, research sites were discovered, I found a helpful guide, and a plan of approach began to emerge. I returned to Maharashtra in the summer of 2005 in order to continue my field research. That summer I attended the death anniversary celebration [‘*urs*’] of the female saint [*wali*] Hazrat⁷ Babajan of Pune, and also conducted a series of field interviews.

Analytical Setting: Sound, Symbol, and Method

From the beginning of my fieldwork it seemed likely that direct engagement with *Qawwali* song texts would be problematic due to my language limitations. As one of my informants, Khalil Muzaffar, an 80-year-old retired professor from Ahmednagar college, told me,

Unless you know one of two languages, at least Urdu or Hindi, that is our national language...we can *enjoy* the ghazals, along with the music, Indian music, but we cannot go down into their meanings, into the depth, without understanding the secrets of that language, it is mostly concerned with spiritualism [Sufism]....Urdu is an Indian language, but mostly influenced by Persian language, and we have the tradition of *Qawwali* right from Persian literature, that is to say, Urdu *Qawwali* is much influenced by Persian literature...It’s mainly concerned, I told you, with spiritualism [Sufism]. So unless...if I do not know the language, the charm of the language, and the rhythm, the meters...I [cannot] grasp the inner charm of the poetry. (Interview, 7-16-05)

As I had little time and no resources for learning more than a minimum of either Urdu or Hindi, I made the choice to focus on the sound and context of *Qawwali*, rather than on the *Qawwali* texts themselves. This does not minimize the importance of song texts, but, rather, emphasizes the importance of the soundscape associated with *Qawwali* and the role of sound

⁷ An honorific from the Arabic *hadra*.

in the delivery of song texts and the *Qawwali* experience. As Professor Muzaffar emphasizes, and as Sufis have emphasized historically, it is not simply the words and their explicit meanings that make song texts important, but it is the “inner charm,” the inner meaning of what the words represent that is key to the experience of *Qawwali*. It is thus one of the central claims of this study that *Qawwali* musicians and singers [*qawwals*] use the sounds of *Qawwali* as symbolic representations of the inner meaning of *Qawwali* experience. These symbolic representations are modes of musical expression that coax the listener to turn inward by mirroring the desired subjective states through the deliberate manipulation of suggestive sounds.

In his classic ethnography of sound, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, ethnomusicologist Steven Feld (1990), paraphrasing Clifford Geertz (1973), describes his project as “...an ethnographic study of sound as a cultural system, that is, a system of symbols among the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea” (3). In his analysis of the sounds of Kaluli music, Feld draws on myth, the surrounding soundscape of the Kaluli rainforest environment, and his own field experiences of Kaluli expressive culture. In the dissertation that follows, I similarly characterize the music of *Qawwali* as a cultural system of symbols that are designed to mirror the guiding concepts of individual *Qawwali* song texts, as well as the general ritual process itself. Informing my understanding of the sounds of *Qawwali* as a system of symbols are pertinent texts from Persian and Indo-Persian Sufi literature, as well as my own field experiences as a participant-observer of *Qawwali* performance in Maharashtra.

My understanding of *Qawwali* texts in general, and how they interact with *Qawwali* sound, draws primarily on the work of ethnomusicologist Regula Qureshi (1995) and Islamicist Bruce Lawrence (1979; 1978). Informing my understanding of the sounds of *Qawwali* and their relation to the practice of listening [*sama*'] and the transmission of spiritual power [*baraka*], in various parts of the dissertation I draw on a number of translations of primary Sufi texts, including discourses on the practice of listening by Ibn Abi al-Dunya (d. 894), Ali al-Hujwiri (d. 1073), Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (d. 1111), his brother Majd al-Din (d. 1126), and Persian mystic Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 1209). In grounding the ideas of these thinkers in early Qur'anic exegesis, I refer to translations of works by the important early Sufi thinkers, Rashid al-Din Maybudi (d. 1126), and Muhy al-Din Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240). Maybudi's *Kashf al-asrar wa 'uddat al-abrar* (Unveiling of Mysteries and Provision of the Righteous) is the first important Sufi commentary on the Qur'an in Persian, and although many of Ibn al-Arabi's writing have been considered controversial in the subcontinent, William Chittick (1992) demonstrates that al-Arabi's influence there is considerable. I use these authors in order to outline key concepts used in my discussions of the Sufi practice of listening, and illustrate how many of these ideas are mirrored as sound-symbols by referring to examples from my field research.

In addition to providing an analysis of sound as spiritual power in *Qawwali*, this field research-based project presents *Qawwali* as a case study in understanding the use of music in religious practice. Drawing from my research in Maharashtra, I focus on the role of *Qawwali* in the development of social identity and symbolic healing in Islamic practice. By providing guided imagery with music, *Qawwali* acts as a catalyst for the construction of an embodied,

symbolic cultural self which interacts, and sometimes merges with, the symbolic sacred self. This activity contributes to the production of social identity for believers and acts as a form of symbolic healing on individual and social levels. In order to lay the groundwork for my analysis of *Qawwali* in terms of identity and symbolic healing, I provide an introduction to the South Asian Islamic practice of *Qawwali* and locate the practice in its cultural and religious contexts in the contemporary world. The discussion of *Qawwali* as a Sufi practice in the history of Maharashtra begins with the Muslim expansion into the Deccan plateau through Daulatabad and Khuldabad. I approach this aspect of the project through a combination of field documentation and through lenses provided by relevant texts from anthropology and ethnomusicology.

The classic study of *Qawwali* to date is *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali* by Regula Burkhardt Qureshi (1995). Qureshi provides a comprehensive musicological and cultural study of *Qawwali* practice in India and Pakistan, focusing especially on the *Qawwal* Bachche of Delhi. All of the various individuals working in a service capacity at the larger *dargahs* in South Asia serve by virtue of their hereditary rights. The *Qawwal* Bachche represent the lineage of *qawwals* attached to the Nizam al-Din Awliya *dargah* in Delhi, and represent a rich tradition whose antecedents are said to have learned the art of *Qawwali* under tutelage of Amir Khusrau himself, widely understood to be the father of *Qawwali*, whose compositions are still sung today on *Qawwali* occasions. Qureshi expertly describes and analyzes *Qawwali* performance in the classic of the formal *mahfil-i-sama* ' [assembly for listening], the South Asian Chishtiyya variety of the classic Sufi *sama* '. Qureshi's ethnographic studies are acknowledged as classic in the field of

ethnomusicology, and the only major academic treatment of *Qawwali*. My own work draws heavily on Qureshi's book and articles on *Qawwali*, especially for musicological detail, and her descriptions and analysis of the *mahfil-i-sama'*.

Within the *mahfil-i-sama'* is the core of *Qawwali* meaning, purpose, and function. The *mahfil-i-sama'* is the classic occasion for *Qawwali*: a male saint is honored, in the person of a *shaykh* in the saint's lineage, at a major *dargah*. The word *shaykh* comes from the Arabic meaning "old man" or "elder." It is also used as a title for someone in authority, either spiritual or political authority. In Sufism the term is used to refer to the spiritual master or leader of a Sufi order (Glasse' 1991). In the *mahfil* context, the *shaykh* is the primary symbol of the sacred Other. Although the *mahfil-i-sama'* is the most formal ritual process associated with *Qawwali*, this is not its only manifestation. *Qawwali* has been widely embraced by the poor of South Asia as a resource of solace and affirmation, and also as a form of cross-cultural entertainment for the masses. One of my tasks in this project has been to document *Qawwali* performance which falls outside of the classic proto-type as represented in Qureshi's essential work, and to demonstrate some of aspects of religious *Qawwali* performance as it occurs outside of the classic *mahfil* setting.

Another aspect of my analysis of *Qawwali* addresses questions of self, identity, and symbolic healing. Beginning with the efforts of Max Weber (1963), who emphasized the distinction between prophet and priest, theorists in the study of religion have found it useful to distinguish between two polarities in regard to religious specialists. Anthropologists have preferred to make the distinction between priest and shaman (Pandian 1991; Turner 1968;

Lessa and Vogt 1958). Pandian articulates the distinction in this way.

The shaman represents empirically verifiable biological-psychological processes in relation to empirically unverifiable reality, and the priest represents empirically verifiable socio-political processes in relation to empirically unverifiable reality. Believers who use the symbols of the sacred other to represent the self as sacred differ in the degree to which they represent either the shamanistic or priestly sacred self, and they may alternate between a shamanistic or priestly orientation towards the sacred other (91).

I find this distinction is a useful device for a number of reasons. One can discern the thread of this distinction through a number of phenomena related to the study of *Qawwali* in Maharashtra. I apply this distinction throughout this study in order to articulate the difference between the shrines which are linked primarily to institutional Sufism (priestly), and those which have appeared and thrived apparently independent of such formal structures (shamanistic). There are, of course, many nuances to these distinctions, which will be articulated as they appear in context of the various shrines.

My intention in employing these distinctions is to emphasize the somewhat more shamanistic character and function of the saints whose shrines were the site of my fieldwork, in contrast to more the priestly character and functions of Nizam al-Din Awliya and his Deccan *khalifa* [successor], Burhan al-Din Gharib of Khuldabad. The lineage of Nizam al-Din Awliya, as represented in Qureshi's work, and as represented by Burhan al-Din Gharib and his lineage at Khuldabad, constitute an important institutional link to the founder of Chishti Sufism in India, and back to Muhammad the Prophet, and thus provide a historical continuity which advocates for acceptance of traditions and practices which some Islamic thinkers oppose⁸. Although they each functioned in a priestly role as institutional leaders of a large Sufi order, they also maintained links to the shamanistic practice through their enthusiastic

encouragement of, and involvement with, the ecstatic practice of *sama'*. For example, however, saints such as Hazrat Babajan of Pune, and Taj al-Din Baba of Nagpur, had no clear institutional ties, left no record of having functioned in a priestly role within institutional Sufism in any way, and appointed no successors. As exemplars, they spoke, and continue to speak to their followers through their life stories and activities, as *faqirs* [impoverished ones], not as representatives of institutional Sufism. For this reason they tend to be extremely popular with the poor masses of Maharashtra, and their shrines have subsequently been appropriated by institutional Sufi representatives due to the cultural capital that these shrines represent. Such saints function differently as representatives of the symbolic sacred self, and therefore play different roles in the production of social identity that occurs through the performance of *Qawwali* at their shrines.

In addition, this dissertation presents *Qawwali* as a case study in the nearly universal phenomenon of the use of music in religious practice. Throughout this study I survey a variety of field experiences in Maharashtra and bring the ideas embodied and enacted through the Islamic practice of *sama'* into conversation with Sufi philosophy and debates on music in Islam, extending the conversation into the realms of Western anthropology, psychology, music therapy, and neuropsychology. In these contexts I examine the role of *Qawwali* in the development of South Asian Islamic social identity, symbolic healing, and interaction with a culturally constructed sacred other. My intention is to move toward an understanding of the human tendency to organize sound in various ways which are understood to facilitate interaction with the symbolic sacred other. In the case of *Qawwali*, this is achieved through the expression of symbolic musical sounds which support the

⁸ For a broader discussion of this process of Sufi legitimation see Ernst (1999:45-57).

delivery sacred texts. These texts are delivered with the intention of creating a subjective state in the listener in which the individual self is experienced as merging with culturally constructed symbolic sacred other.

Ethnographic Setting: Sufism, Mysticism, and Islam in South Asia

Although it has become a popular musical form across South Asia and internationally, traditional *Qawwali* in Maharashtra is an Islamic devotional practice. The Muslims who practice traditional *Qawwali* are Sufis, primarily of the Chishtiyya order. The word Sufi comes from the Arabic term *tasawwuf*, although the etymology is disputed, the word is most often thought to refer to a particular type of woolen cloth worn by ascetics during the early centuries of Islam. Sufism is often referred to as the mystical dimension of Islam⁹. Today, however, the words Sufism, Islam, mysticism, and, for that matter, religion itself, are all contested. There are Muslims who say that Sufism has nothing whatever to do with Islam, that Sufism is an accretion to, or degeneration of, the original religion of the Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand there are some Sufis who themselves claim that Sufism has nothing to do with Islam. Their assertion is that it is conservative, fundamentalist Islam as arisen in the modern period that has degenerated and corrupted the religion of the Prophet (Ernst 1997:xii-xxi). Yet most see a place in Islam for a somewhat modified form of both points of view. Whatever position one takes, the historical relationship of Sufism to Islam cannot be denied. Sufi ideas can be traced to the early centuries of Islam, Sufi writings and biographies of exemplary Sufis appear as early as the 9th century, with Sufi manuals and other literature appearing by the 11th century. Most Sufis, however, trace the beginnings of

⁹ The minority Shia traditions in Islam also have developed forms of mysticism, usually called *'irfan* or *hikma* (see Momem 1985:208-219).

Sufism to Muhammad and the Qur'anic revelation, counting the Prophet and his cousin and son-in-law Ali among the first Sufis.

Mysticism is also a contested term, having evolved to have different meanings over time. In the post-enlightenment Western world, to label a person or group mystical is to marginalize and subordinate them as irrational or otherworldly, disinterested in the practical matters of social justice, politics and economy. At the same time, the validity of mystical experience can have profound social implications. The acceptance of mystical experience as valid often serves as a marker conferring authority upon the one who is understood to have had a "valid" mystical experience. No Muslim would question the authenticity of the Qur'anic revelations of Muhammad, but what of the "divine inspiration" of subsequent Muslim holy men and women? Who has the authority to interpret the Qur'an, to cite hadith (collected oral reports of the life of the Prophet and his companions), to prescribe what is proper conduct, what is allowed [*halal*] or forbidden [*haram*]? These are some of the debates revolving around Sufism within Islam. The interpretations and pronouncements of Islamic religious scholars and doctors of law [*ulama*] have long criticized some of the assumptions, and the more extreme forms of Sufism. Within Sufism there are individuals whose mystical experiences have given them varying degrees of authority regarding religious practice and social behavior. To understand Sufis as exclusively 'mystical', however, is to run the risk of interpreting them as a marginal group and to misunderstand their active role in the shaping of Islamic life, especially in India and Pakistan. Sufis *are* involved with the concerns of practical daily life, and are, at the same time, known to take an active interest in concerns of the 'other world' as well. As one Turkish Sufi musician states:

Every Muslim expects to see God after death, but Sufis are the impatient ones. They want God now, day by day, moment by moment, in this life. Sufism is a path on which one can progress towards the end of self-realization. And it's a way of love, a way of devotion, a way of knowledge (Bari Karacay, Public Talk, November 29, 2001).

Exactly how Sufis understand this process of progress towards self-realization, the role of music in its attainment, the affect of practices towards this end upon Muslim society in general, and especially the role of *Qawwali* for Sufis in Maharashtra as they progress towards self-realization, will be discussed throughout the course of this study.

In addition to disagreements over the terms Sufism and mysticism, Jonathan Z. Smith brings the word religion itself into dispute.

...while there is a staggering amount of data, phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religion — there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no existence apart from the academy (Smith 1982:xi).

Smith's concern is that the cultural practices and activities that scholars tend to label "religious" often have so little in common with one another, that categorizing them under one all-inclusive term often clouds their particularity and seduces us into thinking that we have defined them in some concrete way when actually we have not. Often these apparently clear and concrete distinctions have been made in a way which reflects a specific way of life (Western, European) and a specific understanding of what religion is and what it means to be religious (often Christian, especially Protestant). In the early days of the study of religion, this usually meant a teleological trajectory, an evolutionary path, from primitive, even savage religion, to the great pinnacle of achievement: European Christianity. Arvind Sharma (2002) questions the word religion as well, comparing it to the Indic word *dharma*. Although the

words are often used as translations for one another, Sharma finds that ‘religion’ often means something conclusive, exclusionary and separative.

That is to say; to be a Christian means that you have the final truth (conclusive); that you belong to a community of Christians which shares in it and others don’t (exclusionary) and that a religion constitutes a distinct component of culture and [is] separable from it, so that anyone belonging to any culture could become a Christian (separative). As the word passes from Christian to secular usage, its first implication gets attenuated, in the sense that it is admitted that not just Christianity but other religions may also claim to possess the ultimate truth. Thus the description of Christianity as a religion converts its “truth” into a “truth-claim”; we revert to the original Christian claim as soon as [we] call it the religion instead of a religion. Religion with a the is the Christian article of faith; with an a it is a secular article of faith (12-13).

Dharma (meaning natural law, reality, or perhaps, the way to this higher truth), on the other hand, refers to values that intersect at points with the word ‘religion’, but are not necessarily conclusive, and are not always exclusionary or separative. *Dharma*, then, intersects with culture as well as with what we tend to refer to as ‘religion’. These are important distinctions to remain aware of throughout this study, for Sufism, especially the Chishtiyya form of Sufism within which the performance of *Qawwali* in Maharashtra takes place, contains important elements of both what Sharma calls the religionist position, and the *dharmic* position. Although in general, and in contrast to more conservative Islamic positions, Chishtiyya Sufism is far more inclusive than exclusive.

I bring out these points, the contested role and place of Sufism in Islam, the meaning and use of words like mystical, and religion, in order to problematize the idea that there is one Sufism, or one Islam, or even one *Qawwali* that can be defined and described by this or any other study. This is to “anthropologize the West” as Paul Rabinow (1986) has suggested and to “...show how their claims to truth are linked to social practices” (241). The danger here of

course, is to do the reverse, to valorize the previously marginalized position, and accept indigenous descriptions as invariant, agenda free fact. Rabinow's prescription here is to "...pluralize and diversify our approaches: a basic move against either economic or philosophic hegemony is to diversify centers of resistance: avoid the error of reverse essentializing; Occidentalism is not a remedy for Orientalism" (241). In this study I pluralize and diversify my approach with an interdisciplinary method incorporating elements from fieldwork and textual study with a variety of methods from the disciplines of ethnomusicology, anthropology, and psychology.

Orientalism is the term used by Edward Said (1994) to critique the tendency of Western scholars to legitimize colonial aggression by intellectually marginalizing and dominating non-Western people. Said's critique focused mainly on the Middle East. Richard King (1999), however, has extended Said's concerns by examining Western views of India and Indian religions and to problematize the tendency of the West to see South Asia as exotic, the 'Mystic East.' King emphasizes the need to "...examine the ways in which mysticism as a category has been constructed in the West, and the ways in which this notion has been projected onto Indian religious culture as a way of controlling, manipulating, and managing the Orient"(6). Although King focuses primarily on Hindu and Buddhist thought and practice, many of the same issues are involved in the study of *Qawwali* in postcolonial Maharashtra. Much of the early work on Sufism, especially Sufism in South Asia, was undertaken by British Orientalists, and three of the sites of my fieldwork, Pune, Ahmednagar, and Nagpur, were directly influenced by the British colonial regime, especially during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The area of Khuldabad has felt the influence of colonialism

indirectly through the impact of the colonial presence upon the patrons of its many *dargahs* during the colonial period.

Orientalism and Sufism

The word Sufism was first used in the English language by British Orientalists in India in the late 18th and early 19th century. To these writers such as Sir William Jones (d. 1794) and Sir John Malcolm (d. 1833), there seemed such a disjunct between formal Islamic practice and the sentiments expressed in Sufi (especially Persian) poetry (wine, love making, etc.) they assumed that Sufism could have little to do with the strictly circumscribed religion of Islam as they knew it. They concluded that Sufism must have been born of Indian influences.

Jones, Malcolm, and others expressed this view which continued throughout 19th century Orientalist scholarship until actual Sufi texts began to emerge which revealed the Islamic roots of Sufi thought and practice. Even so, the Orientalist view was latched on to by reformist Muslims, especially followers of Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792) who saw in Sufi practices a dangerous innovation, and a movement away from 'pure' Islam.

Wahhabis and other conservative, fundamentalist reformers condemned many Sufi practices, including the use of music, the veneration of saints and pilgrimage to their tombs (Ernst 1997). These very practices are central to the context of traditional *Qawwali* as it is performed across Maharashtra at the shrines of Muslim saints at their annual death anniversaries [*urs*], and throughout the year at various religious observances.

Many of the practices of South Asian Sufis, and of Sufis throughout the Islamic world, are criticized by conservative reformers as non-Islamic. Sufis, on the other hand, defend their

practices with quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith, affirming that their practices are firmly grounded in Islamic tradition. This ongoing confrontation of conservative reformers with Sufi practice is a large-scale example of a social drama. According to anthropologist Victor Turner (1986), a Social Drama occurs when:

A person or subgroup breaks a rule, deliberately or by inward compulsion, in a public setting. Conflicts between individuals, sections, and factions follow the original breach, revealing hidden clashes of character, interest, and ambition. These mount towards a crisis of the group's unity and continuity unless rapidly sealed off by redressive public action...If a social drama runs its full course, the outcome...may be either the restoration of peace and "normalcy" among the participants or social recognition of irremediable breach or schism (39).

In this case, the Islamic world is so huge (estimates run from one billion to 1.5 billion Muslims world wide), and so diverse, that the breach between the conservative side and the Sufi side is nuanced in such a way as to be understood differently by different factions. For most Sufis, however, as for all other Muslims, the sacred sources and core religious practices are the same. For most Sufis, supererogatory prayer and other additional practices are simply added to the compulsory requirements of being a Muslim. The important point is that for Sufis around the world, including those in Maharashtra and across South Asia, Sufism is an Islamic practice and should be understood as such. Regardless of criticisms from various quarters, Sufis themselves see their practices as Islamic, rooted in the same Qur'anic revelation and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad [hadith] from which conservative Muslims draw their own practices. Although his position is at odds with early Orientalist views of Sufism, and with conservative Muslims, when Burhan al-din Gharib of Khuldabad brought *Qawwali* to Maharashtra, he saw Sufism and the practice of *Qawwali* as Islamic, and a vital element of his own Islamic practice.

Significance of Project

This dissertation is the first interdisciplinary study of *Qawwali*, and focuses on *Qawwali* as a religious practice in which music and religion are coextensive. There has been little academic work done on *Qawwali* to date. Regula Qureshi's (1995) seminal ethnography was first published over 20 years ago, and was primarily based on fieldwork conducted as much as ten years earlier. Aside from a brief pamphlet by Adam Nayyar (1988) and biographical pieces on *Qawwali* master Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, little has been written on *Qawwali* in English. The study that follows takes an entirely different approach from Qureshi, who focused primarily on ethnography, musicological explication, and institutional ritual applications of *Qawwali*. By incorporating a number of complementary approaches, ethnomusicology, anthropology, psychology, and history of religions, this study sees *Qawwali* in context of the cross cultural use of music in religious worship, examining the psychological and psycho-social impact of *Qawwali* practice.

Along with providing a broad introduction to *Qawwali*, this project is also the first to document *Qawwali* in Khuldabad, a Sufi center whose importance was little documented until Carl Ernst's (1992) important work on the area was published. It is also the first work to document *Qawwali* at sites associated with the shrines of Taj al-Din Baba of Nagpur, Hazrat Babajan of Pune, and Mastan Shah of Ahmednagar. The documentation of these sites and the *Qawwali* recorded there show a very different side of *Qawwali* and everyday Sufi practice from that documented in the only major published work on *Qawwali* to date (Qureshi 1995). An important contribution of this aspect of the study is that it stands in contrast to Qureshi's work, in that the present study focuses on *Qawwali* as it is experienced outside of the formal

mahfil-i-sama setting. This underlines some of the varieties of *Qawwali* practice as it is experienced by those outside of the elite structures of institutional Sufism, including the poor, as well as non-Muslims.

In addition to presenting and preserving original field recordings of *Qawwali* in Maharashtra, this project is one of a very few to consider music and religion as coextensive in many worship situations, applying psychological analysis to historical data in conjunction with data gathered in the field. The only other work applying psychological analysis to the Sufi practice of *sama*' is *A Psychology of Early Sufi Sama': Listening and Altered States* by Kenneth S. Avery (2004), which relies almost entirely on historical data, and mainly focuses on narratives regarding trance and altered states of consciousness. This is an important work which examines primary texts on *sama*', drawing out and categorizing reports of a variety of reported behaviors related to listening and altered states of consciousness. The author focuses briefly on healing, but does not relate the data to identity formation or symbolic healing, nor does he look at music and religious practice as a cross cultural phenomenon. In addition, although the author does make use of some of Qureshi's fieldwork, he focuses on texts from the early medieval period, primarily from Middle Eastern sources. The present study takes the reader from synchronic field experience of *Qawwali* performance, to a diachronic history of *Qawwali* and *sama*' in Maharashtra, from the micro level of local *Qawwali* and *sama*' in context, to the broader macro level of music and religion as a cross cultural phenomenon, suggesting ways in which the phenomenon could be studied as an evolutionary adaptation which enhances central nervous system and immune system functioning in believers cross-culturally.



Figure 9 - Alim Nizami *Qawwal* smiles as he relates stories of his early experiences as a *qawwal*.



Figure 10 - Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* gestures as he performs at an evening *Qawwali*.

***Qawwali* and culture.**

It was over 50 years ago that Alim Nizami *Qawwal* (Fig. 9) began studying with his mentor, Master Habib *Qawwal*, a famous Maharashtra *qawwal* who grew up in a poor family in Ahmednagar. Master Habib later went on to have an impressive recording career, performing often on All India Radio, the national Indian radio network. When Alim was told that I was staying at Meherabad, his face brightened. He related that when he was 14 years-old he had sung before Meher Baba on several occasions, as a member of the party of Master Habib *Qawwal*. He also related that in later years he had performed at many functions at Meherabad.

On this evening, Alim is performing at a small local *dargah* [tomb-shrine] in Ahmednagar, singing for an enthusiastic group of worshippers from the neighborhood. Tonight Alim's performance is *bari ka gana*, or "singing by turn" with his old friend Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* (Fig. 10), a singer from the neighborhood. Although Mahmud lives across the street from the

dargah, he has a reputation throughout the region as an accomplished *qawwal*. *Bari ka gana* is often engaged in as a competitive practice. Tonight, however, there is little of the competitive spirit. Alim and Mahmud are relaxed and among friends, engaging in a practice that is clearly enjoyable for both men, as well as for their accomanists, and for their audience.

Although the performance of *Qawwali* is considered controversial to some Muslims, it is an integral part of the culture of this small Ahmednagar neighborhood. Just down the street from the *dargah* there are several small stalls selling *Qawwali* tapes and CDs. *Qawwali* is also an integral part of the culture of South Asia in general. As my friend, Akbar Khan explained, *Qawwali* is not compulsory for Muslims in South Asia, it is a traditional practice, a practice that is undertaken above and beyond the normal obligations of a religious Muslim. *Qawwalis* are often held at night, not in order to improve the atmosphere of the performance, but in order to avoid interfering with the five times daily prayers which Muslims perform. Only men attend a *Qawwali* at a *dargah*, unless special arrangements have been made to accommodate female worshippers. The men all wear a *kufi*, or skullcap, at the *dargah*, as a sign of respect. All of these behaviors are considered to be natural expressions of Islamic practice, as is the performance of *Qawwali*. Exactly how the performance of *Qawwali* fits into Islamic culture in Maharashtra, what its function is, and why it is considered by some to be an essential aspect of Islamic faith, is the subject of this dissertation.

CHAPTER I

HEARING IS SUPERIOR TO SIGHT: SOUND, SYMBOL, AND EMBODIMENT IN *QAWWALI*



Figure 11 - Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* and Party, with his son and vocalist, Shabaz Nizami (left); harmonium player, Abu Bakr Bhai; and *dholak* player Sandar dholakmaster (background).

Personal Fieldnote—Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* travels throughout Maharashtra and the surrounding districts pursuing performance opportunities as a *qawwal*. He often sings in his neighborhood *dargah* as well (Fig. 11). Prior to an afternoon *Qawwali* program, I visited Mahmud and his family at their home in Ahmednagar. Standing in the doorway of Mahmud's small house, I can hear the familiar soundscape of modern India. The constant buzz of scooter rickshaws, motor bikes, and the roar of diesel trucks from the main road, only a few yards away,

fill the air. At the same time, I notice that I am also surrounded by the physical relics of history. To the right is a small dargah, or tomb-shrine (Fig. 12), erected over one hundred years ago in memory of a local holy man, Mastan Shah [king of the intoxicated] (d. 19th c). To the left is a walkway that passes through a small entrance built into a 14-foot high stone wall which leads into an old section of Ahmednagar. According to local tradition, this section of stone wall is one of the few remaining sections of the original wall of the city of Ahmednagar, constructed by Ahmed Nizam Shah (d. 1508-9) over 500 years ago (Fig. 13). As we walk over to the dargah, we find that Mahmud's Qawwali party has already begun to assemble, along with several visitors from the neighborhood who had heard that Mahmud would be performing this afternoon. As the sounds of Qawwali music begin to fill the small room, I notice that the sounds Mahmud is creating, like the environment in which he lives, are a blend of old and new, modern innovations that coexist with ancient structures.

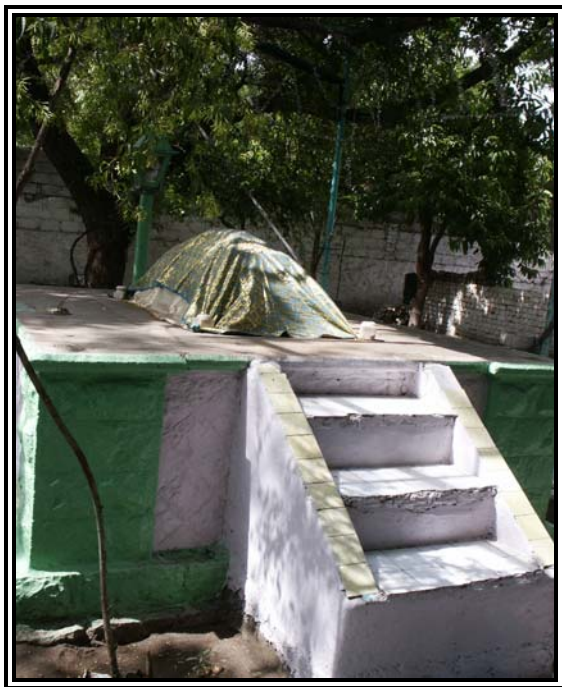


Figure 12 - Tomb of Mastan Shah, Ahmednagar.

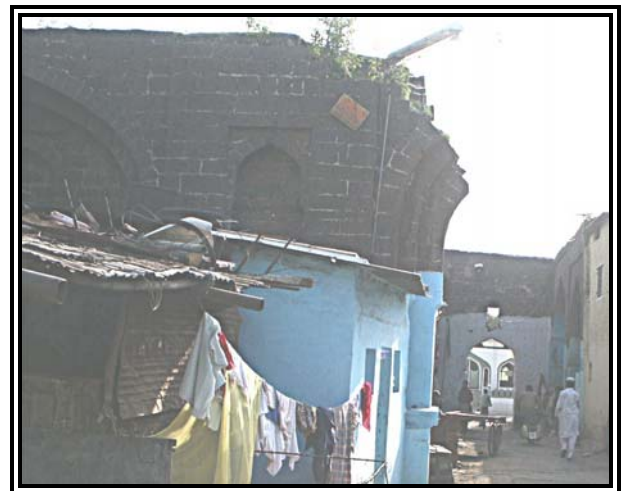


Figure 13 - Portion of the original wall of the old city, Ahmednagar.

In this chapter I use the sounds of *Qawwali*, created by Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* of Ahmednagar and his *Qawwali* party, as an aural example of some of the key symbols encountered in the *Qawwali* soundscape. These sounds are not created for aesthetic reasons alone, but have specific religious functions. *Qawwali* scholar and musicologist Regula Qureshi (1995) identifies three specific religious functions of *Qawwali*:

1. *Qawwali* serves to generate spiritual arousal.
2. *Qawwali* serves to convey a text message of mystical poetry.
3. *Qawwali* serves to satisfy listeners' diverse and changing spiritual requirements (60).

Although one may indeed identify these three functions of *Qawwali*, in practice *Qawwali* has one primary function: spiritual arousal. The other two components serve the function of spiritual arousal through interaction with the objective forms of poetic compositions and diverse assemblies of listeners. The focus on spiritual arousal is a requirement of *Qawwali*'s relationship to the symbolic categories of allowed [*halal*] and forbidden [*haram*]. *Qawwali* must of necessity focus upon spiritual arousal, otherwise there is a danger that it will inspire the listener to focus upon worldly desires. The spiritual function of *Qawwali* dictates its distinctive symbolic features. These symbols generate for the listener a subjective sense of spiritual arousal through an encounter with *baraka* [spiritual power, or blessing] transmitted through the sounds of the music itself. As Qureshi says, "...*Qawwali* music has special features which render it distinct from all other musical idioms of the region. These features are directly linked to the basic *raison d'être* of *Qawwali* music: its religious function and context of use" (58). I identify here three symbolic categories which are distinct features of *Qawwali*: The Beautiful Voice, the Rhythm of *Dhikr*, and the Dynamic Flow of Ecstasy, and discuss their relationship to embodiment and worship. Before detailing the symbolic elements found within each of these three categories, there are certain aesthetics of sound in Sufi ideology that will be helpful to explore.

Sound as Spiritual Power

Sound itself is a symbol of power in classical Sufi discourse. One of the first important Sufi writers in Persian, and an early South Asian Sufi thinker, Ali al-Hujwiri, emphasized sound by arguing that hearing, or listening, is superior to sight.

God has sent Apostles with true evidences, but belief in His Apostles does not become obligatory until the obligatoriness of knowing God is ascertained by means of hearing. It is hearing, then, that makes religion obligatory; and for this reason the Sunnis regard hearing as superior to sight in the domain of religious obligation (*taklif*). If it be said that vision of God is better than hearing His word, I reply that our knowledge of God's visibility to the faithful in Paradise is derived from hearing: it is a matter of indifference whether the understanding allows that God shall be visible or not, inasmuch as we are assured of the fact by oral tradition. Hence hearing is superior to sight. (Nicholson 2000:393)

Andalusian Sufi *shaykh* Ibn 'Arabi, emphasizes the importance of sound with a similar argument.

God says “[God is] Listening, Knowing” (Koran 9:98), and He says, “[God is] Listening, Seeing” (22:61). Hence He places listening before knowledge and sight. The first thing we knew from God and which became connected to us from Him was His speech (*qawl*) and our listening (*sama'*)...The cosmos can have no existence without Speech on God's part and listening on the part of the cosmos. (Chittick 1989:213)

Ibn 'Arabi sees all things coming into being through the breath of God's speech [*qawl*].

Referring to Sura 16:40 of the Qur'an¹⁰, Ibn 'Arabi says of Allah, “‘Be!’ is exactly what He speaks. Through it, that to which he says ‘Be!’ becomes manifest” (Chittick 1989:128). By this reading, all manifest creation and the phenomenal world itself comes into being through sound. It is through hearing the sound of God's command to “‘Be!’” that His creatures come to love him.

As for our love for Him, its origin is audition, not vision. It is His words to us—while we were in the substance of the Cloud—“‘Be!’” Hence the Cloud derives from His breathing, while the forms which are called the cosmos derive from the word “‘Be!’” So we are “His words which are not spent.” ...When we heard His speech while we were immutable in the substance of the Cloud, we were not able to keep back from existence...This is the

¹⁰ For anything We have willed, We but say the Word, “‘Be!’”and it is (S16:40).

cause of the origin of our love for him (Chittick 1989:128).

Less esoteric approaches to Islamic practice recognize that the power of sound can also have a negative effect, especially if that sound should incite drinking and licentious behavior. From the combination of these two lines of thought establish with some clarity the idea that sound is powerful. It is because sound is powerful, that early thinkers felt that it was imperative to see that this power was used only for sacred purposes.

Halal and Haram as symbolic categories

Islamic law, or jurisprudence [*fiqh*] recognizes five categories of action: that which is prohibited [*haram*], discouraged [*makruh*], neutral [*mubah*], recommended [*mustahabb*], and that which is obligatory [*fard*]. That which is released from any prohibition is termed *halal* [released].

Although the word *halal* is usually used in reference to dietary prescriptions, it is also understood as the antonym of *haram* (Glasse 1989). The symbolic categories of *halal* and *haram*, then, have come to represent sacred and profane spheres of behavior in Islamic society. In terms of sound and music, the question has never been whether sound is powerful, the question is: to what end will this power be used? The debate around the use of music, then, is essentially a question of which category the use of music falls into: *halal* or *haram*, allowed or prohibited? *Halal* and *haram* are key concepts in understanding why it is imperative for Sufis to affirm that music is coextensive with religion in the practice of *sama'* and *Qawwali*, *Qawwali* being a specifically South Asian variant of *sama'*.

In the context of mystical Islam, *sama'* [listening] refers to formal communal gatherings arranged for listening to spiritual music (usually inspired texts set to music) as well as programs

for spiritual dance. In all of these cases the intention of the gathering is to inspire ecstatic states of religious experience in the participants. The premise of listening to music for spiritual purposes is an intriguing one in itself, but the issue becomes more complex when one considers the opposition within Islam the practice has inspired for over ten centuries. For our purposes here, it will be useful to understand something of what is at stake.

Music and poetry were important features of life in pre-Islamic Arabia and their appreciation did not seriously decline in the early centuries of Islam. According to Orientalist scholar of Arabmusic, Henry Farmer (2001), music was commonplace during the reign of the early *khalifas* [successors] of the Prophet Muhammad. Ali, son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet, and the fourth *khalifa*, "...was the first *khalifa* who extended any real protection to the fine arts and letters by authorizing the study of sciences, poetry, and music" (43). This is of particular interest, since Ali's opinion is respected by both *Sunni* and *Shi'ah* Muslims. If such an important, early Islamic leader was a supporter of the arts, why did music become so controversial in later centuries?

There is no official clergy in Islam, no central religious body of authority. Islamic religious law [sharia] is determined largely by arguments based upon religious scripture, primarily the Qur'an and the hadith [Traditions of the Prophet]. As the Qur'an makes no explicit mention of the question of music, most arguments refer to the hadith (Shiloah 1997). One of the earliest important arguments against music, written more than two centuries after the death of the Prophet, is Ibn Abi al-Dunya's (d. 894) *Dhamm al-Malahi* [The Book of the Censure of Instruments of Diversion]. Ibn Abi al-Dunya was a prominent student of hadith who was devoted

to the religious life. He was tutor to the Abbasid *khalifa* al-Mu'tadid (d. 902) and his son, the *khalifa* al-Muktafi (d. 908) (Shiloah 1997; Robson 1938). This was a period when music was prominent at court, musicians were rewarded handsomely, and music parties were accompanied by much frivolity, singing girls, and the drinking of alcohol. Ethnomusicologist Amnon Shiloah (1997) sees this as "...the background of Ibn abi'l-Dunya's diatribe against music" (145). In speaking of the caliphate of that period, Shiloah says,

In the face of their passionate love for music and eagerness for pleasure, which were often combined with drinking and libertinage, it is easy to understand the vexation of Muslim rigorists who therefore adopted a puritanical attitude, stressing scriptural observance more than feelings. To my understanding, this conflicting attitude may well have been one of the major factors in the emerging debate over the lawfulness of music (145).

Whatever Ibn abi'l-Dunya's motivation, the arguments in his "diatribe against music", *Dhamm al-Malahi*, became the standard model which continues to be followed in legalist arguments against music in Islam today. Since there is no direct mention of music in the Qur'an, Ibn abi'l-Dunya relies mainly upon hadith, most of which only touch on music tangentially, and many of which cite later caliphs and *shaykhs*, not the Prophet himself. The citations usually address "diversions" generally, including games such as backgammon and chess, denouncing them as a distraction from prayer and religious practice. The following is typical of hadith cited by Ibn abi'l-Dunya in *Dhamm al-Malahi*.

And on the authority of Abu Huraira (Allah be pleased with him!), he said, Allah's apostle (Allah bless him, etc.) said, "In the last time some of this people will be metamorphosed into apes and swine." They said, "O apostle of Allah, they testify that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is Allah's apostle." He said, "Yes, indeed, and they fast, pray and perform the pilgrimage." They said, "Then what is the matter with them?" He said, "They have employed stringed instruments, tambourines (*dufuf*), and singing girls, and spent the night at drinking and their diversion, so in the morning they will have been metamorphosed into apes and swine" (Robson 21-22).

Responses to legalist objections to the use of music in religious contexts typically argue that, although some forms of music may distract Muslims from religious obligations, spiritual music is itself a form of supererogatory prayer, and is an aid, not a hindrance, to the religious life.

Important proponents of *sama*’ are Ali al-Hujwiri (d. 1073; full name: Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali ibn ‘Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri al-Ghaznawi) of Lahore, in modern Pakistan, the famous theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (d. 1111; full name: Hujjat al-Islam abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali Tusi), and his lesser-known brother, Majd al-Din (d. 1126; full name: Abul Futuh Ahmad ibn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Tusi al-Ghazzali). Al-Hujwiri seems to speak directly to Ibn Abi al-Dunya’s argument against diversions when he counters by insisting that,

Anyone who says that he finds no pleasure in sounds and melodies and music is either a liar and a hypocrite or he is not in his right senses, and is outside the category of men and beasts. Those who prohibit music do so in order that they may keep the Divine commandment, but theologians are agreed that it is permissible to hear musical instruments if they are not used for diversion, and if the mind is not led to wickedness through hearing them (Nicholson 2000:401).

For Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, the mystery of *sama*’ is hidden, but its value is self evident. In the *Alchemy of Happiness [Kimiya al-saadat]* he begins his chapter on *sama*’ with the following.

Know that God Most High has a mystery in the human heart. It is hidden in it just as fire in iron: when a stone is struck on iron the mystery (fire) is made manifest and plain. In the same way listening to fine music (*sama-i khush*) and rhythmic song (*awaz-i mawzun*) excites that essence in the heart (Salam 2002:5).¹¹

Although *sama*’ has never been universally accepted, al-Ghazzali was such an influential thinker that his support of the practice led to greater tolerance among Sunni legalists and theologians (Gribetz 1991).

¹¹ In an earlier variation of this idea Sufi writer Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi says, “When audition strikes the ears, it stirs the secret things of the heart...” (Arberry 1966:182).

Various details of behavior and etiquette [*adab*] that Sufis have employed in the practice of listening have primarily been in an effort to assure that *sama'* and *Qawwali* fall unquestionably into the *halal*, permitted, category of Islamic law. The attacks upon *sama'*, which were largely attacks by legalists upon the Sufi worldview in general, not simply music or *sama'*, actually served to encourage Sufis to attribute more and more powerful effects to music and to further emphasize its potential for spiritual benefit. These ongoing attacks on the practice of *sama'* contributed to the development of symbolic features of the ritual practice, as well as symbolic characteristics in the music itself which represent not only the *potential* for experiencing spiritual power and blessing [*baraka*], but the manifestation of that spiritual power itself.

The fact that Ibn Abi al-Dunya does not actually criticize *sama'* as a practice suggests that *sama'* may have evolved in response to legalist arguments against music. Abi al-Dunya includes music as one of the general group of “diversions” from right living that the elite of Baghdad of the period indulged in. *Sama'* as practiced by Sufi orders is not opposed until later periods. This suggests that *sama'* as a formal practice was still in its formative stages, and that key developments in *sama'* as a ritual practice were defensive moves in order to affirm the propriety of the practice. Even today in India *sama'* is practiced as an imitation of the royal court. The physical arrangement is that of a *darbar* [royal court], with the musicians facing the *shaykh*, (or doorway of the tomb-shrine of a departed saint [*wali*]). The themes of the song texts of the *sama'* include songs in praise of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, but love songs [*ghazals*] are also included, as they were at court, but are understood metaphorically. To say that one is enraptured by the beloved is meant to signify love for the spiritual master, the *shaykh*, or God; the wine cup is the heart; the wine within is the consuming, intoxicating state of ecstatic love for God. It

would seem that the development of the *sama'* ritual was constructed deliberately in response to legalists like Ibn Abi al-Dunya who criticized music in the royal courts of Baghdad. It is as the Sufi response was: “Yes, we use music, just like the people at court, but we answer every one of your objections by directing our activities towards the remembrance [*dhikr*] of God.” This in turn led to an emphasis on symbolic features in the music itself, which supported the spiritual aims of *sama'*.

Because of the importance of music and *sama'* in South Asian Chishtiyya Sufism, the symbolic features of music in *Qawwali* take on special importance. Chishti Sufi scholars Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence survey the order in their book *Sufi Martyrs of Love*. In the section of their book discussing *sama'*, they summarize the possible Sufi approaches to *sama'*.

Sama' relates to the spiritual progress of a Muslim mystic or Sufi adept in one of three ways: (1) it may be totally excluded as inappropriate to Islamic teaching—mystical or nonmystical (as the Mughal *Shaykh* Ahmad Sirhindi [d. 1624] and his suborder, the Mujaddidiyya Naqshbandiyya, believed); (2) it may be accepted as a penultimate stage on the mystical ladder leading to ontological unity, i.e. perfection; or (3) it may be viewed as the top rung of the ladder, itself the ultimate mystical experience when properly pursued (Ernst & Lawrence 2002:34).

According to Ernst and Lawrence, for Chishti theorists, the debate concerning *sama'* has always revolved around the second or third categories. Ernst and Lawrence see *sama'* as the “...integrating modus operandi of the Chishti order” (36). The importance of *sama'* for Chishti Sufis, and the emphasis that they place on the power of the *sama'* experience underline the power and importance of musical sound and its role in the transmission of *baraka* in the performance of *Qawwali*.



Figure 14 - Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* invokes the presence of the Beautiful Voice as he performs a *Qawwali* song.

The Beautiful Voice

Personal Fieldnote—As the small assembled group begins to gather, Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* signals his harmonium player, Abu Bakr Bhai, who begins the first *Qawwali* song with a *Naghmaa*, or instrumental prelude (Music track 3). As the rhythmic accompaniment to the harmonium resounds through the courtyard, it alerts passers by that the *Qawwali* has begun, and more people from the neighborhood begin to join the assembly. After a few moments, Mahmud begins a vocal improvisation. As he does so, he is enacting a standard technique for beginning a *Qawwali* song, the *alap*, a form related to North Indian Classical music. He is also enacting one of the primary symbolic expressions found in the *Qawwali* soundscape: the beautiful voice (Fig. 14).

The beautiful voice is originally the voice of God, speaking to the unborn souls of humanity at the beginning of time. God asks the assembled souls if they belong to him or not, those souls

who respond by saying “yes” have in effect agreed to take part in the first covenant with the creator. This event is known as the “covenant of *alast*¹²,” and is the primordial agreement between God and his creatures, established prior to the creation of the world. This covenant is frequently cited by Sufis, and appears in the Qur’an, Sura 7:172, as follows:

When thy Lord drew forth from the children of Adam—From their loins—Their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): “Am I not your Lord (who cherishes you and sustains you)?”—They said “Yea, we do testify!” (This), lest ye should say on the Day Of Judgment: “Of this we were never mindful.”

A disciple of Burhan al-Din Gharib of Khuldabad, Rukn al-Din Kashani (d. after 1337), cites the Sufi *shaykh* Junayd of Baghdad (d. 910) who interprets the relationship of the beautiful voice to the original covenant with God.

When to the essence of the children of Adam on the day of the covenant there came the words “Am I not your Lord,” all the spirits became absorbed by its delight. Thus those who came into this world, whenever they hear a beautiful voice, their spirits tremble and are disturbed by the memory of that speech, because the influence of that speech is in the beautiful voice (quoted in Ernst 1992:151).

Understood in this context, the sound of the voice in musical expression is itself symbolic of the voice of God speaking to his creatures prior to the creation. Mahmud’s vocal improvisations in the above example can be understood as an enactment, or invocation of the beautiful voice, awakening the memory of God’s original speech [*qawl*] in the soul of the listener until “...their spirits tremble and are disturbed by the memory of that speech...” This felt sense of an awakened memory creates in the listener a sense of the mystical experience of a timeless, eternal communion with the sacred Other. Evoking this type of experience in the listener is the goal of religious *Qawwali*.

¹² From *A-lastu bi-rabbikum* [Am I not your Lord?], Sura 7:172.

Personal Fieldnote—As Mahmud continues his vocal expressions (Music track 3), he begins to sing the *ruba'i*, or *Introductory Verse*. Just as God's creatures answer God's question to them in the Qur'anic passage ("Yea, we do testify!"), so Mahmud is soon answered by his younger (though less accomplished) fellow *qawwal*, with another line of text, and the pattern of call and response, which will continue throughout the song, begins.

This same Qur'anic passage, Sura 7:172, recounting the covenant of *alast*, also articulates the original call and response between God and his creatures, and is itself remembered whenever believers gather for *sama'*. According to Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), whose verses are often used as *Qawwali* song texts, God also enjoys hearing the voice of his creatures. In the following passage, Rumi imagines the voice of God explaining his delay in answering prayer:

God says it is not from His own wish - His friendship is the essence of the delayed gift. "Need brought man from forgetfulness towards me; it yanked him by his hair to my presence. If I fulfill his need, he will go back, and will become absorbed in that game again. But if he cries out with his soul, 'Save me,' lamenting with broken heart and injured breast, his voice sounds sweet to me, like his calling out 'God!' and telling his secret" (Ernst 2007:9).

Vocal call and response is a prominent feature of all *Qawwali*. The give and take between the lead singer and the other members of the *Qawwali* party simultaneously represents communication between the singers, communication between the *Qawwali* party and the audience (whose response is the act of active listening), and communication between God and his creatures. This give and take emphasizes both the unity and the separation between human beings and their creator. As Kashani says, "*Sama'* is the recollection of the speech of the Covenant, and the burning of the fire of longing" (quoted in Ernst 1992:151). This fire of longing is often reproduced in *Qawwali* song texts as love songs [*ghazals*] featuring a dialogue in which the lover (the seeker) expresses longing for the Beloved (God). According to Sufi scholar Bruce

Lawrence (1983), the dialectic relationship between God and humankind found in early Sufi *ghazals* represents the paradox of

...a reciprocal relationship between the divine Beloved, who was also the supreme Creator, and the human lover, who was but a humble creature...Its fundamental precondition was separation. Separation was mandated, because without separation there could be no love relationship, and yet separation was also minimized, for union was the ultimate goal of every Sufi adept...(69).

This longing is reflected in an aesthetic in which the ideal voice expresses pain [*dard*] and longing and emphasizes the sense of separation from the Beloved. This longing is awakened when a beautiful voice sings out the pain of separation and reminds the listener of the covenant with the Beloved. As Rashid al-Din Maybudi (d. 1126) expresses in his commentary on the Qur'an:

How sweet was that day when the foundation of love was laid! How precious the time when the covenant of love was made! Those who aspire (*muridan*) never forget that first day of spiritual intent (*iradat*). Those of anguished longing (*mushtaqan*) know that moment of union to be the crown of life and the focal point (*qibla*) of all time (Keeler 2006:141).

When in such a state of longing, the only thing that that brings solace to the heart of the believer and soothes this sense of separation is constant remembrance of the Beloved. The expression of the Beautiful Voice, and its often explicit associations with the mystical sense of a timeless union with the creator, is one of the key symbolic expressions which facilitates remembrance through *Qawwali*. Another symbolic expression which facilitates remembrance through *Qawwali* is the Rhythm of *Dhikr*.



Figure 15 - Asrarbhai (foreground, right) emphasizes the Rhythm of *Dhikr* with hand-claps, as Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* gestures (left), Abu Bakr Bhai plays harmonium, Hashulal and Sandar play *dholaks* in the background, and Shaykh Razak (behind Asrarbhai) joins the vocal chorus.

Remembrance of God and The Rhythm of *Dhikr*

Personal Fieldnote—After several repetitions of improvised call and response, Mahmud subtly shifts his voice into rhythm, simultaneously signaling the two *dholak* [hand drum] players to slip into tempo behind him (Music track 3). One *dholak* emphasizes a steady, immovable downbeat, while the other introduces accents, flourishes, and polyrhythms. Mahmud resumes his vocal improvisations, but now with the insistent rhythm of the *dholaks* behind him. The harmonium joins in, as do several of the other *qawwals* in the party, who emphasize the insistent rhythm with their hand claps providing an essential adjunct to the persistent beat of the *dholaks* (Fig. 15).

A dominant rhythm, regardless of the meter [*theka*], while not unique to *Qawwali*, is a distinct feature of the genre, explicitly linked to the practice of *dhikr* [remembrance, or *dhikr* Allah, remembrance of God]. The idea of simply remembering God [*Dhikr*] is encouraged in the

Qur'an¹³, and eventually became a formal ritual practice involving verbal, group repetition of God's name, or some combination of sacred formulae (often involving the profession of faith [*shahada*¹⁴]), in highly stylized, rhythmic patterns. Sufi thinker Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 990) cites an early reference associating the practice of *dhikr* [Persian: *zīkr*] with remembrance of the covenant discussed above:

The people heard their first *zīkr* when God addressed them, saying, "am I not your Lord?" This *zīkr* was secreted in their hearts, even as the fact (thus communicated) was secreted in their intellects. So, when they heard the (Sufi) *zīkr*, the secret things of their hearts appeared, and they were ravished, just as the secret things of their intellects appeared when God informed them of this, and they believed (Arberry 1966:183).

Like *sama'*, the performance of *dhikr* was controversial in early Sufi circles. All agreed that remembrance was beneficial, but the question of whether it should be silent remembrance or spoken was critical. Also like *sama'*, *dhikr* was recognized as powerful and potentially harmful, so specific guidelines were established. Most guidelines included the requirement that *dhikr* rituals should not be practiced alone, that a *shaykh* should lead a congregation of believers in the practice, and that only those with some understanding of the Sufi path and the mystical goal of the practice should take part. The spoken *dhikr* ritual has developed along several different lines, but most varieties of the practice include the repetition of God's name along with rhythmic, controlled breathing, and certain repetitive movements and gestures which build in intensity over a period of time, and which encourage spiritual arousal (Schimmel 1975). When Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* leads his *Qawwali* party into the rhythmic phase of a *Qawwali* song, he is invoking the spirit of this type of rhythmic *dhikr*. An emphatic rhythm that echoes the rhythm of

¹³ "O ye who believe! Remember Allah with much remembrance!" Sura 33:41 (Pickthall 1997:304). "Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest!" Sura 13:28 (Pickthall 1997:185). "So remember the name of thy Lord and devote thyself with a complete devotion." Sura 73:8 (Pickthall 1997:419).

¹⁴ There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of God [*la ilaha illa-llah, wa muhammadan rasulu-llah*].

dhikr is an aspect of the *Qawwali* soundscape employed expressly in order to initiate an ecstatic state in the listener. Qureshi (1995) makes it clear that connection is intended to be explicit.

A strong rhythmic framework and an emphatic stress pattern or pulse (*zarb*) – often compared with the heartbeat (also called *zarb*) by *Qawwals* and Sufis alike – are considered essential for the soul to become moved (*qalb jari hojana*). In more concrete terms, the recurring beat is to suggest the continuous repetition of God’s name (*zikr*), and to guide the Sufi’s movement in ecstatic dancing (*raqs*)

Musically, this dual requirement of a strong rhythmic framework and an emphatic stress pattern affects both duration and acoustic presentation. Thus, *Qawwali* music favours a durational framework consisting of metres with simple and regular durational patterns, clearly articulated by vigorous and recurring stresses (60).

These “vigorous and recurring stresses” then are explicit symbols of the human heartbeat, the recurring pulsation of the beating heart of a lover longing for the Beloved. Simultaneous to this image is the implicit reminder that one is participating in a form of *dhikr*, and that each beat of the *dholak* gives voice to a repetition of the name of God. The program itself is modeled on the *dhikr*. “*Qawwals* agree that with the downbeat of the drum the listener’s head moves in silent repetition of God’s name (*zikr*), and the listener’s foot moves in the dance of ecstasy (*raqs*). Even the recurring drum beat alone may cause ecstasy” (Qureshi 1995:60).

Ritualized prayer recitation is an important developmental link between the recitation of the Qur’an, the practice of *dhikr*, and the singing of sacred texts in *Qawwali*. The inspired prayer texts traditionally chanted by Sufi orders are often understood to be a similar in practice to *dhikr*. These supplicatory prayers known as *ahzab* [sing. *hizb*] are inspired compositions of Sufi *shaykhs*, and are important aspects of the oral culture which contributed to the development of musical practices such as *Qawwali*.

Richard McGregor (1997) refers to these prayers as a “lesser tradition” of texts “...because they fall somewhere between the ‘greater works’ of Sufi literary traditions and studies in the history of Sufi *turuq*¹⁵ and institutions...” (255) and are often neglected by scholarship. These prayers, repeated rhythmically, in groups, much the way *dhikr* is performed, often express an attitude of supplication, or request [*du’a*; pl. *ad’iya*], and are a more personalized petition than the ritual duty of the five times daily prayer [*salat*]. The term *wird* [pl. *awrad*], is often used to refer to the time that one devotes to such superagatory prayer, but, because the central teaching message of a *shaykh* is often found in these prayer texts, *wird* may take on a number of meanings, it may even refer to the entire Sufi brotherhood. This tradition of employing inspired text for the purpose of prayer and supplication is closely related to the development of the singing of inspired texts in South Asian *Qawwali*¹⁶.

In addition to associations with *dhikr*, the emphatic rhythms of *Qawwali* emphasize embodiment by inspiring movement. For many Sufis, one of the prime attractions of *sama’* is the inspiration to movement and its expression. Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mevlevi order is a prominent example of expressive movement integrated into the *sama’*. For other Sufis, movement is only allowed when one has become enraptured by a genuine ecstatic state [*hal*]. Al-Ghazzali was very supportive of dance. He says, “If someone says that (dancing) is forbidden, he errs. Indeed, the worst of this is that it is play, and playing is not forbidden. And as for the person who does it in order to strengthen that state which appears in his heart, that is itself praiseworthy” (Salam 2002:28).

Burhan al-Din Gharib is said to have greatly enjoyed movement and dance during *sama’*. Yet, Burhan al-Din’s *shaykh*, Nizam al-Din Awliya, once scolded Amir Khusrau for dancing during

¹⁵ Mystical order or brotherhood.

¹⁶ For a broader discussion of prayer repetition in the Shadhiliyya order, see McGregor 1997.

sama', telling him that he was not yet advanced enough to give in to such expressive behavior. Formal *sama'* in the Indian subcontinent is often characterized by a prohibition on movement, especially exaggerated movements that might distract another listener. Even so, the music of *Qawwali* is so dynamic and rhythmic, and inspires such emotion, that it often takes enormous concentration to remain motionless. Al-Hujwiri observes that it is the beginners who have the most trouble remaining calm during *sama'*, while adepts are able to remain tranquil in all situations. He tells the following story about such a beginner, who was a disciple of Junayd of Baghdad:

Junayd had a disciple who was wont to be greatly agitated in audition, so that the other dervishes were distracted. They complained to Junayd, and he told the disciple that he would not associate with him if he displayed such agitation in the future. "I watched that dervish," says Abu Muhammad Jurayri, "during audition: he kept his lips shut and was silent until every pore in his body opened; then he lost consciousness, and remained in that state for a whole day. I know not whether his audition or his reverence for his spiritual director was more perfect" (quoted in Nicholson 2000:408)

The emphasis, then, is on remaining motionless, and letting the impact of the musical and textual symbols arouse the spiritual emotions and mystical experience. As Qureshi (1995) observes, however, "While different saintly lineages and teaching traditions vary in the extent to which they permit such outward expression, all recognize that, in the extreme state of ecstasy, complete restraint from physical movement is impossible" (120). Even so, the express purpose of remaining still while under the dynamic influence of the rhythms of *sama'* is to facilitate the transformation physical sensations into states of spiritual ecstasy [*Wajd*].



Figure 16 - Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* gestures, signaling his accompanists to join with him in *parti ghana*, or group singing.

The Dynamic Flow of Ecstasy

Personal Fieldnote—As Mahmud continues to sing (Music track 3), the patterns of call and response continue, alternating with sections of *parti ghana*, or sections of refrain during which the entire party sings in unison (Fig. 6). The tempo and volume build in intensity until Mahmud signals the *dholaks* to stop. As Mahmud continues with his vocal line, he begins to decrease the tempo. The vocal slows almost to a halt, allowing the listener to anticipate the ending. Instead of stopping, however, Mahmud signals the *dholaks* to resume, this time with new intensity that quickly builds to the song's conclusion. As the sound of the harmonium trails off, Mahmud can be heard uttering an invocation of praise to “*Gahrib Nawaz*” [*Patron of the Poor*], the affectionate nickname of Mu'in al-Din Chishti, founder of the Chishti order of Sufism in South Asia.

The dynamic flow of intensity expressed as Mahmud's *Qawwali* performance progresses, the quickening tempo, increased volume, sections of *girah*, or improvised verses, combined with call and response, and *parti ghana*, or group singing of the refrain, are all symbolic, aural representations of the spiritual arousal of the listener. The dynamic flow of musical sounds mirrors the dynamic flow of the listener's emotional state of arousal. An accomplished *qawwal* will monitor his listener's responses and mirror them with a corresponding dynamic intensity in the sounds he creates. This is enacted within individual songs, as well as in song selection and pacing of the *Qawwali* program. An effective program may last far into the night, and even as late as the time for the morning prayer, if the *qawwal* has effectively aroused his listeners.

As Lawrence emphasized earlier in this chapter, the fundamental precondition for relationship between the divine and human is separation. This condition is understood to exist until the lover/devotee ascends to the highest level of union with the divine. It is the purpose of *sama'* to expedite this process. The soundscape of *Qawwali* mimics the subjective experience of spiritual arousal by creating an aural dynamism that is as seductive as it is captivating. The *qawwal's* express purpose is to create a musical atmosphere that invites an ecstatic experience of union with the Beloved. The ebb and flow of the music is intended to symbolically represent the ascent to union. Ibn Arabi describes the ascension to union in this way,

...all the steps of the meanings for the prophets, the friends, the faithful, and the messengers are the same. No ladder has a single step more than any other. The first step is *Islam*, which is submission (*inqiyad*). The last step is annihilation (*fana*) in going up (*'uruj*) and subsistence (*baqa*) in coming out (*khuruj*) (Chittick 1989:219).

Ruzbihan Baqli describes a similar process:

“Then is the station of unification (*ittihad*), of which the beginning is annihilation (*fana*), the middle subsistence (*baqa*), and the end essential union (*'ayn al-jam'*). Annihilation is

the veil of subsistence, and subsistence is the veil of annihilation, but essential union is pure unification (Ernst 1985:94).

Elsewhere, Baqli explicitly links the experience of *fana* with music:

Spiritual music is the audition and vision of Divine Presence (*hudur*). It is terror and sorrow. It is wonder in wonder. In that world canons cease to exist. The man of knowledge becomes ignorant and the lover is annihilated. (Nasr 1976:41)

There are, of course, many intermediary steps, or stations, prior to the final, “essential” union. The Sufi mystic al-Hallaj (d. 922), claimed to have achieved this state of essential union with God, and is said to have been put to death in Baghdad as a heretic for uttering the words “I am truth!” This historic moment in early Sufism is referred to by Persian poet Hafiz (*Khawaja Shams al-Din Hafiz-i Shirazi*, d. 1389) in one of his *ghazals*, which says: “Our friend who ended on the gallows—his only crime was this—the blabbing of secrets” (Avery Stubbs 1952:43). It is this subjective experience of union to which the listener aspires in *sama'*, and for which the *Qawwal* provides an aural catalyst.

Sufi *shaykhs* have had a variety of approaches to understanding ecstasy and the stages of the path. One simplified formulation is that there are the three stages of ecstasy: *tawajud*, *wajd*, and *wujud*. According to Ibn al-Arabi (Chittick 1989), *tawajud* means “inviting ecstasy, since it is self exertion in order to experience ecstasy” (212), *wajd* is “the states [*ahwal*] that come upon the heart unexpectedly and annihilate it from witnessing itself and those present” (212), and *wujud* means “finding [*wijdan*] the Real [*al-haqq*] in ecstasy” (212). *Wajd* and *wujud* are generally considered the more exalted states, while *tawajud* was often frowned upon as frivolous. Many of the early non-Indian *shaykhs* were against the idea of what often appeared to be “pretending” to go into ecstasy, the early Chishti *shaykhs*, however, including Burhan al-Din Gharib of Khuldabad, encouraged *Tawajud* and found it indispensable for beginners because it provided

them with a technique for learning how to enter into exalted states. One *shaykh*, Mas'ud Bakk (d. 1387), saw *tawajud* as "...a threshold experience integral to *sama* ..." (Lawrence 1983:84). Bakk, citing an earlier *shaykh*, expressed the idea that, "*tawajud* is an uprooting, *wajd* a submersion and *wujud* a destruction of the self of the seeker" (84). When skillfully used by an accomplished *Qawwal*, the dynamic flow of musical sounds in *Qawwali* can be understood as a symbolic enactment of the state of *tawajud*, for they invite the listener to become uprooted from normal experience and to enter into the higher states of *wajd* and *wujud*.

There many ways in which the typical soundscape of *Qawwali* can be understood symbolically, the three categories I have identified here correspond to traditional Western musical categories of melody, rhythm, and dynamics, which are elements of most humanly organized sound. Taken together, the beautiful voice, the rhythm of *dhikr*, and the dynamic flow of *Qawwali* performance create a soundscape that corresponds to the Sufi religious worldview. These sounds support and embellish a process that empowers individual believers to experience a subjective state of merging with the sacred other. One modern Sufi writer trained in Western psychology, Reza Arasteh, describes this process as a growth to selfhood:

In this sense Sufism consists of two steps: (1) the passing away of 'I', and (2) becoming wholly aware of 'me'. The real self exists in no place, its very nature is intensive rather than extensive, and it can be both near us and far removed, depending on the individual's experience. Ordinarily a flash of knowledge enlightens the consciousness, a small circle of our psyche, but when we attain the real self a strong flash constantly illuminates the whole structure of our psyche (Arasteh 1980:x).

Seen in this way, the *sama* ' can be seen as a vehicle for identity formation linking the individual to both the community and the sacred other. It is an enactment of the Sufi ideal of self-realization. Arasteh describes it this way:

A Sufi may stop at the stage of *fana*, which can be defined as passing from consciousness to the world of unconsciousness where reason is active. He may also pass beyond this stage and find himself in the state of *baqa* (continuance) where he gains individuality and non-individuality, that is, infusion has taken place but the individual has entered a state of conscious existence. Whosoever achieves this state becomes a 'perfect man', who relies on consciousness and is ruled by reason. Aided by intuition the perfect man functions as a totality, with spontaneity and expressiveness. Instead of studying life from afar he is life itself. In this state, indescribable and characterized by silence, the individual is now everything or nothing: everything in the sense that he is united with all, nothing in the sense that nothingness is the beginning of 'everythingness.' (138-139)

This is "*wahdat al-wujud* (the unity of existence; all is the One; the One is all) and *wahdut al-shuhud* (the unity of the witness; all is from the One but is *not* the One" (Lawrence 1983:69-70) described in contemporary terms. According to both Lawrence and Schimmel (1975:267), when understood correctly, these apparently opposing statements are interchangeable views of the same reality. It is the goal of the *Qawwali* performance to aid the believer in achieving this idealized state.

The sounds of *Qawwali* saturate the listener with nonverbal cues that support engagement with symbolic understandings of the sacred other. One symbolic representation of the sacred other which supports the Sufi vision of merger with the infinite and remains dominant in South Asia is the death anniversary '*urs* festival of a saint [*wali*]. The death of a saint is understood to be a great triumph, symbolically representing the saint's final union with God. In India and Pakistan, the anniversary of the death of a saint is known as the '*urs*, which literally means that a wedding is widely celebrated as a popular festival, as if it were an actual wedding celebration. A typical '*urs* will include a processional, a number of charitable activities, such as feeding the poor, and, of course, a *Qawwali* program, often the formal *mahfil-i-sama*' [assembly for listening], as well as less formal program for the public. The purpose of the '*urs* is to symbolize the final spiritual union between the lover (the saint) and the Beloved (God) in the form of a wedding celebration.

A *mahfil-i-sama'* is often the climax of the *'urs*. In this way the saint's ascension to and union with God is affirmed. Likewise, each participant in the *sama'* is reminded in tangible ways of the potential to participate in a similar union through the experience of listening. The importance of the physical presence of the saint is emphasized by holding the celebration in close proximity to the saint's physical remains, which are entombed in the saint's *dargah*. The saint's presence assures the availability of *baraka* [spiritual power or blessing] and the possibility of the saint's intervention with God on behalf of the devotee. Embodiment and disembodiment are simultaneously emphasized in the *'urs* celebration, because it is at the moment of disembodiment that the saint is understood to achieve final union with God, and provides the devotee with a proto-type model for his (or her) own embodied experience of union through the vehicle of the *sama'*.



Figure 17 - Shayyar Shaf al-Din *Qawwal*.

Embodiment

Personal Fieldnote—The weekly Sunday afternoon *Qawwali* program was over, and we were seated with the *Qawwals* in the shaded verandah opposite the tomb of Raju *Qattal* in Khuldabad. We had already engaged a lengthy discussion about why music was necessary for communicating the message of *Qawwali*. One *qawwal* who had sung that day, an elderly singer, poet, and radio artist named Shayyar Shaf al-Din (Fig. 4), told me that music brought one closer to God. “But, how?” I asked him. He tried various answers, but seemed frustrated. Then he asked me a question: “When we were singing and clapping, why did you start to clap?” “Because I felt the rhythm,” I replied. The old man turned a wrinkled palm upward and smiled broadly with a sense of relief: “That’s the answer! That’s the answer!” came the reply, and everyone laughed.

It is popular, and indeed quite an important development, in the contemporary study of religion to recognize that early scholars of non-Western religions often reported religious data in a way that corresponded to their own preconceived assumptions about religion, often reflecting elements of their own Christian backgrounds (Masuzawa 2005; King 1999). As Robert Sharf (1995) points out, discussing Western scholars of Buddhism, “Like Narcissus, Western enthusiasts failed to recognize their own reflection in the mirror held out to them” (140). In similar fashion, as ethnographers, we like to think, talk, and write about ideas. Consequently, when observing religious practice, we look for and focus on the ideas encountered there. When representing these same religious practices, we choose to think, talk, and write about these ideas. I emphasize here one aspect of the problem of textual bias discussed by Richard King (1999) and so prevalent in the academic study of religion. As scholars we are often reticent to engage the embodied experience of religion, favoring discussion and textual interpretation over engaged experience. It is true that in many historical studies all we have is the text, but that is not to say that the text is all that existed in the given religious practice, nor that the text itself was of particular importance to the individual worshipper of the time.

The balance between music and text in *Qawwali* is important for several reasons. In *Qawwali* the song texts have primary importance, but considerable effort is expended to support these texts with a symbolic soundscape of dynamic musical ideas. Musical sounds can be understood metaphorically as text, but they remain something apart, for they relates as much to the body as to the realm of thought. Musical sounds are produced by the actions of the body, they are taken in through the ear, not the eye, as, at least in modern cultures, text usually is, and they engage the body in movement. Musical sounds, even when transcribed, can not adequately be reproduced in

a text. Musical sounds are often the primary catalyst of engaged, embodied experience in religious practice historically and cross culturally and they provide a similar catalyst for engagement with text for many cultures. Nonetheless, the importance of musical sounds in human cultural embodiment and communication are often overlooked in academic studies.

I am not advocating for a Cartesian split that privileges body over mind. Rather, I join Margaret Lock and Nancy Scheper Hughes (1996) in emphasizing the mind-body as a locus of cultural experience: “The individual body should be seen as the most immediate, the proximate terrain where social truths and social contradictions are played out, as well as a locus of personal and social resistance, creativity, and struggle”(70). With the recognition of the importance of the body in culture, the importance of musical sounds to culture, and, especially, the importance of musical sounds to religious practice and experience, comes clearly into focus. One important reason that musical sounds have continued to play a major role in human experience and in religious practice is that they are experienced viscerally: they have the power to bring us back into our bodies.

Embodiment has been widely discussed in recent decades in ethnomusicology (Blacking 1992; 1979; 1973a; 1973b; 1971; 1969), anthropology (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1996), (Csordas 2002; 1990) and cognitive psychology (Gibbs 2006; O’Donovan-Anderson: 1996; Anderson 2003). My emphasis throughout this study is on the role of the body in engagement with music and religion, engagement on the level of the production of musical sounds, and in the ritual engagement with sound in the practice of *sama*’.

Islam as Embodied, Performed Religion: The Roots of *Qawwali*

The Islamic religion is the attempt of Muslims to remember and honor the revelation of the Prophet Muhammad. For Muslims, this revelation is the message of God as revealed to and through the person of the Prophet. During his lifetime, the Prophet himself was the embodiment of revelation, and his experiences of revelation provide the primary model for mystical experience as understood and practiced in Sufism in the centuries following his death. All of the earliest sources report that the Prophet would regularly spend time in a cave outside of Mecca for the purpose of prayer and meditation. It was during one of these retreats, in 610ce, that he received his first revelation. Throughout his lifetime Muhammad continued to receive these revelations, often in response to the events that were effecting him and the early community of Muslims who followed him. These revelations were spoken aloud, first by the Prophet, and then memorized and recited by his followers. After the Prophet's death, they were eventually collected into 114 separate recitations or chapters [*surahs*], and written down in manuscript form. This manuscript was called "The Recitation" [*al-quran*], what Western people have come to know as the Koran, or Qur'an.

The processes of transmission of ancient bodies of knowledge often follow a trajectory that involves an interface between written and oral (Goody 1987). In the case of the Qur'an, the explicit purpose of codifying a written text was to preserve, as far as possible, the precise words received by the Prophet. Even so, oral transmission of the Qur'an, even today, has remained its primary form of expression, audition its primary form of reception. As Ruth Finnegan (2002) has observed, the role of sound in human communication is often undervalued as pre-modern, this has not been true in Islam. Throughout the Qur'an's history, its recitation has remained the

central expressive performance of religious experience. This is why translations of the Qur'an are often referred to as the "meaning" of the Qur'an. The book itself is not the Qur'an. It is not "the Recitation" until it is actually recited.

The Qur'an came into being in an oral culture and, although it has survived almost 1400 years and well into the modern period where most communication is written and little memorized, for most Muslims the Qur'an remains essentially an oral communication, a recitation, not a piece of literature in the sense that a European or American Christian understands the Bible as a piece of literature. The Qur'an *is* literature, but it is essentially something else as well. The Qur'an is itself performed religion, performed religion that Muslims experience on a daily basis throughout the Islamic world whenever it is recited in a mosque, or in daily worship. Islam is not the only faith in which practices from oral traditions have survived into modern times, but the implications of Qur'anic recitation and its place in Muslim worship have important repercussions in regard to how Muslims understand musical sound, its place in worship, and the historical development of *Qawwali* in South Asia. As Kristina Nelson (1985), a musicologist who has done an extensive study on Qur'anic recitation, has noted "...the Qur'an is not the Qur'an unless it is heard." This point is key to understanding the place of the Qur'an in Islamic daily life and to understanding its relationship to the practice of *sama'*.

Divine communication is received aurally in Islam, through active listening. The Prophet received the transmission of the Qur'an through the angel Gabriel, transmitting the message to his followers through recitation. Even when the Prophet had passages written down in order to spread his message, he would send out reciters with the texts, not texts alone. When the third

khalifa [successor], Uthman (644-56) had decreed a standardized Qur'an, he sent out a reciter with each text in order to teach its proper recitation (Nelson 1985). Aural transmission of text is intimately connected with the delivery system of the human apparatus: chest, lungs, vocal chords, etc., and its delivery anticipates engagement with an active listener. Moreover, although to the Western ear, and by Western definitions, the cantillation of the Qur'an is very beautiful music, a Muslim would never call Qur'anic recitation music. Both the Qur'an and its recitation exist in special categories that do not exist in typical Western thought and practice. As with *Qawwali*, a more accurate understanding of the place of the Qur'an and its recitation in Islamic life involves dislocating ourselves from our own cultural locations and allowing the cultural nuances of Islamic religious practice to speak for themselves. Understanding the Qur'an as a recited text which must be listened to in order to be received, helps us understand the importance of the listener, and of listening, in the practice of *sama'*, and the performance of *Qawwali*.

The importance of embodied engagement with religious practice in Islam is further emphasized by the well-known "Five Pillars of Islam:" the profession of faith [*shahada*], the five times daily prayer [*salah*], fasting in the month of Ramadan [*sawm*], pilgrimage to Mecca [*hajj*], and the giving of alms [*zakah*]. These are obligatory practices which all Muslims are expected to engage with on some level. The profession of faith requires simply stating with conviction "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah" and is essentially a spoken affirmation of monotheism and the importance of the Prophet's role in delivering the new revelation. The prayers require positioning the body towards Mecca, as well as the repetition of certain prescribed movements in conjunction with the recitation of the words of the prayers. Fasting during the holy month is seen as communal, spiritual exercise of faith and physical endurance.

The pilgrimage to Mecca requires physically orienting oneself in close proximity to the Ka'bah [literally cube] in the Grand Mosque at Mecca, and the giving of alms is required in order to maintain the physical well being of those less fortunate than oneself. These are the only compulsory religious requirements of Muslims, and each emphasizes embodied engagement on some level. These embodied aspects of Islamic practice are central to daily Islamic life, and form the ground from which early Sufi practices arose. The practice of *dhikr*, the practice of *sama'*, and subsequently the development of South Asian *sama'* and *Qawwali*, all arose as adjuncts and complements to these core Islamic practices.

Embodied and Disembodied Identity: Saints, Shrines, and Pilgrimage

Qawwali as an art form springs from traditional performance in the precincts of the South Asian Muslim *dargah*. Not just in South Asia, but also throughout the Muslim world, embodied exemplars of holiness and sanctity are recognized both as teachers and as potential intercessors between the worshiper and God [Allah]. The word "saint" is often used to describe Muslim holy men and women, the term can be misleading, however, and has strong Christian connotations. In fact, there is no such office in Islam, and no such idea of sainthood appears in the Qur'an. The roughly equivalent Arabic term is *wali* Allah, or "friend of God." This is in reference to the Qur'anic passage which reads, "Behold! Verily on the friends of God there is no fear, nor shall they grieve," *sura* 10:62. As with the use of music, and the role of Sufism itself, the veneration of saints is a controversial issue within Islam. Although the Qur'an specifically prohibits associating anyone or anything with God [*shirk*], the issue of intercession is less clear. Supporters of intercession cite the hadith [tradition] which claims: "If a company of Muslims numbering one hundred prays over a dead person, all of them interceding for him, their

intercession on his behalf will be accepted” (Meri 1999:264). Explanations in defense of saint veneration, pilgrimage, and the construction of shrines often appeal to the idea of seeking intercession through the saint, whose assistance would surely be worth more than that of a hundred ordinary individuals. Belief in saints and their power to intercede has always existed at the periphery of Islam, though never fully accepted as normative by conservative Muslims, in South Asia the *dargah* [tomb-shrine] lies at the center of popular Muslim piety. This was once true in Saudi Arabia and Iraq as well, but in the early 19th century, in an effort to eradicate the idea that the practice was normative, Wahhabi groups destroyed as many tombs of Sufi saints and Shi’a imams as they could find (Ernst 1997). It is not my goal to emphasize either side of this argument, it is important, however, to understand the importance of the *dargah* in the development of *Qawwali*.

If pilgrimage is a liminal expression of social process which counteracts the structure of society with the anti-structure of *communitas*, as suggested by Victor Turner (1974), then each visit to the *dargah* of a Sufi saint signifies a pilgrimage of sorts. Phillip Bohlman (1997; 1996) emphasizes the importance of music in pilgrimage, and *Qawwali* at a saint’s tomb often enlivens the soundscape of the South Asian pilgrim’s arrival at a *dargah*. Pilgrimage to Sufi saints’ tombs is not meant to replace the compulsory religious requirements of Muslim devotion. As with *dhikr*, *sama’*, and other practices, pilgrimage is understood to be supererogatory, an additional action which, it is hoped by the faithful, will result in additional blessings. For conservative Muslims, the main objection to the practice of visiting tombs is not so much the idea of intercession as the problem of communication with the dead and the touching tombs, which are thought to be unclean. This attitude, however, has not halted the construction of tombs, nor the

honoring of the memory of their inhabitants with pilgrimages and festivals throughout the Islamic world. The tomb of the Prophet Muhammad at Medina, known as the *Rauda* (Garden), was the first in a long line of tombs built for Muslim holy men and women. (Robinson 1999; Schimmel 1985). Soon, in the tradition of the Hajj [the pilgrimage to Mecca which every Muslim must attempt, if at all financial feasible], pilgrimages to saints' tombs, or *ziyara* (Arabic, literally "a visiting" or "a visit," Persian, *ziyarat*), became commonplace. Although there were arguments over the legality of *ziyara*, even opponents of the practice would reluctantly admit that some benefit might accrue from it. The Prophet himself is known to have visited the graves of his dead companions, and pray to God for their spiritual well being. The legality of *ziyara* was sometimes defended by citing a hadith in which the Prophet says, "I previously prohibited you from visiting tombs, now visit them..." (Meri 1999:274). Sufis today continue to refer to the example of the Prophet visiting tombs as an argument in support of the practice of *ziyara*.

We have evidence of *ziyara* practice among Muslims in the Middle East from at least the 10th century up to the present day in the Maghreb, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Central Asia. However, nowhere is the Muslim enthusiasm for shrines and the veneration of saints more widely practiced than among the Sufis of South Asia. Early British colonials in India and conservative Muslim reformers alike saw in the practice of venerating saints and their tombs the negative influence of Hindu paganism. This attitude ignores the fact that educated Sufi masters have continued to participate in and encourage the practice of *ziyara*, finding it legally sound and in keeping with the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet. One South Asian Sufi writer, Muhammad Nab Quadric Niagara Ajmeri of Aurangabad, in Maharashtra, wrote a treatise on the subject in his introduction to a calendar of Saint's death anniversaries [*'urs*], as a guide to those

wishing to go on pilgrimage. The writer offers commentary and suggestions on a number of topics including prostration at tombs, making offerings to the spirits of the dead, and the efficacy of praying for deceased relatives. According to Muhammad Nab, the pilgrims should observe proper manner and behavior [*adab*] when visiting a saint's tomb, so as not to offend the saint, "The dead are aware of the coming of a pilgrim and his concentration, for the spiritual world has a subtlety, specifically, that the spirits of the saints take notice of even a little concentration of the pilgrim" (Ernst 1994:61). Muhammad Nab discusses the various benefits of pilgrimage, quoting a variety of sources. From one source he quotes,

However much the spirit of the saint departs from the body both in expressions and relations, yet its influence nonetheless leaves their mark on a place. Just as when musk is removed from a letter or tray, even so his [the saint's] perfume continues to linger in the place to which he was related" (64).

Though written in Maharashtra during the 18th century, the sentiments expressed by Muhammad Nab are in keeping with contemporary Muslim piety at *dargahs* in Maharashtra today.

It is in the precinct of the *dargah* that *Qawwali* is traditionally performed, not only in honor of the saint who is entombed there, but in memory of the entire lineage [*silsila*] of the shrine, and of the Sufi order. When *Qawwali* is performed at the *dargah* of Raju Qattal in Khuldabad, as mentioned above, the entire lineage back to the Prophet is invoked. Sayyid Yusuf al-Hussayni (d.1330), popularly known as Raju Qattal, was a disciple of Nizam al-Din Awliya of Delhi. He traveled, with his family, along with Burhan al-Din Gharib from Delhi to Daulatabad when Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq (d.1351) forced much of the Delhi population to transfer to the Deccan. The Sultan's ill conceived plan ultimately failed as a political move to centralize his kingdom, but it did lead to the establishment of the first real Muslim culture in the Deccan (Schimmel 1980), as well as to the first *Qawwali* in the Deccan. Perhaps just as significantly,

traveling with Raju Qattal on this journey was his seven-year-old son, Sayyid Muhammad al-Hussayni Gisudiraz (d.1422), who, after his father's death, returned to Delhi with his mother and eventually became *murids* [disciples] of another successor of Nizam al-Din, *Shaykh* Nasir al-Din Mahmud, or Chirag-i Dihli (the lamp of Delhi). Bandanawaz Gisudaraz (the one with long locks who comforts others), as he is popularly known, eventually transferred to Gulbarga and is still honored at the *dargah* complex there, just outside the border of Maharashtra, though still within the Deccan region¹⁷. Thus, two important Sufi lineages, which come together under Nizam al-Din Awliya, are invoked at Raju Qattal.

Conclusion

Regular Sunday afternoon or Thursday evening *Qawwali* programs at *dargahs* like Raju Qattal often do focus on honoring early saintly figures, but *Qawwali* is not always exclusively an act of remembrance of the disembodied friends of God. Key figures in the Chishti Sufi lineage, especially Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, Nizam al-Din Awliya, and Burhan al-Din Gharib, all encouraged the practice of *Qawwali* as an engaged, embodied celebration of the presence of a living *shaykh* and his connection to the shrine's lineage. Such programs were conducted in the spirit of classical Sufi *sama'*, and are still practiced today. The *mahfil-i-sama'* or *darbar-e-Awliya* [Royal Court of Saints] are formal gatherings which operate within the structure of institutional Sufism (represented by the designation *darbar-e-Awliya*) but whose purpose is the inner spiritual development of the individual (represented by the designation *mahfil-i-sama'*). The *mahfil-i-sama'* is a serious affair governed by strict rules of etiquette [*adab*] based on those exercised at the royal courts of early Muslim rulers in South Asia (Qureshi 1986). In these

¹⁷ One of the *shaykhs* from the lineage of Bandanawaz Gisudaraz, *Shaykh* Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini, presided over the *mahfil-i-sama'* in Pune, discussed in chapter three.

formal settings the *shaykh* is the embodied symbol of the departed saint, who is often, though not always, a previous *shaykh*. In this context the *shaykh* is a living representative of the sacred Other with whom the worshipper may personally interact.

Although the *shaykh* is the central embodied symbol of the sacred Other in the *mahfil* process, the primary emphasis in *sama* ' is on the listener and his or her ability to derive spiritual benefit from the proceedings. *Qawwali* as a musical form is the organizing principle around which the *shaykh* and other dignitaries of institutional Sufism gather on these occasions, and *Qawwali* in this setting acts as a catalyst for the spiritual development of the individual participant. The focus of these gatherings, however, is neither on the musical performance nor the performers, but, rather, on the listener, who in turn focuses on the *shaykh* as the most important listener. The orientation of *sama* ' gatherings, which often include one hundred or more in attendance, is towards the *shaykh* as the representative of the lineage of the order. If the gathering is held at a *dargah*, the gathering is oriented towards the doorway of the tomb. The general assembly of the gathering often sits behind the performers, not in front, as at a concert. In this way both the performers and the listeners are oriented towards either the *shaykh*, or the saint's tomb. This orientation emphasizes the imperative placed upon the listener to associate himself (with some exceptions, only males are allowed to attend most *mahfils*) with the *shaykh* and, by extension, the entire lineage back to the Prophet, and ultimately to an existential union with God as the divine Beloved. The purpose of the music and the sung texts in this context is to then enliven the enactment of this physical arrangement and arouse spiritual feeling in the listener.

Emphasis on the listener, the power of sound, and the importance of ensuring that *sama'* fall into the category of permitted behaviors, have led to a number of strict guidelines for the practice of listening. Kashani quotes Burhan al-Din Gharib on the delicate path that must be tread between *halal* and *haram*, leaving the responsibility for proper behavior up to the conscience of the individual dervish.

The master (Burhan al-Din) also said “*Sama'* is of four types. One is lawful, in which the listener is totally longing for god and not at all longing for the created. The second is permitted, in which the listener is mostly longing for God and only a little for the created. The third is disapproved, in which there is much longing for the created and a little for God. The fourth is forbidden, in which there is no longing for God and all is for the created....But the listener should know the difference between doing the lawful, the forbidden, the permitted, and the disapproved. And this is a secret between God and the listener (quoted in Ernst 1992:149).

Several writers on *sama'* cite Junayd, who emphasized the importance of the proper time, place and companions when arranging a *sama'* gathering (Salam 2002; Ernst 1999; Lewisohn 1997; Hussaini 1983). Kashani reports that early *sama'* programs at Khuldabad were treated by Burhan al-Din as ritual prayer, beginning with recitation of the Qur'an, and requiring ablutions prior to participating in the assembly. Conversation, even to question someone about the inner meaning of a verse was forbidden, and the dervish should restrain themselves from unnecessary physical movement. “A dervish should be sober and never allow his hands or feet to touch another; if this happens anyway, he should pull back” (Ernst 1992:153). *Sama'* as a ritual process is based upon the model of *dhikr*, and as such is primarily mediated by the *shaykh*. The rules of deportment [*adab*] are much along the same lines of *dhikr*, and the relationship between the devotee and the *shaykh* dictates the approach to spiritual arousal. “Listening to *Qawwali* is part of the spiritual training a Sufi receives from his *shaykh*. Until spiritually initiated he is to listen under spiritual guidance and in the presence of his *shaykh* or a spiritual superior” (Qureshi 1995:119). Although individual approaches and guidelines for *sama'* may vary among Sufi *shaykhs* and theorists,

respect for the power of *sama'* remains constant. In each case, guidelines serve to insulate the space within which *sama'* takes place, assuring sacrality and religious legality of the practice.

Sama' is not always a formal ritual process. We know little of the historic development of *sama'* outside of the confines of the circle of the prominent early Sufi masters, but there was clearly a popular love for listening to music. Since history, especially premodern history, is usually written by the educated, and thus the wealthy and privileged, we have few sources of direct knowledge concerning popular applications of *sama'* among the poor of the subcontinent. As Ernst and Lawrence (2002) point out,

Unfortunately, the popular, nonelite, mass sentiment in favor of *sama'* fell outside the scope of [Chishti theorists'] inquiry: Popularization suggested vulgarization, and for the Chishti theorists, as for most of the Indo-Muslim elite, vulgarization of any mystical institution, including *sama'*, was firmly resisted. Hence, we find but few, random references to the popular dissemination of *sama'* (36).

Even so, that there was popular dissemination there can be no doubt. Just as *sama'* was popular among the poor during the Sultanate period, *sama'* and *Qawwali* are popular today among the poor as well. Whether at the small *dargah* of Mastan Shah in Ahmednagar, where Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* performs, or at Raju Qattal in Khuldabad, where Shayyar Shaf al-Din *Qawwal* and others regularly perform, *Qawwali* is clearly popular among the poor of Maharashtra, who find in the musical sounds and message of *Qawwali* respite and solace. As one Sufi *shaykh*, Fakhr al-Din Zarradi, says in a couplet,

Every ecstasy that is derived from *sama'*
Is a taste that relieves the soul of anxiety¹⁸

¹⁸ quoted in Ernst and Lawrence, pp. 38.

CHAPTER II

AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS OF SYMBOLIC HEALING IN *QAWWALI*: THE *DARGAH* OF TAJ AL-DIN BABA OF NAGPUR



Figure 18 - Main entry to Taj Bagh, the *dargah*, or tomb-shrine, Taj al-Din Baba (d. 1925) of Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

Thursday evenings at *Taj Bagh*, the tomb shrine, or *dargah* (Fig. 18) of Taj al-Din Baba (d. 1925) of Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, are punctuated by colorful crowds of worshippers, the sweet smell of burning incense, and the sounds of *Qawwali* music. Families come here with their children, elders can be seen comforting or playing with a child, others are seated quietly, enjoying the pleasant atmosphere of social interaction and religious devotion. What is it that draws these men and women, old and young, rich and poor, to enter into this impoverished neighborhood with their families, contend with the persistent beggars and other inconveniences, simply for the privilege of paying their respects at the tomb of a man who died over 80 years

ago? What role, if any, does *Qawwali* play in drawing them and keeping here? I put forward here the claim that *Qawwali* is one element of an everyday aesthetic that informs and contributes to the symbolic healing experienced by worshippers at *Taj Bagh* and in other *dargahs* across South Asia. This symbolic healing, of which the performance of *Qawwali* is just one element, is an affirmation of collective memory which asserts for the worshipper the importance of their Islamic heritage, Sufi ideology, and belief in the unseen, as it contributes to the individual's formation of a symbolic cultural self. I suggest this analysis as neither reductive, nor essentialist, but, rather, as a heuristic approach to understanding one aspect of the significance of the coextensive nature of music and religion cross-culturally, and, specifically, in the practice of *Qawwali* in South Asia.

I begin with a case study describing the context of a *Qawwali* performance at *Taj Bagh*. I follow with an argument that sees *Qawwali* as one element in symbolic healing at *Taj Bagh*. In support of my argument I draw on anthropological theory, employing elements of James Dow's (1986) articulation of the idea of symbolic healing, expanding the concept to include religious behavior in general, not simply religious or spiritual healing. What I refer to as *symbolic healing* might well be viewed through the lens of psychological theory. In this case I prefer the approach of anthropologist James Dow to that of psychological theory. Dow's theory of symbolic healing works well within cross-cultural applications. He avoids much of the jargon commonly found in psychological theory, while at the same time retaining the sense of individual transformation effected through specific healing practices. I incorporate anthropologist Jacob Pandian's (1991) ideas regarding the symbolic cultural self to Dow's ideas on symbolic healing, adapting the combined ideas to my analysis of *Qawwali*. In addition, I use Robert Dejarlais' (1992)

understanding of what he calls an aesthetics of everyday life as the basis for approaching the contextual influences within which *Qawwali* performance takes place. I use this concept to contextualize the role of *Qawwali* in symbolic healing at *Taj Bagh*. I identify three key values that I see as important themes in the aesthetics of everyday life at *Taj Bagh*. These are: performance, memory, and belief in the unseen. I elaborate on my understanding of how these values relate to the role of *Qawwali* in symbolic healing at *Taj Bagh*, and close with a discussion of my conclusions.

Nagpur is a large city of approximately two million people, located in the far northeast corner of Maharashtra, and capital of Nagpur district. The city functions as a large industrial center as well as a central marketplace for surrounding agriculture products. When Deogir (later, Daulatabad), the capital of the Hindu Yadava dynasty fell to the Delhi Sultanate in the early 14th century, the Nagpur region technically came under Islamic control. The area had little political value, however, so Islamic political influence was never constant. By the late 18th century Nagpur was once again in *Maratha* hands, but fell to the British and was annexed into the British territories in the mid 19th century. The *dargah* of Taj al-Din Baba is located on the outskirts of the city in an impoverished area known as *Taj Bagh* [the abode of Taj]. *Taj Bagh* is situated approximately fifteen kilometers from the city center. The name of “*Taj Bagh*” is given to both the *dargah* of Taj al-Din Baba (Fig. 19), as well as to the general vicinity of the *dargah*. The surrounding area is quite poor and under developed (Fig.20 - 21), with a series of small shops lining the final kilometer or so stretch of the approach road leading to the shrine (Fig. 22 - 23). The shrine itself is surrounded by a large marble verandah where worshippers relax and mingle (Fig. 24).



Figure 19 - The dome of Taj Bagh, the dargah of Taj al-Din Baba.



Figure 20 - Some of the homes in the surrounding neighborhood of Taj Bagh.



Figure 21 - Some local residents of Taj Bagh.



Figure 22 - Stalls selling flowers and *chadars* at Taj Bagh.



Figure 23 - Seller of sweets to offer to the saint and then distribute to others for a blessing.



Figure 24 - Worshippers relaxing on the verandah at Taj Bagh.



Figure 25 - Niyaz Rangeel *Qawwal*, singer of *Qawwali* at Taj Bagh.

Taj Bagh: The dargah of Taj al-Din Baba of Nagpur

Personal Fieldnote—Although I had already visited the dargah several times, this was to be my first visit at night. As I bumped along the road in a hired black and yellow scooter-rickshaw, the gathering darkness obscured some of the worst squalor and dilapidation of the hutments and shops surrounding the main compound of the dargah. The night air carried a variety of competing scents, punctuated by a sooty mixture of smoke and diesel exhaust. The colored lights hanging from countless stalls selling chadars (tomb cloths), prasad (sweets), flowers, pictures of Taj al-Din Baba, and a host of other devotional knickknacks that visiting pilgrim might find appealing, provided the eye with a welcoming array of color.

At one corner of the dargah there is a short walkway that serves as the main entry way (Fig. 18), with small doorways which open onto the verandah of the dargah at various points along each side of the main structure. I chose a side entrance and circled around the rear of the dargah. The

population of visitors on this evening was very different from the smaller crowds of mainly lower income pilgrims that I had seen on my earlier visits. Although there may have been just as many beggars and poor people there now as there had been previously, their numbers seemed less significant now, as I looked out upon the Thursday night crowds of middle and upper class Muslims who had come to observe the traditional Thursday evening festivities in remembrance of the dead. My visit on this evening was in the hope of making recordings of some of the local musicians. Such festivities at a dargah usually include the presence of qawwals, and the performance of Qawwali, and I had been assured that, as usual, Qawwali music would be performed on this occasion.

As I entered the large marble tiled verandah, I saw a much larger crowd there than I had seen on any of my previous visits, several hundred people at least. The atmosphere was more like that of a carnival than anything else, multiple layers of social interaction taking place, not all of it religious in nature, yet, at the same time, the powerful presence of the saint and the proximity of religious and institutional symbols were ever present in the background. It seemed that for many of the attendees this was primarily a social occasion, in the same way that going to a sermon at church on Sunday morning might be as much a social occasion as a religious one. There were families with children, older people, and people from all walks of life mingling, shouting greetings, laughing, kissing and comforting a crying child, other children running and laughing among those who were simply seated on the verandah and drinking in the powerful presence of the saint. Small cliques of three or four same-gender teenagers could be seen from time to time, moving about and talking. All of these activities, however, have very different social structures governing their enactment. The spiritual presence of the saint on the one hand, and the

institutional presence of Islamic religious observance on the other, provide both an implicit and an explicit sub-text to the proceedings, ensuring that all behaviors fall within certain acceptable guidelines. Amid the many social activities there were individuals who obviously regarded the occasion with more seriousness, some seated or kneeling in prayer or quiet meditation, others crowding into the inner confines of the tomb itself in order to make a flower offering to the saint, place a chadar or other offering on the tomb, to say a prayer, and to receive the blessings of the saint.

Before long I encountered a friend from an earlier visit, and he introduced me to a young man named Niyaz Rangeel (Fig. 25). Niyaz is a resident of the nearby low-income section of Taj Bagh. He was the singer scheduled to lead the Qawwali program on this evening. Niyaz and I chatted for awhile, I took his photograph and received his permission to record his performance. Before long he rushed off to make preparations for the program.

After some time had passed, one of my friends said, "Look, it is beginning! If you want to record him you'd better come quickly!" I was then nearly dragged to the front of the verandah, near the doorway of the tomb, and instructed to sit almost immediately adjacent to Niyaz, who sat facing the doorway of the tomb, so that he would in effect be singing directly to the saint. This I did gladly, and as Niyaz began to sing, the crowd became focused on his performance, I turned on my tape recorder and began recording his performance, occasionally taking photographs of the singer and his small Qawwali party (Fig. 26, Music track 4).



Figure 26 - Niyaz Rangeel *Qawwal* singing at the *dargah* of Taj al-Din Baba.

Symbolic Healing

In his study of *Qawwali*, Adam Nayyar (1988) observes that *Qawwali* has long been understood by participants and observers as contributing to psychological well-being.

The therapeutic effects of *Qawwali* were always generally known and indigenous doctors often told mentally disturbed individuals to attend *Qawwali* sessions. Spiritual leaders even today often take their mentally disturbed followers to a *Qawwali* session with the object of exposing them to the harmony and therapeutic powers of the music and words.

Aware of this effect of *Qawwali* and himself deeply interested in it, an eminent Pakistani psychiatrist is using “*Qawwali* therapy” on some of his patients with marked success. While still in an experimental stage, this powerful medium can surely provide an effective indigenization of occidental therapeutic techniques (14).

Not just *Qawwali*, but music itself is often understood to have therapeutic qualities. Joseph Moreno (1995), Mary Ann Steekler (1998), Pat Moffitt Cook (2003), Michael Winkelman (2003), and many others have spoken to the positive effects of music on both psychological and physiological health, and Gilbert Rouget (1985) has explored the use of music cross-culturally in

healing practices involving trance states. These studies, however, do not speak to the element of religious narrative combined with music. Benjamin Koen (2003), in his dissertation on devotional music and healing in Tajikistan, moves closer to the element of religious narrative in healing practices, proposing the term *music-prayer* dynamics for cross-cultural explorations of the relationship between prayer, meditation, and music. While *Qawwali* can and often does include prayer and meditation, it is also much more. *Qawwali* itself is a religious practice, and while, due to the controversial status of music in Islam, the musical element is often said to be secondary to the sung texts, in *Qawwali*, religion and music become *coextensive*. In *Qawwali*, we reach the nodal point where it becomes impossible to separate music from religion, religion from music. As such, we encounter a third phenomenon, a phenomenon which is neither music nor religion alone, but inextricably both simultaneously. No single theory of music or of religion, then, can fully describe nor account for the popularity nor the perceived benefits of *Qawwali* in South Asian Islamic religious practice. I suggest symbolic healing as one way of approaching an understanding of the coextensive nature of music and religion in *Qawwali* performance.

Anthropologist James Dow (1986) adopts the term symbolic healing used by Daniel Moerman (1979). Dow suggests that a common, universal structure can be discerned cross-culturally in religious healing, shamanism, and Western psychotherapy. In Dow's words, "The structure proposed is as follows:"

1. The experience of healers and healed are generalized with culture-specific symbols in cultural myth.
2. A suffering patient comes to a healer who persuades the patient that the problem can be defined in terms of the myth.
3. The healer attaches the patient's emotions to transactional symbols particularized from the general myth.
4. The healer manipulates the transactional symbols to help the patient transact his or her own emotions (56).

I suggest that, with some adaptation, Dow's proposed universal structure for symbolic healing is a useful way to understand patterns in religious behavior in general, not just healing practices. In taking this position, I adopt Dow's model beyond his original intention. Even in its more formal *mahfil-i-sama* [assembly for listening] form, *Qawwali* performance does not precisely parallel Dow's proposed universal structure for symbolic healing. In order to make a better fit, I incorporate some of the ideas of anthropologist Jacob Pandian (1999; 1991).

Pandian (1991) positions religious behaviors in relation to culturally formulated concepts of identity and self. According to Pandian, an individual attempts to formulate a symbolic cultural self through the integration of sacred beings and powers. Pandian builds upon the concepts of symbolic interactionist theory. As he puts it, "Symbolic interactionist theory posits that one's own self is a symbolic representation, an object in relation to the selves (objects) of others, and in this manner the self is created and re-created in the processes of human interaction" (86).

When the symbolic self interacts with the sacred self, the individual incorporates new ways of coping with a threatening world. As Pandian (1999) says,

Religion does not eliminate suffering or death, but it eliminates the contradictions between cultural formulations of suffering, death, and the symbolic self by constituting and maintaining the symbolic self as sacred, rendering the symbolic self into a coherent, meaningful system of action despite the existence of "natural" inconsistencies and problems (505-506).

Symbols of the self (the symbolic self) signify the characteristics and meanings of what it is to be human. Symbols of the sacred other signify the existence and characteristics of supernatural beings, entities, and powers; linkages between the symbolic self and the sacred other occur in different ways in different domains (508).

While no one is explicitly assigned the role of healer in a *Qawwali* program, it is possible to interpret the *shaykh*, the saint, anyone associated with the lineage of the shrine, or even Allah

himself as healer, the worshipper understood as the one seeking to be healed. The ailment, in this case, is consciousness of separateness from the beloved, from the lineage of the shrine, from Islam, from God. When understood, in Pandian's terms, as symbols of the sacred other, these figures represent sacred values, characteristics, and ways of being in the world, the integration of which heal the subjective experience of separation from God and community and create a coherent social identity for the individual through the formulation of a symbolic cultural self.

Aesthetics of Everyday Life

Anthropologist Robert Dejarlais (1992) sees concepts of well being as flowing from local cultural understandings of everyday values and social tastes. In Dejarlais' view the specifics of what constitute health or illness are culturally determined by what he calls an aesthetics of everyday life. As he puts it,

Loss, darkness, and a downhill descent: in my estimation, the way in which Mingma evaluated his pain, the way in which he gave form and meaning to his malaise and experienced the healing process, was patterned by an implicit, politically driven "aesthetics" of everyday life....I use the term "aesthetics" in a slightly irregular fashion, not to define any overt artistry or performative genres – art, music, poetry – but rather to grasp (and tie together) the tacit leitmotifs that shape cultural constructions of bodily and social interactions. I see such aesthetic forms....as embodied through the visceral experience of cultural actors rather than articulated through concrete artistic or philosophic tenets. With the term "aesthetics of experience," then, I refer to the tacit cultural forms, values, and sensibilities – local ways of being and doing – that lend specific styles, configurations, and felt qualities to local experiences (65).

In applying Dejarlais' approach to my approach to understanding the role of *Qawwali* in symbolic healing at *Taj Bagh*, I see the aesthetics of everyday life as a way to contextualize *Qawwali* performance locally, and in the broader context of Islam. To do this I identify some of the "...the tacit leitmotifs that shape cultural constructions of bodily and social interactions..." and the "...tacit cultural forms, values, and sensibilities – local ways of being and doing – that

lend specific styles, configurations, and felt qualities to local experiences...” at *Taj Bagh*. There are countless ways to quantify these leitmotifs. Dejarlais lists, and elaborates upon, a series of broad cultural values that his field experience suggested to him were key in understanding the healing practices of the Yolmo people of Nepal. For this chapter I have chosen a less ambitious list of three key values which I see as useful in understanding the role of *Qawwali* performance in symbolic healing at *Taj Bagh*. The values I have chosen are performance, memory, and belief in the unseen.

Performance

The subject of performance and aesthetics is broad. Before discussing the specifics of the importance of performance at *Taj Bagh*, it will be helpful to look at performance issues in general. Thomas Csordas (1996) identifies four main streams of performance theory and relates them to the performance of healing rituals. The first stream sees performance as a specific *event*, the second sees performance as taking place within certain *genres*, the third sees performance as specific performative *acts*, and the fourth sees performance as an articulation of a certain *rhetoric* which persuades the participant to adapt in some way to a different point of view. This last point corresponds directly to Csordas’ (1983) view that the “...effectivity of ritual healing is constituted by distinctly definable rhetorical devices that ‘persuade’ the patient to attend to his intrapsychic and interpersonal environment in a new and coherent way” (335). The idea of persuading the suffering individual to adopt a new narrative description of their plight corresponds to Dow’s assertion that “A suffering patient comes to a healer who persuades the patient that the problem can be defined in terms of a myth,” cited earlier.

Csordas understands performance events as serving the function of large public healing services, analogous to the Thursday night gatherings at *Taj Bagh*. He sees the genres of performance relating to the three levels of healing body, mind, and spirit. In this sense one can see the kind of worship experience at *Taj Bagh* which I am describing as symbolic healing as most closely related to healing of mind and spirit. Csordas also sees performative acts in healing as relating to “...discrete gestures or verbal formulae construed primarily as acts of empowerment, protection, revelation, and deliverance” (1996:96). In the context of *Taj Bagh* such acts can be understood both as acts performed by worship participants, or as acts performed by the *qawwals* in their performance duties, or acts performed by any number of other institutional figures operating in some official capacity at the shrine. Simply visiting the *dargah* is in itself a performative act that brings the devotee into the aura of the saint’s *baraka*, or spiritual power. This sense is demonstrably acted out by the participants, who invariably approach the tomb of the saint in some explicitly reverential way: kissing the threshold, bowing the head, covering the head, touching the tomb and then the area of the heart repeatedly, making an offering of flowers, etc. For Csordas the rhetoric of performance is represented by the doctrinal specifics articulated in the verbal formulae. The sung *Qawwali* texts themselves represent verbal formulae that explicitly empower the individual worshiper to participate in the traditions of Sufism and Islam, and specifically the traditions of the saint, and to grow nearer and nearer in proximity to Allah. All of these activities imply the tacit protection offered by the *baraka* of the saint, and of Allah.

In addition to the performative actions and rhetorical functions already discussed, the *qawwals* provide an aural sub-text to the entire proceedings, enlivening the atmosphere and moving the hearts and minds of the participants on many levels, not just through the communication of

religious ideology and doctrine. This is the juncture where music and religion become coextensive. The insistent emotionality of the singer's delivery, the repetitive rhythm of the *dholak* [hand drum], and the response of the accompanying vocalists communicate the immediacy of the present moment experience of worship and the proximity and accessibility of the *baraka* of the saint. Even as these sounds are symbols of the saint's *baraka*, they are simultaneously experienced as spiritual power by the worshippers. Ethnomusicologist John Blacking (1979) has observed that "As a metaphor of feeling, [music] can both reflect and generate a special kind of social experience"(8). This is true of the *qawwals* of *Taj Bagh* as they transmit, and articulate through their performance, the sounds of spiritual power, expressing religious feeling that is often lost if one attempts to clothe it in words.

Serious, religious feeling, however, is not the only emotion communicated through *Qawwali* performance. Donald Brenneis (1987) describes the importance of playfulness in the performance of *bhajan kavvali* in Indian Fiji communities. This light-hearted attitude can often be seen in performance of South Asian *Qawwali* and helps to balance the supremely serious topics that are expressed in the *Qawwali* texts, which so often emphasize the pain of separation and longing. Some of these texts parallel very closely what Marina Roseman (2003, 1991) describes as "the aesthetics of longing" among the Temiar people of the Malaysian rain forests. The Temiar experience longing in relation to a spirit guide, reconnection with whom restores the individual, ill from longing, to health. As Roseman (2003) describes it, "The sentiments of longing and remembrance are aesthetically coded in sound and movement within Temiar everyday life and performance" (186). In the *Qawwali* texts the longing is not for a healing spirit guide, but for God as the divine beloved. Such texts articulate the individual's subjective

experience of separation from the sacred other, as well as affirming the immediate accessibility of the sacred other. Through the combined performance of music and text, the worshipper experiences a subjective sense of symbolic healing through the linkage of the symbolic cultural self with the sacred other.

In this sense, performance of *Qawwali* at *Taj Bagh* is most closely related to what the theorist of performance studies Richard Schechner (1988) describes as “transformance.” Positioning himself in relation to Victor Turner (1974), Schechner asks if Turner’s theatrical metaphor identifying performance as a social drama encompassing a “...four-phase pattern of breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration (or schism)...(168)” is truly a cultural, or theatrical, universal. For Schechner, “The basic performance structure of gathering/performance/dispersing underlies and literally contains, the dramatic structure...(168)” Schechner sees solidarity, not conflict, as the organizing principle of performance. “Conflict is supportable (in the theater, and perhaps in society too) only inside a nest built from the agreement to gather at a specific time and place, to perform – to do something agreed on – and to disperse once the performance is over” (168-169). The requirement of performance for Schechner is that it provide a container for transformation. Both Turner and Schechner emphasize social transformation, but at *Taj Bagh* it might be more appropriate to emphasize inner, subjective, and individual transformation. The group gathers, there is a *Qawwali* performance, and the group disperses, but there is no general social drama, nor is there any observable transformation, aside from that of “gathering/performance/dispersing.” The display aspect of performance is reserved for the qawwals, the individual worshipper decides for themselves how deeply they will engage the performance subjectively. On Thursday night at *Taj Bagh* the only formal ritual process observed

is that there will be a gathering, and a performance, and then a ritual closing of the tomb itself, which signals the dispersion of the crowd. The *Qawwali* performance, then, provides worshippers with a choice to engage symbolic healing on a variety of levels. How deeply an individual engages the symbolic cultural self and the sacred other through the sounds and symbols of *Qawwali* music and text is an individual choice, and determines each one's individual engagement with symbolic healing and "transformance."

Memory

Central in importance to the aesthetics of performance is the ability of the performer to evoke in the participant the longing for a profound experience of communion with the divine, or the sacred other. Another way to understand the evocation of this longing is as the activation of memory. *Qawwali* performance itself can be understood as a process of social identity creation through the activation of the socio-cultural memory of the spiritual lineage of the shrine.

Although this activation of memory is a looking back in order to establish present time identity, it is also a vision of the future made present by bridging the phenomenal world through entering into the possibility of imminent communion with the Divine Beloved. Thus, by remembering the deceased saint, the *Qawwali* performance invokes the memory of the entire lineage of spiritual leaders back to the founder of Islam, and beyond. When the *Qawwali* performance is understood in this way, it is an extension and elaboration of *dhikr*, an explicitly proactive form of remembrance. The performance of memory enacted in the *Qawwali* ritual, then, establishes a social identity that is supported by both the immediate community, and that community's spiritual ancestors. The fulfillment of this vision is expressed by the medieval Chishti poet Amir Khusrau (d. 1325), often considered to be the founding father of *Qawwali*, and composer of

some of the most famous *Qawwali* texts, the following Persian poem is called *nimi danam koja raftam* (“I do not know where I vanished”):

I know not in what state and in what wondrous place I found myself last night
Victims of love ecstatic danced all around me where I found myself last night
God himself was Lord of this assembly—O Khusrau, partaker of the infinite
Muhammad was the Beloved illuminating that wondrous place where I found
myself last night (Amir Khusrau, quoted in Qureshi 1986:161-162).

Although the presence of *qawwals* at *Taj Bagh* is a reminder to the worshipper of the general accessibility of the lineage of Islamic holy men and women back to the prophet, and to Allah, it is specifically a reminder of the presence of the saint, of Taj al-Din Baba. The only accounts that we have of Taj al-Din Baba’s life are hagiographic, the story that emerges, however, is an interesting one and is well known to all of those pilgrims who have more than just a passing interest in the shrine. For us, his story is an essential element in understanding the every day aesthetics of *Taj Bagh*.

Taj al-Din is associated with two Sufi *shaykhs*, the Quadiri *shaykh* Hazrat Abdulla Shah (late 19th century) of Nagpur and Hazrat Da’ud Chishti (late 19th century) of Sagar. His first contact with a Sufi *pir* [elder, or spiritual master] was at the tender age of six, when the local saint Hazrat Abdulla Shah visited Taj al-Din’s school in Nagpur. One account reports that the saint

...gazed at Taj al-Din, took out a piece of sweetmeat from his bag, chewed a bit of it and thrust the rest into Taj al-Din’s mouth. He then told one of the teachers standing by : "What can you teach him? He is already well taught in his previous life." And, addressing the young Taj al-Din, he said: "Eat little, Sleep little, and Talk little. While reading *Qur'an*, read as though the holy Prophet Mohammed has descended upon you."

This strange incident effected a profound change in Taj al-Din. Tears flowed from his eyes continuously for three days and he lost all interest in play and childish pranks. He sought solitude and was always found reading the works of great Sufi Saints and reflecting upon their profound significance (Bharadwaja 1981:9).

Later in life, in his late teens, Taj al-Din began visiting Hazrat Da'ud Chishti in Sagar and began following his instructions. He soon fell into a state of *majdhubyat* [intense attraction to God] and was taken for a madman by most who encountered him. Taunted by children, rejected by his family and friends, he was eventually committed for life to the Nagpur “Lunatic Asylum” by British officials who had been offended by his bizarre behavior. Some time prior to being committed, however, he had already begun to attract a following of local people who understood his condition very differently from the way the British authorities understood it.

The idea of the individual who is so absorbed with thoughts of God that he or she does not function well in the physical world is not uncommon in Islam. As Carl Ernst (1997) points out, “Collections of Sufi biographies sometimes contain appendices giving the lives of intoxicated saints, who have been attracted [*majdhub*] to God with such force that their intellects have been overpowered” (115). Michael Dols (1992) has compiled a study of attitudes towards madness and sanctity in medieval Islam, surveying the history of Islamic medicine and its response to mental illness, with interesting sections on the idea of the ‘holy fool’ and the *majdhub*. In this work he summarizes one writer’s understanding of the *majdhub*.

...the mystical call of the sufi or dervish may be so sudden and the person may follow it so quickly that he is believed to have become mentally deranged. In fact, this state, being *majdhub*, was believed to be the normal beginning in the careers of many dervishes. The *majdhub* forgets all earthly things and follows only the internal call, living—so to speak—with his Caller. Being completely absorbed by his inner life, his outer existence is characterized by disconnected speech, repeating one and the same sentence, and roaming aimlessly in the streets or fields... (417-418).

The preceding quotation captures nicely the way in which many of the local people of Nagpur understood the state of Taj al-Din Baba. As time went on, miraculous powers were attributed to the saint, and soon literally thousands of people were coming to visit him in the asylum.

Eventually, a new gate had to be built on the grounds in order to accommodate the throngs. It is reported that the head of the hospital himself eventually became a devotee, and frequently went to his patient for advice. He would have preferred to release his patient but British authorities refused to allow it.

The Nagpur “Lunatic Asylum” was established by the British Colonial Government in 1884. The asylum system for psychiatric patients began in Britain on a small scale in the early nineteenth century, and a similar system developed simultaneously in India, in part to maintain the apparent superiority of the colonizers. “European lunatics were made invisible either by institutionalization or deportation” (Waltraud Ernst 1999c:263). “Native lunatics” were handled in a similar manner, again, in part to maintain apparent superiority, as well as to display colonial dominance. The development of the asylum system in India was heterogeneous, and reflected individual engagement by the colonial authorities with issues of concern in a given region. Although few records are available regarding procedures in the Nagpur asylum, it was not uncommon for race to be a factor in how individual cases were handled (Waltraud Ernst 1999a, 1999b). Europeans and “Native lunatics” were usually handled separately. Natives were often herded together with no regard to religious perspectives, caste, etc., to the extreme displeasure of the families (Mills 2004; Waltraud Ernst 1997). Medical and psychiatric historian Waltraud Ernst (1999c) describes the interaction between the colonizers and the colonized in this way,

...British asylum-based psychiatry faced resistance from Indian doctors and patients who were not easily subordinated by the foreign discourse of psychiatry or its institutional management. British psychiatry as an instrument of rational Western discourse remained largely rhetorical and symbolic. Even so, these ideological aspects were central to a Western science which claimed to be not only different from but also superior to indigenous knowledge (263).

According to local tradition and hagiographic accounts, this was certainly so in the case of Taj al-Din Baba of Nagpur (Fig. 27). Neither the director of the Nagpur Lunatic Asylum, nor the general public were in agreement with “the foreign discourse of psychiatry or its institutional management.” Even today, there remains a small, functioning *dargah* on the grounds of what is now known as the Nagpur Regional Mental Hospital (Fig. 28).

It is the memory of Taj al-Din Baba, his historical relationship with the British authorities, and the general local understanding of his spiritual status, that is called to mind by the pilgrims to *Taj Bagh*. The understanding is that Taj Baba, as he is affectionately known, spent much of his life in a state of divine absorption, in communion with the divine, that he was a *wali* [friend] of Allah. As a friend of God, the saint is understood to have the ‘ear’ of God, and, much like the Virgin Mother in Christianity, has the ability to intercede for the devotee and bring him or her into the kind of close communion with God that Taj Baba himself enjoyed. This is not an individual memory, as most likely no individual at *Taj Bagh* today has a personal memory of Taj al-Din, or the events of his life. To visitors of *Taj Bagh*, Taj al-Din represents cultural memory, his representation in song, in story, and in the architectural monuments erected in his memory, are constructions of meaning which inhabit the cultural memory of the worshippers at *Taj Bagh* (Bal 1999). The texts sung during the *Qawwali* programs are often chosen with the intention of affirming this cultural memory, and this understanding of Taj al-Din and his mental state. Deliberately to align oneself with these ideas and values assists the worshipper in developing a subjective sense of the symbolic cultural self. This alignment facilitates a healing of the separation between the individual’s symbolic cultural self and the sacred other.

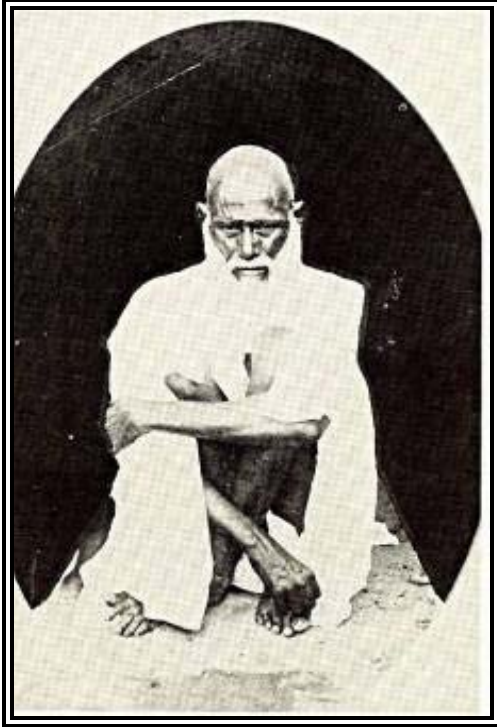


Figure 27 - Taj al-Din Baba, photo probably taken in the asylum, around 1900 (Kalchuri 1986).



Figure 28 - Dargah of Taj al-Din Baba at the Nagpur Regional Mental Hospital.



Figure 29 - Worshippers at entrance to the shrine at Taj Bagh.

Belief in the Unseen

Belief in the unseen is an implicit element of virtually all religious practice. Rarely, however, is it so explicitly stated as in the following verses of the Qur'an.

This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah.

Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them;

And who believe in the Revelation sent to thee, and sent before thy time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the Hereafter -- Sura 2:2-4.

This passage explicitly promises divine guidance to those who 'believe in the Unseen.' Such belief is an important sub-text to all of the activities at *Taj Bagh*, and undergirds and informs the *Qawwali* performance, the message of the sung texts, and the activation of collective memory. Although by no means an exclusively Islamic or Sufi belief, it is precisely this imperative to believe in the unseen that makes the deliberate acts of remembrance essential.

A common theme in Sufi poetry and ideology is the idea of the "two worlds," this world, and the "other world," the unseen world. It is in the other world that communion with God takes place. This is the realm towards which Taj al-Din Baba's consciousness was drawn, which absorbed his concentration so much that he appeared to be mad to the uninformed observer. This is the world that is symbolized by the *dargah* and the presence of the saint. One gains access to this world through communion with the *wali*, the friend of God, and through the *wali* one gains access to communion with Allah. Thus, the *dargah* itself, and the activities that take place there, take place, as it were, in both worlds. Each action in this world, bowing to the tomb, placing a flower, performing or listening to *Qawwali*, etc., has its parallel activity reflected in the other world, and it is through the activities in this world that one participates in the reality of the other world. It is

precisely because the other world is unseen that one must engage in specific activities of remembrance, activities that remind one of the supreme reality and of the importance of the other world. This other world, then, is the world of the sacred other. *Dhikr*, the ritualized oral repetition sacred names and formulae, and *Qawwali* are both explicitly understood as techniques for remembering the sacred other. Linkage of the individual's symbolic cultural self with the sacred other through practices such as visiting the tombs of *Awliya* [saints] and listening to *Qawwali* provide the worshipper with a subjective sense of a cohesive cultural identity, as well as with a sense of continuity between the phenomenal world of suffering and death, and the world of the symbolic sacred other.

There are other aspects to the worshipper's understanding of the unseen as well. Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh (1978), psychiatrist, former head of the department of psychiatry in Tehran, and *shaykh* of the Nimatallahi Sufi order, sees a parallel between the transference phenomenon described by Western psychoanalysis and the relationship between a Sufi master and his *murid* [disciple]. Although the Persian Nimatallahi Sufi ideas discussed by Nurbakhsh are not identical to those of the understanding of the South Asian Chishtiyya, both draw from early Persian sources, and there are many similarities. According to Dr. Nurbakhsh,

In transference a new relationship is formed between the analyst and the patient, and the latter becomes obedient to the former and puts his trust in him. This obedience and surrendering of one's trust, which stems from the child's relationship with his parents and is now developed into a therapeutic instrument, presents the analyst as a person to be relied upon. Such a relationship is necessary for any successful advance in therapy, and it will take place spontaneously sometime during the course of it. (215)

In Sufism, the bond between a Sufi *shaykh* and his *murid* is described as *iradah* [will, intention], or "...the motive force of the heart and the fire of its longing" (214). Dr. Nurbakhsh sees a parallel between what the *murid* experiences in *iradah* and the psychological transference. Sufi

teachings describe *iradah* as having two aspects, one which relates to the *murid's nafs-i ammarah* [demanding soul], and one which relates to the heart [*dil*], or the *murid's* higher nature. Nurbakhsh sees the psychological transference as relating to the lower nature of the *murid*, the *nafs-i ammarah* or “demanding soul”. The same influence, however, may awaken the aspirant’s higher spiritual nature. “When the bond of *iradah* brings master and disciple together, the aspirant unconsciously projects his image of the ideal person upon the master and transfers his feelings and creaturely passions to him” (215). This is one way to understand the relationship of worshippers at *Taj Bagh* to Taj al-Din Baba (Fig. 29)¹⁹.

In the case of the worshippers at *Taj Bagh*, Taj al-Din Baba’s presence must be invoked through active imagination, which is often invoked through guided imagery provided by *Qawwali* song texts. This has been true historically as well. In discussing the attitude of early Chishti shaykhs in South Asia towards pilgrimage to the tombs of saints, Ernst and Lawrence (2002) relate the practice to the relationship of master and *murid*.

The Sufis’ own understanding of the encounter with a saint’s spirit derived from their intense cultivation of the master-disciple relationship, which for them reached beyond the limits of life and death. The *ziyarat* pilgrimage is not merely a journey to a place of burial, but is literally a visit to a living saint: One of the most common Persian terms for a saint’s shrine is *mazar*, a place that is visited, indicating that the act of personal encounter takes priority over the structure’s reliquary function (95).

The song texts, social ambiance of the *dargah*, and the traditional understanding of the relationship between Sufi saints, God, and the worshipper, all contribute to an element of positive expectation that aids the worshippers in their attempts to construct a meaningful relationship with the unseen saint. In addition to the transference, and *iradah* described by Nurbakhsh, this engagement with cultural constructions of the sacred self, though remaining

¹⁹ For a treatment of the sufi-shaykh relationship in terms of ontology, see McGregor 2003.

unseen, provides the worshipper with a kind of modeling (Bandura 1986) from which they learn new ways of being in the seen world of everyday events. By interacting with a culturally constructed sacred self, the worshipper acquires new resources for positive living by experiencing a sense of personal control, meaning, and optimism. Research has shown that such resources, even when based on illusory or perceived ideals, can help individuals adapt more readily to stressful events, and may even positively impact physical health (Seligman, et al 2006; Seligman, et al 2005; Seligman, et al 2000; Taylor, et al 2000; Myers 2000).

Conclusion

Ethnomusicologist John Blacking (1973) defined music as “humanly organized sound” (10).

Elsewhere (1979) he has observed that

Man makes music as a patterned event in a system of social interaction, as a part of a process of conscious decision making; but there is also a sense in which music makes man, releasing creative energy, expanding consciousness and influencing subsequent decision-making and cultural invention (4).

Something very similar might be said of religious practice, that religious practice is “humanly organized” interaction with the sacred other, perhaps, or that religious practice “makes man”, that it releases creative energy, expands consciousness and influences “subsequent decision-making and cultural invention.” There are many parallels between music and religion as cultural artifacts. Both music and religion go against the grain of rational, linear thought. Both have survived the enlightenment and the modern era, and both appear poised to survive the post-modern era, and whatever may come next. There appears to be something unstoppable about music and religion. One would be hard pressed to find a society on earth today in which one segment or the other does not use some form of music (or “humanly organized sound”) in religious practice. Why should this be so?

Blacking (1969) concludes that “The value of music lies in its power to restore and develop man’s sense of being and to close the gap that the acquisition of culture has made between the inner and outer man” (71). He sees music as an evolutionary adaptation which functions to compensate for the demands of culture on the developing individual. One might conclude, then, that as modern culture develops more and more, humankind will require music more and more, not less. Jacob Pandian (1991) suggests that

...the roots of religion are in symbolizing human identity as having “super-natural” characteristics, that is, in having qualities that are not confined to the physical/natural world...Symbols of the self (the symbolic self) signify the characteristics and meanings of what it is to be human. Symbols of the sacred other signify the existence and characteristics of supernatural beings, entities, and powers, and they connote the linkages between the symbolic self and the sacred other (3-4).

This link between the symbolic self and the sacred other, which Pandian sees as the “root” of religion, has its parallel in Blacking. Blacking sees music restoring the link between the inner and outer man, thus healing the gap between them that has been created by the acquisition of culture. When music and religion are coextensive, as in *Qawwali*, these two linkages accomplish the symbolic healing described by Dow. According to Dow

...symbolic healing exists, in part, because humans developed their capacity to communicate with each other from an earlier capacity to communicate with themselves through emotions. Awareness of personal biological survival at the level of emotional thinking is primarily adaptive; as culture and language have developed, the capacity to communicate has been extended to symbols within social systems. Symbolic healing exists, therefore, because of the way in which social communication has drawn with it the structure of emotional communication (66).

As cited earlier, Blacking sees music as a metaphor for feeling, thus making music an ideal complement for the transaction of emotions Dow sees occurring in symbolic healing. In Pandian’s terms, music helps to dramatize communication between the symbols of the self and symbols of the sacred other in ritual practice. This is one of the things I see happening in

Qawwali which, with some adjustment to Dow's proposal, I am suggesting can be understood as an aspect of symbolic healing. As described earlier, the symbolic musical expressions of the beautiful voice, the rhythm of *dhikr*, and the dynamic flow of ecstasy function to make these feelings aurally tangible, and often physically tangible, when they inspire movement. The symbolic sounds of *Qawwali* act as form of *tawajud* [invitation to ecstasy] which engage the emotions and the body, while the song texts focus the mind on the goal of uniting with the divine Beloved. As I have already stated, I do not suggest this analysis as a reductive, or essentialist claim, but, rather, as a heuristic approach to understanding one aspect of the significance of the coextensive nature of music and religion cross-culturally, and, specifically, in the practice of *Qawwali* in South Asia.

From this perspective, the musical sounds of *Qawwali* at *Taj Bagh* function as symbols of the spiritual power [*baraka*] of the sacred self, Taj al-Din Baba, and act, along with other culturally constructed symbols of the sacred self, as an organizing principle for the worshipper, providing support and cohesion in the face the stressful and threatening aspects of life. *Qawwali* defines the existential experience of the worshipper in terms of the religious narratives of Islam and Sufism, activating the emotions of the worshipper and, in James Dow's terms, assisting in the transaction of the worshipper's emotions. The religious narrative lifts the worshipper out of the ordinary, mundane world, and into a state positive expectation of transformation, moving him or her closer to an experience of merger with the sacred other. In Sufi terms, this merger is *fana*, or annihilation of the false self. The advanced individual, the *wali* or an advanced *shaykh*, may be understood to have reached the highest state of *baqa*, or subsistence with God, in which "...God gives a new will to the disciple directly from Himself, in order to replace that which has become

annihilated in the course of the path” (Nurbakhsh 1978:212). Having reached this state, such an individual is understood to be a perfect spiritual master, a *qutb* [literally, pole, or axis]. A *qutb* is a master who is understood to be “...the head of an invisible spiritual hierarchy of saints upon whom the order of the universe depends” (Geaves 2006:89). Local tradition recognizes Taj al-Din Baba of Nagpur as a *qutb* and the worshipper’s understanding of him in this way heightens both their emotional investment the ritual process as well as the transactional benefit to the believer. The transformation which results, in the ideal situation, provides the worshipper with, at the very least, what some Western psychologists refer to as a state of “subjective well-being” (Diener 2000). It is the sounds of *Qawwali* which underline the emotional articulation of these experiences, giving them substance through the very sounds themselves.

One of Dejarlais’ points in articulating an aesthetic of everyday life is to correct a tendency on the part of some writers who evaluate performance as a set of aesthetic values that are removed from the cultural context of the given performance. He emphasizes that the aesthetics of performance flow from cultural values, not the other way around, and that even what constitutes health or illness flows from these values. In this sense, and according to my analysis, a worshipper at *Taj Bagh* can be said to have been restored to health, i. e. to have regained a strong sense of a symbolic cultural self, when he or she has performed certain actions which activate the collective memory of a symbolic, unseen reality. The activation of such memories empowers the individual to feel confident in their connection to and communion with these unseen forces which grounds them in a sense of connection to and identification with a symbolic cultural self. In this regard, *Qawwali* at *Taj Bagh* plays an important role in the activation of collective memory, and in the restoration of a sense of physical, emotional and spiritual well being in the

worshipper. This sense of a restoration of well being will be a reflection of the degree to which the individual has identified with the cultural and religious narrative as represented by the song texts, the daily life of the *dargah*, the life of the saint, and the lineage of the shrine.

CHAPTER III

INTERSECTIONS OF WORLDLY AND SPIRITUAL POWER: THE *DARGAH* OF HAZRAT BABAJAN OF PUNE



Figure 30 - *Dargah* of Hazrat Babajan, Pune.

Personal Fieldnote—When I arrive at the *dargah* [tomb shrine] of the female Muslim saint, Hazrat Babajan, I can see that much has changed here since my previous visit (Fig. 30). The *dargah* has been draped with strings of electric lights, small stalls have been erected on the far side of the structure. Flowers and religious articles are now displayed there for sale. To the right of the *dargah* a large billboard has been erected, also draped with strings of lights, featuring a large photograph of Hazrat Babajan, and announcing the reason for the change in décor:

tonight is the first night of the 'urs, the death anniversary celebration, of Hazrat Babajan (Fig. 31).

As I approach the dargah, I am greeted warmly by my friend, Akbar Anwar Khan, who has graciously invited me to attend the 'urs as his guest. Akbar Khan is a burly man in his late twenties. He has a warm smile and engaging personality. He supports his wife and daughter through his family's trucking business. Truck drivers have a questionable reputation in India, and are generally seen as a rough crowd. Akbar Khan does not fit the norm. He has the build and carriage of an Indian truck driver, but the gentle personality of a Sufi. I join him at the registration table that has been set up near the entrance of the dargah, and he introduces me to several of his friends as we sit and talk about the 'urs and how he came to be involved with the dargah. Later, I ask him to tell me more about his family, and their connection to the dargah.

70 years ago, my grandfather was a trustee of the *dargah* committee. After that, slowly, slowly, he gave the responsibilities over to other people. My grandfather was *there*, he saw Babajan. He was a Pathan²⁰, like Babajan, he was a *pure* Pathan, from Peshawar, *pure* Pathan. You saw there, in the *dargah*? There is that tree, inside there? (Fig. 32) Babajan would sit there at that tree, and all the time Pathans would come, in the evenings, in the mornings, they would come and sit there and take the blessings of being there with Babajan. When my grandfather came from Peshawar to Pune, he was one of them there, he would join them there and sit with Babajan. He was at that time younger, maybe 22, 24 years. He's telling me there is no way to describe Babajan. When he saw Babajan, he became speechless, he could not talk. And what is Babajan? All things are there in her, that means, she is fully spiritual. He is gone now, my grandfather, he died some years back, he was 94 years old. Yes, if you could see my grandfather's photo you would say, yes, that was a man. When I was small he took me by holding my hand, and we were always going to *Qawwali*. He would teach me about *Qawwali*, and after that I joined this community and all of my friends now are from this place. I don't go anywhere, just staying here and doing the social work for all, and for our committee also. (Interview, July 19, 2005)

²⁰ Pathan is the ethnicity of modern day Afghanistan.



Figure 31 - *Dargah* of Hazrat Babajan decorated for the '*urs*'.



Figure 32 - Tree inside Babajan's *dargah*.



Figure 33 - Tomb of Hazrat Babajan, tree in background.

Akbar Khan is the secretary of the Hazrat Babajan Library Committee. One of the roles of the Library Committee is to arrange for the formal *mahfil-i-sama*' program at the annual '*urs* celebration. The purpose of this chapter and the following chapter is to present a description of the *mahfil-i-sama*' in the context of a relatively modest '*urs* celebration of little known, female Muslim saint, Hazrat Babajan (d. 1931) of Pune. The annual '*urs* celebration of a Muslim saint is the ubiquitous Islamic religious festival of South Asia. The word '*urs* means literally "wedding" and the festival, which usually lasts several days, is modeled on Islamic wedding rituals. Although the origin of the use of the word '*urs* is unknown,

The later Chishti scholar Hajji Imdad Allah (d. 1899) traced the term '*urs* to a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, directed at the saints as they prepare for death: "sleep with the sleep of a bridegroom ('*arus*)"; this saying suggests that the physical death of the saint is in fact the joyous reunion with the beloved. To make a pilgrimage, or *ziyarat*, to the tomb of a saint is considered beneficial at any time, but at the time of the '*urs* special blessings are available, since paradise rejoices at the return of that supremely happy moment when a human soul is united with God (Ernst and Lawrence 2002:91).

Depending on the popularity of the saint, and the financial resources of the *dargah*, an '*urs* celebration may range in size anywhere from a one day affair with very little fanfare, to a several day festival that may take on a carnival atmosphere, with thousands in attendance, and coverage on local television and radio. The '*urs* festival of al-Hujwiri of Lahore, Pakistan, an early Sufi writer cited earlier, known locally as *Data Ganj Baksh* ["The Master Bestower of Treasure"], regularly draws over half a million people (Huda 2001). The '*urs* of Mu'in al-Din Chishti of Ajmer, founder of the Chishtiyya Sufi order in South Asia, is estimated to draw over one million worshippers each year (Huda 2003). Often, the central focus of an '*urs* celebration is an enactment of the formal *Qawwali* ritual, the *mahfil-i-sama*', or "assembly for listening". For, as Qureshi (1995) says, "There is no *Qawwali* experience

more vivid and profound than the ‘*urs* of...a saint, the commemoration of his own final union with God on the anniversary of his death’ (1). The festival documented here took place in June of 2005. By South Asian Standards this ‘*urs*’ was relatively modest in size and attendance, with approximately fifteen to twenty-five hundred visitors to the small shrine over the three day period beginning on June 16th, 2005.

In the previous two chapters I have discussed examples of informal religious *Qawwali*. In each of the cases of *Qawwali* performed at a *dargah* encountered thus far, In the introduction with Alim Nizami *Qawwal*, in chapter one with Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal* in Ahmednagar, and in chapter two with Nyaz Rangeel on a Thursday evening at *Taj Bagh*, *Qawwali* has enhanced the sense of sacred space, but has made few demands upon the listener. In such a setting, the sounds of *Qawwali* suggest the opportunities offered by Sufi ideology, but the question remains open, the listener may engage *Qawwali* as background music, or as entertainment, or choose to engage the musical and textual symbolism more deeply. The *mahfil-i-sama*’, however, is the central religious practice associated with *Qawwali*, its performance is the enactment of the main elements of Sufi ideology. The purpose of the *mahfil* ritual is explicitly to engage the listener, and invite him²¹ to participate in the enactment of Sufi ideology by actively listening with the intention of experiencing an ecstatic [*wajd*] state [*hal*] of communion with God. It is in the *mahfil* that the symbolic sounds of *Qawwali*, the beautiful voice, the rhythm of *dhikr*, and the dynamic flow of ecstasy, are most fully expressed by the performers, and most fully engaged by the listeners.

²¹ Women are usually excluded from the formal *mahfil*, though allowed under special circumstances.

As a prelude to my description of the *mahfil-i-sama*, I go into some detail here regarding the history of the shrine and the biography, or, at least, hagiography, of the saint. I do so in order to both emphasize the importance of the historical and cultural context in which the *mahfil* ritual takes place, as well as to clarify the disjunct between the original purpose of the ritual, and its contemporary manifestation in June of 2005, in Pune, India. This disjunct occurs owing to certain peculiar qualities in the saint herself, and to certain aspects of institutional Sufism. For the sake of convenience I discuss the *'urs* in two separate chapters. Chapter three emphasizes the history of the *dargah* and the context of the *'urs* celebration. Chapter four focuses on ethnographic description and analysis of the *mahfil-i-sama* ritual itself.

Both feminists and Foucault, and even Edward Said, identify the body as the site of power (Diamond & Quinby 1988; Sawicki 1991; Foucault 1995; Said 1978). This is usually thought of in terms of worldly, institutional power. In the context of a South Asian *'urs* celebration, however, the element of spiritual power [*baraka*] is added to the cultural mix. At the *'urs* in question, the physical remains of Hazrat Babajan, entombed in the shrine [*dargah*] around which all of the elements of the *'urs* celebration circumambulate, is the focal point for the intersection of a variety of power relations. One important aspect of my discussion of the *mahfil* is the contrast evident between the ascetic lifestyle of the saint whose memory is being honored, and the formal institutional elements that have become associated with the *dargah* in the intervening seventy-four years since Babajan's death. I identify these contrasting elements, 1.) the saint, who is understood to be in constant communion with God through her ecstatic state, and 2.) the formal Sufi enactment of ritual, represented by the

shaykh and his entourage at the *mahfil*, as shamanic and priestly, respectively²². I see these distinctions as important and useful in articulating one of the explicit goals of the *mahfil*, which is to transcend the worldly representations of Sufi ideology (i.e. the shaykh as the institutional representative of the deceased saint), through the individual transformation of identity experienced as a subjective, internal sense of merging with the sacred other through listening (*sama* ') to sacred words set to music. This is the explicit goal of the *mahfil-i-sama* '.

The shrine of Hazrat Babajan is located in the city of Pune, in Western Maharashtra, about 65 miles southeast of Mumbai. The city has a long history, its earliest settlements dating to the 8th century AD, but has grown to become a large educational and industrial center. With a population of approximately four and a half million people, Pune is the second largest city in the state, after Mumbai. Throughout its early history, Pune sporadically fell under Muslim rule in the persons of various sultanate kings. For a time the city was technically under the rule of the Shah of Ahmednagar, but there was constant resistance from the local people. Pune gradually became famous as a *Maratha* stronghold, resisting the last great Mughal emperor, Awrangzib. The *Maratha* leader, Shivaji, is the great hero of Pune who repeatedly thwarted Awrangzib's attempts to bring all of the Deccan into the Mughal empire. In the mid-19th century Pune fell into the hands of the British, subject to the authority of the Bombay Presidency. A permanent British military camp was established well outside the outskirts of the old city, covering four and a half square miles. This area eventually became the Pune cantonment, the area from which the colonial military governorship of the area was carried out (Diddee, Gupta 2000).

²² See my discussion of shamanic and priestly categories in the Introduction, pages 16-17.

The cantonment area contains an ethnically and religiously diverse population, including large Muslim, Hindu, and Zoroastrian communities. Zoroastrianism is the religion of ancient Persia, founded by the prophet Zoroaster. During the Muslim expansion into Persia, many Zoroastrians migrated to the subcontinent. The most significant Persian migration began sometime after the seventh-century. The immigrant Zoroastrians mingled easily with the Gujarati population and were dubbed "Parsis," after the land from which they had come, Persia [*Pars*]. When the British East India company began to take control of the subcontinent, Zoroastrians worked well with the colonial powers (Nanavutty 1980). During the 19th century a large Parsi community began to develop in the cantonment area of Pune. The shrine of Hazrat Babajan is found in this area, which is still referred to as the cantonment, or "camp" area of Pune.

Babajan's *dargah* is a small, white marble structure with broad, carved teak doors which open onto a busy intersection in the cantonment (Fig. 30 - 31). The building is approximately eight feet by thirty feet, near fifteen feet high, and is constructed to enclose, at the far end, the five foot high stump of a neem tree which has been painted silver (Fig. 32). Immediately adjacent to the neem tree, leaving just enough space between the tomb itself and the tree to allow circumambulation of the tomb, is the marble covering which houses the remains of the saint (Fig. 33). Directly behind the *dargah* is the schoolyard of the Lady Hawabai High School. Because of the location of the shrine, festivities cannot be held in the area of the *dargah* itself without blocking traffic. For this reason, on the second night of the 'urs, the outdoor, public *Qawwali* program was held in this schoolyard, directly behind the *dargah*. The school building itself, which lies beyond the open space of the schoolyard, provided the

location for the formal *mahfil-i-sama*’, which took place on the final night of the *‘urs*. The circumstances leading to the construction of a Muslim shrine in the middle of a busy thoroughfare, in the precinct of the Pune military cantonment, during the British Raj, are quite interesting. However, before inquiring into the life of Hazrat Babajan, and the history of the establishment of her now permanent seat in the Pune cantonment, it will be helpful to take a moment to look at the history of the writing of Muslim saints’ lives in South Asia in general.

The history of Sufism is often traced by way of initiatic genealogies and hagiographic accounts of the lives of the saints who inhabit them. Many of these saints, however, have more than one *khalifa* [successor]. In such cases as the Chishtiyya saint Nizam al-Din Awliya, one of his successors, Shaykh Nasir al-Din Mahmud (Chirag-i Dihli; the Lamp of Delhi) is widely known and celebrated, while another, Burhan al-Din Gharib of Khuldabad, has received little attention until quite recently. Regarding the Chishtiyya of South Asia, one might well ask, as Bruce Lawrence (1982) has, why “...certain Muslims from this part of the world become famous, while others have been forgotten, slighted, or remembered only in relationship to their illustrious contemporaries?” (47). According to Lawrence, in order for Sufi teachers during the pre-Mughal period of the Delhi Sultanate to become famous they must have been male, urban, and elite. This same criteria might well be applied to Sufi teachers of the late colonial period as well.

Hazrat Babajan is said to have first appeared in Pune as a wandering beggar woman, a *faqir* [impoverished one]. She was not male, and although her hagiographies tell us that she was

born of an elite Afghan family, this would only have been known to the local people of Pune by way of vague legends about her, if at all. She was by no means among the educated elite in the sense implied by Lawrence in his criteria. By 1905 she had established her seat under a neem tree on the outskirts of the cantonment, on the Malcolm Tank Road, in an area of Pune called *Char Bawdi*. She rarely moved from this spot once she had established herself there. Although the environs eventually became more developed as the cantonment expanded, she was not in an urban area at the beginning of her stay in Pune. Moreover, Babajan was not connected with any Sufi lineage [*silsila*]. She never claimed any association with a Sufi order, and named no *khalifa*. Her shrine, and the cultural capital associated with her legacy, was appropriated by representatives the Chishtiyya order soon after her death, or perhaps even as her death was seen to be imminent. Even then, it was only by virtue of their affection and reverence for her that they wished to be associated with her, there is no record of her voicing such an affiliation herself. Babajan had broad popular appeal, with many followers in Pune, and from all over India, who came to her for her blessings. She was not, however, a functioning shaykh in any capacity. She left no record of oral teachings [*malfuzat*] or of any formal teachings whatsoever. When I asked Akbar Khan why there was no shaykh at Babajan's *dargah* he replied, "...she is own shaykh, she is *sultana* [queen]!" Babajan's popularity was not inspired by her institutional affiliation or bloodline, but rather, by her personal magnetism, her austerities as a *faqir*, and her state of mind, which was understood by her followers as an ecstatic state of divine absorption, of *majdubiyya* [attraction to the divine].

It is often suggested that the valorization of the mentally ill is a sociological phenomenon which serves to reincorporate the insane into a functioning role in a given society. While this view has its merits, it is problematic. Why are some apparently unstable individuals chosen for valorization, while others are not? One writer (Desai 1989) suggests that local people determine the distinction between madness and divine absorption by observing a defiance of the rules of self-interest in the subject. Does the individual's abnormal behavior contribute to his or her self interest, or work against it? This understanding offers some insight into local understandings, but is incomplete. Another problem with the rather too neat assessment that a *majdhub* [divinely absorbed individual] is simply a mentally ill person who is treated with respect, is that this view privileges the imposition of positivism and Western psychological diagnosis over indigenous interpretations of behavior. In the case of Babajan, this view fails to account for her personal magnetism (reported among Europeans as well as local Muslims, Hindus, and Zoroastrians), periods of lucidity, when she gave apparently sound advice and communicated intelligently, and it unquestioningly reduces the religious interpretation of her austerities (she was reported to seldom take food, surviving the rigors of advanced age for weeks on only tea and a few scraps, living in the open in all weather, etc.) to the suggestion that she simply hadn't enough sense to take care of herself. More importantly, such a reductive view casts a pejorative interpretation upon the esteem and reverence with which thousands of locals (according to newspaper accounts of her funeral) afforded her, and rejects their interpretations of her behavior as inadequate and incorrect. The followers of Babajan interpreted her behaviors religiously. As we saw in the case of Taj al-Din Baba, Babajan was understood to be in a state of *majdubiyya*. For these people, Babajan's choice to live in the open, on little food, was the conscious act of will of a *faqir*, and these austerities themselves

led to her absorbed state, not the other way around; not an unbalanced mind resulting in the condition of one who could not care for her own needs.

The issue of religious ecstasy and sanity has been discussed at length by anthropologists and psychologists in the cross-cultural study of shamanism and other religious behaviors (Fabrega 1998; Marsella, et al 1985; Marsella 1985; Devereux 1980; Lewis 1971; La Barre 1970). The issue involves questions of the universality of Western medical paradigms and cultural relativism. In many early studies, anthropologists interpreted tribal shamanic figures as mental patients whose illness had been recognized as having religious significance and who were accepted into the community as religious specialists (Devereux 1980; Silverman 1967). As anthropologist I.M. Lewis (1971) has observed, "...shamanism [was] regularly seen as an institutionalized madhouse for primitives" (179). Such a viewpoint often neglected to take into consideration a variety of cultural nuances, including the deliberate choice of the shaman to enter into a relationship with subjective experiences, and the shaman's possession of adequate ego strength to survive the experience in a way which may benefit his or her community. "Not all those upon whom the spirits press their attentions progress to that point of intimacy where they are joined in celestial union. And even when they do, the decision to accept their divine calling is at some level made by the subjects themselves" (190). This approach involves an understanding of multiple cultural factors, including culturally specific self-concepts. Since Lewis' early observations, the trend in anthropology has been away from interpreting all ecstatic states as pathological, and towards an understanding which integrates the multiple cultural influences affecting each individual case. As psychologist Anthony Marsella (1985) observes,

Culture and self are inextricably linked to both normal and abnormal behavior. The imposition of western psychiatric assumptions on non-western people is not only unwarranted, but potentially dangerous in its implications. Psychiatry, psychology, and cultural anthropology must begin first and foremost with an understanding of the nature of human experience. This requires knowledge of the self. The self is tied to culture and culture varies across the world (303).

I do not mean to suggest that Hazrat Babajan was a shaman in the sense generally understood and discussed in anthropological literature. To characterize her as such would not only be imprecise, but would perpetuate the tendency of Western researchers to characterize any religious specialist who falls outside of mainstream “World” religious practices as a stereotyped, mythical Other, i. e. a “shaman” (Kehoe 2000). I use Jacob Pandian’s (1999; 1991) broad categories of shamanic and priestly as a heuristic device in analyzing the context of religious *Qawwali* performance, not as labels to be understood literally. In this context, however, Babajan falls more closely into the shamanic category than the priestly, given that she undertook no overt social function within institutional Sufism or Islam, yet the hagiographic literature shows that she was understood to function as an Islamic healer. The followers of Hazrat Babajan understood her to be a mystic who, through years of austerities, had achieved the state of a *majdhub*, or one who is completely absorbed in communion with the divine. Like Taj al-Din, discussed in chapter two, she was also understood by many to be a *qutb*, or the head of a hidden spiritual hierarchy of saintly figures²³. However one interprets Babajan’s personality and behaviors, over simplification on either side of the question will not be helpful. The salient point here is that the local interpretation of Babajan’s state of mind provides her followers with an example of the potential for *majdubiyya*, or divine absorption, which is central to the philosophy of Sufism and an important aspect of the practice of *mahfil-i-sama’*.

The unusual character and location of Babajan's shrine, or *dargah*, itself, and its history, are important elements of the context and character of her annual 'urs celebration. The location of the small shrine on a busy city street physically limits the extent to which 'urs activities can take place in proximity to the shrine itself. It also speaks to the extent to which Babajan's personality, and the personality of her shrine, have continued to be integrated into the daily life of the area. At no time is this more evident than during the 'urs celebration. During the 'urs celebration, several additional stalls are erected near the shrine, providing flowers, sweets, and other devotional objects for pilgrims to offer to the saint. Large banners, billboards, and signs are also erected near the shrine announcing the 'urs celebration and listing upcoming events. These signs and stalls, as well as the shrine itself, are decorated with colorful lights and tapestries. All of these elements encourage locals, as well as those who have come from a distance especially for the 'urs, to visit the shrine and make an offering. As a result, the small shrine is more crowded during this period than it usually is, with Muslim men and women, as well as Hindus, Zoroastrians, and Europeans, coming to offer prayers, flowers, and other gifts throughout the three day celebration. The crowds often spill out into the street, and special policemen are on hand to keep the traffic of automobiles, scooter rickshaws, bicycles, and pedestrians flowing smoothly (Fig. 4).

²³ For a description of the traditional hierarchy of saints, including the *qutb* [pole], see McGregor 2004:13.

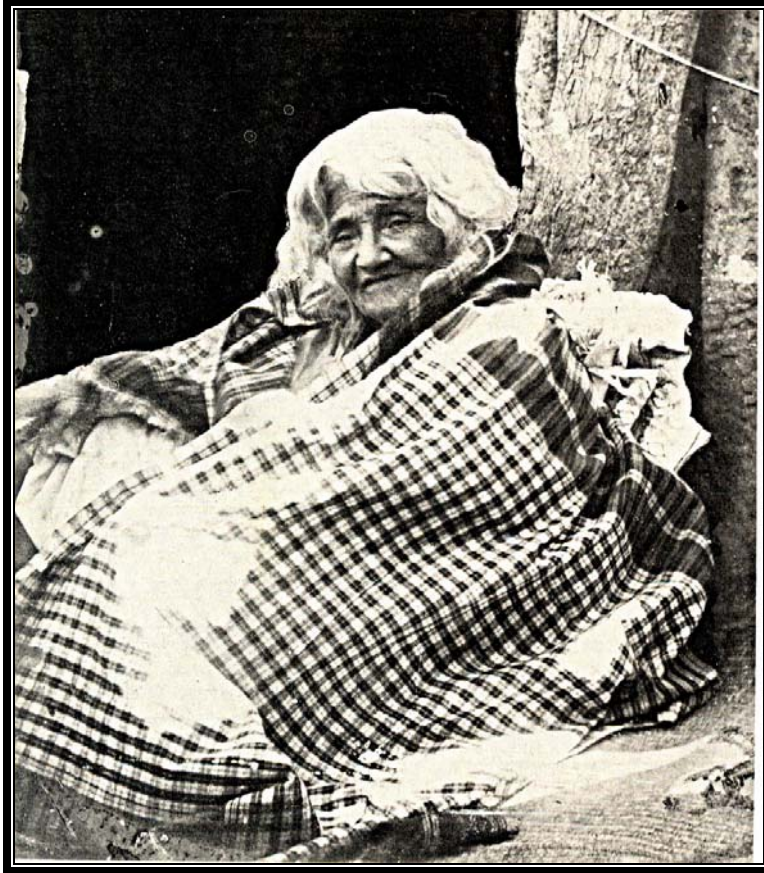


Figure 34 - Hazrat Babajan of Pune, seated at the neem tree.

Establishment of Babajan's *Dargah* in the Pune Cantonment

Aside from a few scattered references, the main sources of information on the life of Hazrat Babajan are hagiographic (Ghani 1961; Ramakrishnan 1998; Kalchuri 1986). As a result, the authors tend to emphasize her *karamat*, or miraculous powers. Even so, some useful information may be culled from the sources. Babajan is said to have been a Pathan from Baluchistan²⁴ and of noble background. The sources describe her as a princess who was committed to the devotional life, but who took to the life of an ascetic when her family attempted to force her to marry. It is thought that she began her stay in Pune some time around 1900. During her early years in Pune,

²⁴ Baluchistan is a large geographical region covering areas of modern day Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran.

Babajan is said to have remained under the neem tree in *Char Bawdi* in all weather, with no shelter whatsoever (Fig 34). Eventually, some devotees constructed a simple, makeshift lean-to made of sticks and gunny sacks to protect her from the brutal Indian sun. Although she would occasionally move about the city for days at a time, she would always eventually return to her seat under the neem tree. One elderly Zoroastrian man told me “As children we would see her walking down the street, coming toward us, and we would run! We didn’t know who she was, we were frightened of her! (laughs)”²⁵. As time went on, and the cantonment grew, Babajan’s seat beneath the neem tree, once in an isolated area, was now in the middle of a busy intersection. This growth was partly due to her presence there, as tea stalls and other small shops sprang up to accommodate the crowds who gathered around her.

The cantonment authorities became alive to the situation, and had it been possible, they would unhesitatingly have had Babajan shifted to some out-of-the-way spot. But they dared not risk a public demonstration in the matter. By now Babajan's fame as a Saint had spread far and wide and Char Bavadi became a place of pilgrimage for people from all over India. Backed by public opinion, a few elected members of the Cantonment Board successfully prevailed upon that body to build at their expense a decent and permanent structure in place of Babajan's shabby shelter. When the new structure, which was only a few feet away from Babajan's original seat, was ready, to everyone's surprise she refused to move there. The awkward situation was gotten over, however, by extending the structure a little more so as to include and embrace Babajan's original seat, as well as the neem tree (Ghani 1961:16).

Thus, the representatives of the colonial authorities, at their own expense, constructed, around both her person, and the neem tree itself, the structure which was to eventually become Babajan's *dargah*. According to an article in *The Times of India*, this enclosure was erected in 1924²⁶.

²⁵ Minoos Barucha, personal communication.

²⁶ I am indebted to Nile Green who made me aware of a collection of newspaper clippings, referring, to Babajan, among the Lane Smith Papers (1928) in the Special Collections Library of the University of Birmingham, UK

One British resident of Pune was so annoyed by the crowds around Babajan during this period that he wrote to *The Times of India* (rather than ask those around Babajan for himself!) inquiring about the saint.

One of our Pune readers is evidently very perturbed about a Grey-haired old woman, said to be at least a hundred years old, who lies on a couch in a specially constructed house from early morning till a late hour at night, surrounded almost all the time by an eager and devout crowd of people of all castes and creeds anxious to pay their respects to her. Our correspondent narrates the dumb show that goes on between the old woman and her devotees and asks who the old woman is and why she is so venerable a personage (September 4, 1926).

Three days later another article appeared in the same newspaper identifying the old woman as Babajan and relating something of her history, including the story of her 1903 pilgrimage by steamer to Mecca, where she is reported to have saved the ship from going down in a hurricane after extracting the promise from all passengers that they would garland the tomb of the Prophet at Medina²⁷.

A British journalist, Paul Brunton (1970), described his meeting with Babajan around 1930-31 in the small enclosure which had been built by the cantonment authorities.

We find her in a narrow street, whose lighting is a quaint mixture of gaudy little oil lamps and electric globes. She lies, in full view of passers-by, upon a low divan. A fenced veranda rail separates it from the street. Above the wooden shelter rises the shapely outline of a neem tree, whose white blossoms make the air slightly fragrant. "You must take off your shoes," my guide warns me. "It is considered disrespectful to wear them when you enter." I obey him and a minute later we stand by her bedside. She lies flat on her back, this ancient dame. Her head is propped by pillows. The lustrous whiteness of her silky hair offers sad contrast to the heavily wrinkled face and seamed brow. Out of my slender store of newly-learned Hindustani I address a phrase of self-introduction to the old lady. She turns her aged head, stretches out a skinny, bonny forearm, and then takes one of my hands in her own. She holds it tightly, staring up at me with unworldly eyes. Those eyes puzzle me. They seem to be quite uncomprehending, entirely vacant. She silently grips my hand for three or four minutes and continues to look blankly into my own eyes. I receive the feeling that her gaze penetrates me. It is a weird sensation. I do

²⁷ The steamer story is also related in one of the biographies (Ramakrishnan:1998) as an eye witness account attributed to a professor from Deccan College, Pune, a Mr. Hyder Ibrahim Sayani (pp. 20).

not know what to do...At last she withdraws her hand and brushes her forehead several times. Then she turns to my guide and says something to him, but it is in the vernacular and I cannot grasp its meaning. He whispers the translation: "He has been called to India and soon he will understand." A pause, and then she croaks forth another sentence, but its meaning were better kept in memory than in print. Her voice is extremely feeble; her words emerge slowly and with much difficulty. Is it possible that this aged and decrepit fleshly frame, this haggard and huddled figure, contains the soul of a genuine faqueer with wondrous powers? Who can say? It is not always easy to read the pages of the soul by the letters of the body (52-53).

Although, due to public pressure, the cantonment authorities had reluctantly agreed to allow Babajan to stay under the neem tree, and had even built a structure for her (primarily as an effort to keep the crowds from blocking traffic) they were adamant that she should not be buried at the site, for the expected crowds visiting her shrine would only serve to further inhibit traffic and the daily business activities of the area. According to newspaper clippings found among the Lane-Smith papers (1928), although Babajan did not die until September 21, 1931, as early as 1928 (possibly earlier), discussions were held and committees formed to debate the topic of her burial and to determine where her final resting place would be. According to one article,

...Mr. Kaji Lal Mahomed pointed out that the Saint could not be buried in the compound of the Mosque chiefly because the singing of songs and the music at the annual "Urus" of the Saint could not be carried out in close proximity to the Pensioners' Mosque or any other Mosque, as music before or near Mosques is strictly prohibited and the prominent feature of an "Urus" is the "Kawwali," which includes singing throughout the night and the playing of musical instruments (March 25, 1928).

Although discussion continued, and various sites were alternately debated and agreed upon, when Babajan finally passed away on September 21, 1931, the public outcry was such, and such huge crowds arrived for her funeral, that the colonial authorities did not dare to interfere. On September 23, 1931, Hazrat Babajan was buried within the confines of the small shelter built for her by the cantonment authorities some years earlier, beneath the neem tree which had given her shelter her for over twenty-five years.

As time passed, the original wooden structure of the shrine was improved upon and added to, and the neem tree which it enclosed continued to thrive. Sometime in the mid-1990s, however, a wealthy patron offered to build Babajan a new *dargah*, made with the best marble and teak. The *dargah* committee agreed, and in the course of construction of the new edifice, it was decided that, rather than leave a hole in the roof of the *dargah* for the neem tree to grow through, the top of the tree would be removed, killing the tree, but allowing the roof, for the first time in its history, to fully cover the entire area of the shrine. When one devotee was asked about the decision to cut down the tree, he simply dropped his eyes, shook his head, and said sadly, “They should never have done that”.

As is evident from the preceding account, in addition to the religious interpretation of Babajan’s personality and behavior, that she was a *majdhub*, or divinely absorbed individual, she also provides a potent symbol of defiance of the colonial rulers. The cantonment authorities were clearly baffled by her presence and popularity and found themselves unable to confront the situation without creating a political and public relations catastrophe. Babajan’s mere presence in the cantonment was an affirmation, for the Muslim, Hindu, and Zoroastrian populations of the area, that the European world view, however socially and politically powerful at the moment, did not represent an unquestioned dominance of social power and ideology. The popularity of her 2005 *‘urs* celebration suggests that Babajan continues to function for the community as a powerful symbol of the shamanic sacred self in communion with the sacred other.

The 'urs of Hazrat Babajan

As mentioned earlier, the festivities of Babajan's 'urs are somewhat constrained by the location of the shrine itself. The 'urs nonetheless combines the outward character of an Islamic religious festival with the implicit symbolism of a funerary ritual of transition. As Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington (1991), two anthropologists who specialize in mortuary ritual, have observed,

Life continues generation after generation, and in many societies it is this continuity that is focused on and enhanced during the rituals surrounding a death. The continuity of the living is a more palpable reality than the continuity of the dead. Consequently, it is common for life values of sexuality and fertility to dominate the symbolism of funerals (108).

The death of a Sufi saint in South Asia is understood as a transition from a state of separation from God [Allah] as the eternal Beloved, to one of union. This state is represented in Sufi poetry, and in *Qawwali* song texts, in the romantic language of the lover (the Sufi seeker) and the Beloved (God, Allah). In this way, the death of the saint is celebrated as one who has lived a life in communion with God, the divine Beloved, and who has now earned the right of final union through an eternal marriage with Beloved/God. This understanding of the saint's death as a victorious union with God serves as a proto-type for the seeker who attends the *mahfil-i-sama*'. It is an affirmation that the union sought by the believer through the practice of listening [*sama*] to sacred words set to music is indeed attainable, and that he or she may participate in the saint's own union with God by practicing *sama*' at the 'urs. Seen in this light, the 'urs is a celebration and remembrance of the body of the saint, which in turn affirms the believer's access to God through the body of the attending shaykh, the body of the assembly [*mahfil*], and his or her own embodied presence and participation in listening [*sama*].

By the Islamic [*hijri*] calendar, Hazrat Babajan passed away on the 8th of *Jumaada al-awal*, 1350 AH [September 21, 1931 AD]. The ‘*urs*’ documented here was celebrated on the 9th, 10th and 11th of *Jumaada al-awal*, 1426 AH [June 16th, 17th, and 18th, 2005]. The specifics of how an ‘*urs*’ is celebrated vary from *dargah* to *dargah*. The events are chosen and implemented by the functioning authorities at the various shrines, usually headed by the *Shaykh*. As stated earlier, Babajan did not function as a *shaykh* herself, although she is still regarded as a *shaykh* by her followers. Neither did she appoint a *khalifa* [successor] prior to her death. In the absence of a functioning *shaykh*, the two authoritative bodies presiding over the events commemorating Babajan’s ‘*urs*’ in 2005 were the *Dargah* Committee, and the Library Committee. The two groups worked together to organize and execute the events of the ‘*urs*’. Akbar Khan was my primary informant and genial host throughout the ‘*urs*’. Akbar Khan (Fig. 35) saw to it that I was invited to all of the events, and kept me informed regarding the *mahfil-i-sama*’, the public *Qawwali* program, and the processional which formally initiated the ‘*urs*’ celebration.

A common feature of the ‘*urs*’ celebration throughout South Asia is a procession, often leading throughout the entire city, demonstrating the areas which were known to be associated with the saint, and over which the saint is understood to have authority [*walaya*]. The processional is a form of pilgrimage, a social process, as anthropologist Victor Turner (1974) would say, which enacts on a small scale the pilgrimages performed by those who travel over greater distances in order to attend the ‘*urs*’ celebration. In the case of Babajan’s ‘*urs*’, for the procession to cover the entire area associated with her would have been nearly impossible, as she was known to walk for miles, at various times, throughout the entire city. In addition, such a procession requires special permits, traffic regulation, etc. Often, a procession is the culminating event of the ‘*urs*’, with the

procession leading through the streets and ending with a ceremony at the tomb of the saint, where sandalwood and flowers, or perfume are offered. Babajan's 'urs began with the procession on the first evening of the celebration. The procession was a fairly modest one, consisting of a few camels and donkeys, each suitably decorated for the occasion, and several Muslim men wearing turbans and carrying flags (Fig. 36). There was no music except for some subdued *dholak* [hand drum] playing as the group processed through the narrow, crowded streets of the cantonment. Rather than extending throughout the entire city, the procession traveled only a mile or so through the nearby neighborhoods, concluding with a brief ceremony at the *dargah*.

For many in the local community, the second night of the 'urs was the main event, when two popular *Qawwali* groups, one from Delhi, another from Mumbai, were scheduled to perform. This was a public event, one of the highlights of the year for the Muslim community of the camp area, and was attended by nearly a thousand people who squeezed into the small schoolground of the Lady Hawabai High School, directly behind Babajan's *dargah*. Although the *Qawwals* performed religious songs, this was not a formal *mahfil*. The occasion had more in common with a Western pop concert than with a religious performance. A large stage was constructed against the side of the school building, professional lighting and sound systems were hired and set up around the stage, and tarpaulins, for spectators to sit on, were laid out on the ground across the entire schoolyard. By 9:30 pm the school grounds began to fill up with people vying for front row seats (Fig. 7), and by 10:00 pm, when the *Qawwals* began to set up their instruments and do their sound check, the grounds were filled and overflowing into the street. Both *Qawwali* parties were setting up together on the same stage, the Hashmi Brothers from Delhi on the left, and Azim Naza and his party on the right.

In general, a *Qawwali* performance may take place at any time, and continue for any duration of time. The important factor is that the performance should not coincide with the obligatory five times daily prayer [*namaz*, or *salat*]. For this reason, *Qawwali* programs are often held at night, beginning soon after the evening prayer [*isha'a*], and ending in time for the morning prayer [*fajr*]. It is not compulsory that the program continue all night, but the timing remains flexible in case the program becomes so compelling that the participants do not want to see it end.

The focus for this *Qawwali* program was on entertaining the public with a powerful Sufi message. Although the message was generally religious, the focus was on the musician's as entertainers, not on the listener's as spiritual aspirants. In the *mahfil-i-sama'*, the listener's subjective experience is the primary goal of the gathering. Although the implicit underlying fact of the 'urs occasion and the presence of the nearby *dargah* made this a religious event, the experience was geared toward rousing the crowd to heights of externally expressed enthusiasm, much like a Western Pop Music concert, it was not primarily focused on the spiritual development of the individual, as is explicitly the case in the *mahfil*. As with much of the 'urs celebration, however, the festival atmosphere provided entertainment as well as opportunity for spiritual refection.

The performance sequence of the program was *bari ka gana*, or "singing by turn." The purpose of having two *Qawwali* parties together on the same stage at the same time, alternating songs, is to encourage the competing *Qawwal* parties to spur each other on to greater and greater heights of excitement, and to likewise arouse the enthusiastic onlookers along with them. Organized

music competitions are common throughout many parts of the world. In East Africa, such competitions are known as *Mashindano* [kiSwahili: from *kushindana*, to compete (Gunderson 2000:7)] and are often associated with community building and identity formation (Barz 2000). In *Qawwali*, this form of competition can sometimes be a way for individual *Qawwals* to develop prestige at large religious gatherings, such as an important *'urs* (Qureshi 1995), but is often employed purely for the sake of entertainment. The practice has become popular due to its use as an entertainment device in Bollywood movie music, or “*filmi*” *Qawwali*. *Qawwali* competitions are so popular in film *Qawwali* (often featuring female vocalists as a novelty) that they have come to be expected in popular *Qawwali* programs.

The program began with the Hashmi Brothers from Delhi, who began performing at around 11:00 pm. The Hashmi Brothers, Aftab and Afzal (Fig. 8), performed a modern style of *Qawwali*. In addition to the standard harmonium and *dholak*, they also employed two electronic keyboards and a drummer playing electronic drums, giving their *Qawwali* a Bollywood, “*filmi Qawwali*” ambiance. The party of accomplished musicians played in a manner that, while completely in keeping with what the crowd expected and hoped for, violated the *adab* [etiquette] of a religious *Qawwali* performance in several ways. In addition to the electronic instruments (which most shaykhs would not allow in a formal program), the entire party wore colorful outfits that drew attention to themselves, and Aftab, the lead singer, used elaborate gestures and facial expressions, often building the choruses from very quiet, tense passages, to dynamic heights of volume and intensity (Music track 5). This was an effective performance style for popular *Qawwali*, and drew cheers from the assembled crowd, but such a style would not be allowed in a formal program of religious *Qawwali*.

The Hashmi Brothers' first number lasted for over thirty minutes and was followed immediately by Azim Naza and his party from Bombay. Azim Naza responded with an equally intense performance, easily matching the Hashmi Brothers in quality, confidence, and flamboyance. Like the Hashmi Brothers, Azim Naza employed the same symbolic musical sounds that are heard in religious *Qawwali*, but the sounds were exaggerated for dynamic effect (much to the apparent pleasure of the audience), and the gestures and style of the singer lacked the nuances of an accomplished religious *Qawwal*. Where a traditional *Qawwal* aspires for an expression of the highest emotional and aesthetic sentiments, the Azim Naza and the Hashmi Brothers were both clearly appealing to the lowest common denominator, the approval of the masses. Although the crowd was tightly packed into the small schoolyard, nonetheless, the crowd's approval was voiced not only by loud cheers, but also, just as in a formal religious *Qawwali* program, in the form of *nazrana*, or a formal offering of money, usually small rupee notes.²⁸

The successful performance of the Azim Naza party spurred the Hashmi Brothers party to even greater heights for their third number. By this time it was obvious that Aftab Hashmi was searching through his notes for particular lyrics that he wanted to sing in response to Azim's dynamic performance. Normally, this would have been just the beginning, and the process would have continued along the same lines for as long as the crowd continued to cheer, and patrons continued to shower the performers with rupee notes. June, however, is monsoon season in Pune. Typically the rains are expected to arrive on or near June fifteenth. It had already rained earlier in the week, and just as the Hashmi Brothers had completed their second song, at nearly 1:30pm, the skies opened up and let loose a torrential downpour. The technicians, experienced with

working during monsoon season, scrambled to cover the electronic equipment, and the performers joined the crowd in a hurried dash for shelter. As many as could squeeze in entered the auditorium of the High School, while much of the assembled throng spilled out into the street looking for shelter. There was talk of waiting out the rain, but, before long it became clear that the monsoon had effectively brought the evening's public *Qawwali* program to an end.

²⁸ One rupee equals approximately two and one half cents.



Figure 35 - The Hazrat Babajan Library Committee, Wajib Dhola Shaykh, (in cap), Nasir Yusuf Khan (president of Library Committee, bearded), Akbar Khan (secretary, far right).



Figure 36 - The 'urs procession pauses at an intersection.



Figure 37 - A crowd begins to gather directly behind the *dargah* of Hazrat Babajan.



Figure 38 - Aftab Hashmi gestures to the crowd as his brother Afzal repeats the vocal line.

CHAPTER IV

INTERSECTIONS OF WORLDLY AND SPIRITUAL POWERS: THE *MAHFIL-I-SAMA*'

Personal Fieldnote—Akbar Khan met me at the large entryway of the Lady Hawabai High School auditorium at around 9:00 p.m. We removed our chapals [sandals] and went inside. The sight that greeted us upon entering was a stunning array of color and regal festivity. The old 19th-century building had been transformed into what the royal court of a Delhi sultan might have looked like in the 13th century. The room was approximately fifty or sixty feet square, with heavy canvas rugs [citranji] covering most of the stone floor. At the back of the room, to the right of the entrance, the windows were open to allow the cool evening air to circulate. At the opposite end of the room, the wall was covered with broad, ruffled sheets of red satin. Over the satin, at intervals, there hung Persian rugs, garlands, and brightly colored lights. In the center of the wall there was a large circular banner with an Urdu inscription reading “the Abundant Festival of Bandanawaz.” Directly below the banner was the special cushioned seating area for the Shaykh and the other dignitaries (Fig. 39). The floor in front of the special seating area was covered with a beautiful red Persian rug. In the middle of the room, flanking the area where the musicians were setting up, were two large black loud-speaker boxes. The sound technicians were arranging and testing microphones, and the general seating area began slowly filling up with men who seated themselves on the heavy canvas rugs covering the floor. Akbar Khan directed me to my seat and apologized for having to run off and attend to some official business. I made myself comfortable, drinking in the atmosphere as we all awaited the arrival of the Shaykh.

The *mahfil-i-sama*’ was enacted on the final night of the ‘*urs* of Hazrat Babajan on June 18th, 2005, in the auditorium of the Lady Hawabai High School in Pune. The *sama*’ program, like many in South Asian Chishti Sufism, was a symbolic reflection of both the sacred Sufi tradition of seeking internal union with God through listening to music, and of the tradition of Persian kingship, as practiced during the Delhi sultanate period out of which modern day *Qawwali* has emerged. It was also the climactic culmination of the ‘*urs* festival. The Islamic practice of *sama*’ as preserved in the South Asian Chishti tradition is characterized in two complimentary ways. The term *mahfil-i-sama*’ means literally “assembly for listening.” The term emphasizes the listener as the focus of the event, and points to the ritual’s function, which is to arouse spiritual emotion and ecstasy through listening to sacred words set to music. The gathering is also referred to as the *darbar-i-Awliya*, or “royal court of saints” and is modeled after the royal court of the Delhi sultanate. This characterization of the *sama*’ emphasizes the saint, and his or her lineage, through the person of the *Shaykh* who presides over the *sama*’ occasion. The *Shaykh* represents the saint and the lineage of the shrine, all the way back to ‘Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, and to the Prophet Muhammad himself. In this context, the *Shaykh* represents the *true* royalty, i.e. the lineage of the shrine (Qureshi 1995, 1994, 1986).

In the early years of Islam, following the death of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632), the community of Muslims expanded rapidly under a series of successors [*khalifas*] to the Prophet. The ruling bodies of early Islam are generally divided into three periods: the first four *khalifas* after the Prophet, the Patriarchal, or “rightly guided” *khalifas* (632-661ce); the *Umayyad* dynasty (661-750ce); and the ‘*Abbasid*’ dynasty (750-1258ce). Music was present in Islamic life in some form throughout all of these periods. The early Islamic soundscape included a variety of rhythm,

stringed, and wind instruments from throughout the ancient Middle-Eastern world. As early as the *Umayyad* dynasty, music was part of the life of the Islamic royal court. Singing [*ghina*] in the traditional Arab style, accompanied by the harp [*chang*] and lutes [*barbat, rubab*], were common, as well as the reed pipe [*mizmar*], flute [*qussaba*] and tambourine [*duff*] (Farmer 2002, 1957). Both the *Umayyad* and *‘Abbasid* dynasties were heavily influenced by the symbolic pageantry of Persian kingship. A significant aspect of these symbolic trappings was the use of music as royal entertainment and ceremony.

During the *‘Abbasid* dynasty particularly, traditional Arab instruments, lute, harp, and the vocal arts, flourished. Music was patronized throughout this period as a form of entertainment, and as fine art. Most musicians of the early *‘Abbasid* period were Arabs who refined the musical arts of their homeland. Many ran schools which produced talented musicians and scores of singing girls for the wealthy and privileged. Henry Farmer (2002) observes:

The courts were crowded with professional musicians and singing girls, who were treated with unheard of favours and generosity, the memory of which is proverbial with Arabs today. Much of this was due to Persian example, since the *‘Abbasids* desired to emulate the glories of the *Sasanids* of old (100).

As mentioned earlier²⁹, some authors suggest that the Islamic censure of music was “...manufactured by the theologians of the *‘Abbasid* era, who were jealous of the inordinate attention paid to music and musicians” (Farmer 2002:22; Shiloah 1997). In any case, those who spoke against music spoke specifically against its courtly manifestations, seeing it as an adjunct to other questionable behaviors, such drinking and keeping company with dancing girls. As the practice of *sama’* developed, Sufi *Shaykhs* began to directly address the question of such indulgences. They saw the tendency to associate music with unlawful behavior as one of the

²⁹ See chapter one.

things which strengthened the argument against using music in devotional practice. *Sama*’, then, is a direct response to courtly music. In the South Asian context, it is not the court of the *khalifas* which is mirrored, rather, the *mahfil-i-sama*’ is a symbolic representation of the Delhi Sultanate, with the symbolic images of Sufi ideology (the spiritual master, the *Shaykh*, the lover and the Beloved, etc.) superimposed upon those of the royal court. The traditional guidelines for practicing *sama*’ emphasize the importance of keeping the spiritual goal fixed in the mind. In this sense, the entire *mahfil* is a symbolic performance which elevates the worldly pleasures of courtly life to the highest level. In the *mahfil* setting the Beloved is understood to be God (not a beautiful dancing girl), the drink is the intoxicating divine wine of love for God, and the sultan (or sultana) of the court, the ruler of the gathering, is the departed saint, represented by the acting *Shaykh*, who simultaneously represents the Beloved.

From the time of Mu’in al-Din Chishti’s arrival in Delhi in 1193, there was tension between the Chishtis and the imperial powers. Battles between indigenous Hindu Rajas and the invading Turks continued to rage throughout the formative years of the Chishti Sufi order. Khwaja Mu’in al-Din Chishti explicitly instructed his followers to accept no alms from kings, as this would tend to obligate them and get them entangled in worldly affairs. The Turkish rulers of the Delhi sultanate were Islamic more in name than in practice, and were far more concerned with the business of empire building than with religious questions. Even so, they disliked any appearance of any challenge to their authority. The Turks, like the *Umayyad* and *‘Abbasid khalifas* before them, were heavily influenced by the imagery of Persian kingship and acted out much of their pomp and ceremony in accordance with Persian norms (Ernst 1992), including the practice of enjoying music at court. The *sama*’ practiced by the early Chishti *Shaykhs* was focused on the

living *Shaykh*, not the shrine. As the *sama*’ continued to develop throughout the shrine system, it came to replicate the formal *adab* [etiquette] practiced at court, as well as the general ambiance of a courtly musical concert. It is unclear if this practice was a deliberately provocative, though subtle, challenge to power as sometimes observed in Medieval Cairo³⁰, but there are clear implications in *sama*’ that the limitations of worldly power are transcended through spiritual practice. The important shift of emphasis in the *sama*’, as contrasted with the royal court, is toward the listener, rather than the musician, and the focus of worldly power shifts to the power of the *Shaykh* as a mimetic king, who represents the saint, the lineage, the Beloved, and God, in the conflation of space and time that is the desired result of the practice of *sama*’. This metaphoric understanding of the king as the Beloved/God can be seen in the poetry of early Sufi poets who were also court poets, such as Hafiz of Shiraz, whose love songs [*ghazals*] often appear as *Qawwali* song texts. Ultimately, though, the courtly appearance of the Sufi representatives present in the *mahfil* is meant to emphasize the connection with spiritual, not worldly power. As Qureshi (1986) puts it, “...the spiritual reality of the Sufi saintly hierarchy becomes manifest in the physical presence of its assembled representatives in the assembly” (138).

Darbar-i-Awliya: The Royal Court of Saints

Personal Fieldnote—At 9:30 p.m., when the acting *Shaykh* for the *mahfil-i-sama*’ at Babajan’s ‘urs, Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini, arrives for the program, the atmosphere in the room becomes charged with excitement. The *Shaykh* is followed by an entourage of accompanying family members and dignitaries, and he is greeted by members of the community, members of the

³⁰ See Richard McGregor, *Aesthetics of a Rival Power: The Shaykhs of the Wafaiyya in Mamluk Cairo*, unpublished paper given at the conference: The Exercise of Power in the Age of the Sultanates, Cairo, Egypt, March, 2006.

dargah committee, and members of the library committee, as royalty. All crowd round, offering greetings and welcoming the Shaykh with flower garlands, bowed heads, and kisses on the hand (Fig. 40). The Shaykh is shown to his seat, and the various members of the party who are not already seated are shown to their seats. Although philosophically everyone in the assembly is equal, the seating is not arbitrary. The most prominent members of the assembly, either by worldly or spiritual measures, were seated nearest the Shaykh, the least prominent found seats at the back of the room. A series of official greetings, presentations, and more flower garlands, continue for some time after the Shaykh is seated in the central spot, directly below the banner, and directly across an open space of some twenty-five feet or more between the Shaykh and the musicians (Fig. 41). The general audience is located behind the musicians (Fig. 42).



Figure 39 - Seating area for “Royal Court of Saints.” Banner: “abundant festival of Bandanawaz.”



Figure 40 - Devotees crowd round *Shaykh* Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini as he arrives.



Figure 41 - *Shaykh* Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini accepts garland from devotees.

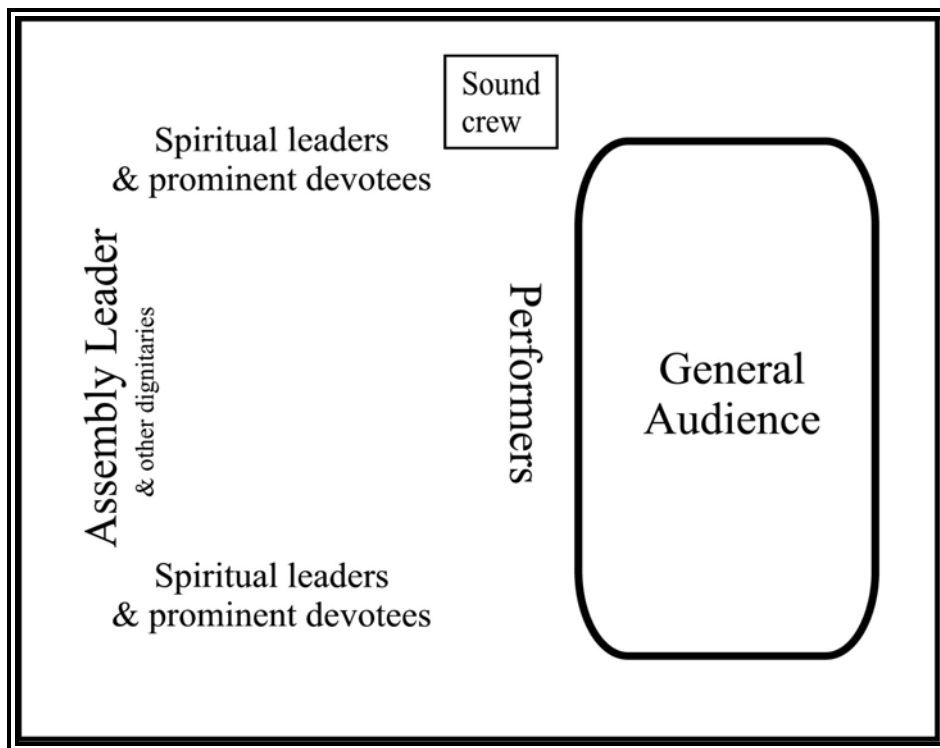


Figure 42 - Seating map of *mahfil-i-sama* at 2005 'urs of Hazrat Babajan.

The musicians face the *Shaykh*, an indication that the focus is not on the performers, but on the sacred lineage of past saints, as represented by the presence of the representatives physically assembled in the gathering. The placement also underscores that the musicians are there as professionals, as hired functionaries. The focus of the listeners (who are seated behind the musicians), is upon the *Shaykh*, not the musicians. Just as their counterparts in the royal court would have no special status, even though performing for kings, so, at the *mahfil*, the musicians are likewise seen as service providers, incidental to the spiritual significance of the occasion. At a larger shrine, there will usually be particular musician, or group of musicians, who have hereditary rights to perform at the shrine on a regular basis. Due to its location, Babajan's shrine can not accommodate regular *Qawwali* programs. The musicians for the 2005 '*urs mahfil-i-sama*', Mohammed Ahmed Warsi Nasiri *Qawwal* and Party, were brought in from Rampur, Uttar Pradesh, especially for the occasion of the '*urs*.'

The banner, hanging above the *Shaykh* and proclaiming "the abundant festival of Bandanawaz," is significant in regard to the *Shaykh*'s presence at the '*urs*', and his role in the proceedings. Often at a *mahfil* held in the precinct of a *dargah*, the assembly faces the doorway of the shrine, the saint attracting the primary focus of the proceedings. In the case of Babajan's '*urs*', however, if the assembly were to sit facing the doorway of the shrine, the entire group would be in the middle of Babajan *Chowk* [intersection]! Instead, it was arranged that the *mahfil* be held behind the shrine, at the Lady Hawabai High School, as previously mentioned. In addition, Babajan did not function as a *Shaykh*, nor did she name a successor, nor did she belong to any specific, articulated lineage. This creates the problem of representation for the organizers of the *mahfil*: who will represent the lineage of the shrine when there is no traceable lineage? For this occasion,

and moving us yet one step farther away from the *dargah* itself, Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini, from the popular shrine of Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni-i Gisudiraz (d. 1422) of Gulbarga³¹ was requested to come to Pune, oversee the *mahfil-i-sama*, and to give a talk on Sufism later in the week. The saint of Gulbarga was nick-named “Bandanawaz” (One Who Comforts Others) by his master, Nasir al-Din Mahmud (d. 1356), popularly known as “Chiragh-i Dihli” (The Lamp of Delhi)³²

In addition to performing the function of a *Shaykh*, Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini (2004; 1983; 1970) is also a Western trained scholar with a Ph.D. from McGill University. As an element of inviting him to the *urs*, it was decided to hold a celebration of Bandanawaz in conjunction with the *urs*, hence the inscription on the banner which dominated the space in which the *mahfil* was held. As a result of this arrangement, the focus of the *mahfil* was on Bandanawaz, who has a clear, traceable lineage, rather than Babajan who, though highly respected as a *faqir* and a *wali*, has none. There is precedent for this type of arrangement at other shrines. Occasionally, even at a shrine with an acting *Shaykh*, the *Shaykh* will step aside at the *mahfil* in order to allow a *Shaykh* associated with a more prominent shrine to oversee the proceedings (Qureshi 1986).

The evening program begins with a series of announcements, introducing and welcoming the *Shaykh* and other guests. This is followed by the *fatiha* and other recitations from the Qur’an (Fig. 43). It is standard to begin and end a *mahfil* with the recitation of the Qur’an, honoring the Hadith which says “I do not blame anything in it, but say to them (who resort to music and

³¹ Bandanawaz is the son of Raju Qattal, a saint whose shrine is mentioned in the introduction. Raju Qattal’s *dargah* is also the site of fieldwork documented in chapter four.

³² Chirag-i Dilli is one of the Khalifas of Nizam al-Din Aulyia, as is Burhan al-Din Gharib of Khuldabad.

singing) that they open before it with the Qur'an and close after it with the Qur'an" (Farmer 2002:28). Mohammed Ahmed Warsi Nasiri *Qawwal* begins the *Qawwali* program with *Qaul*, the famous composition by Amir Khusro, acknowledged father of *Qawwali*, and disciple of Nizam al-Din Awliya. This is the standard hymn in *Qawwali*, usually used either to begin or end a *Qawwali* program.

The demeanor of the entire *Qawwali* party, both in dress, behavior, and attitude is in marked contrast to the previous night's public *Qawwali* program. All of the performers are dressed simply in white with black head coverings [*kufi*]. The lead singer is restrained in his gestures and body movement, as are the rest of the party. The most movement occurs when the party falls into unison clapping during the more rhythmic passages. This is the proper *adab* [etiquette] of *sama'*. Both the listeners and the musicians must always remain aware of the sanctity of the event, and the presence of the saint. Generally, the *Shaykh* overseeing a *mahfil* will not allow the musicians to draw attention to themselves through exaggerated gestures or dress. The musicians are there to provide the sacred message put to music, the emphasis of the gathering is on the subjective state of the listener, not the performers.



Figure 43 - *Shaykh* Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini and the *darbar-i-awliya* as Qur'an is recited.



Figure 44 - Mohammed Ahmed Warsi Nasiri *Qawwal* (Playing harmonium at left) and party.

The Lady Hawabai High School auditorium echoes with the swelling sound of the harmonium, or *baja*³³, signalling that the *sama*’ has begun (Music track 6). The long, sustained notes continue for several minutes, emphasized by occasional, light drum beats, performed *chutki se*, or “with the fingers,” and intermittently accented *thap se*, “with slaps,” as the percussionists continue to check the sound of the room and their instruments. Mohammed Ahmed Warsi Nasiri *Qawwal* and Party have two harmonium players. This is the *naghma*, or instrumental prelude section which introduces most *Qawwali* songs. Mohammed Ahmed Warsi, the *main admin* or, lead singer, plays the outline of the melody of the *raga*³⁴ on his harmonium, while his *sathi*, or accompanist, plays sustained notes along with him (Fig. 44). As the soft passage continues to build, Mohammed Ahmed Warsi subtly, almost imperceptibly, signals the percussionists to introduce the *lai*, or rhythm, behind the melody lines provided by the two *bajas*. Of the two percussionists, the first plays a large *dholak*, which is tuned to a low *sur*, or pitch. This provides the *zarb*, or heartbeat, which signals the second percussionist, on *tabla*, twin hand drums set on the floor and commonly used in North Indian classical music, who begins the *theke ki bandish*, or the drum pattern. The *dholak* not only drives the musical experience, but provides a symbolic association to *dhikr*, which undergirds the entire *sama*’ experience. As the drum pattern, or *theke ki bandish*, begins, the *dholak*, signals the other *sathi*, or companions, to begin the *tali*³⁵, or clapping. At first the *tali* simply emphasizes the *sam*, or downbeat. Soon, however, the frequency of the *tali* is doubled, and the dynamic flow of the harmoniums and percussion instruments also increases. Soon, the *chal*, or tempo, increases along with the general dynamic intensity of the

³³ Urdu, meaning, literally, instrument, but in *Qawwali* the term is usually used to refer to the harmonium. All of the descriptive musical terms here are Urdu terms.

³⁴ *Raga* is a Sanskrit term meaning literally, color, or mood. It refers to the particular melodic mode used in a composition. A common term in North Indian classical music.

³⁵ In North Indian classical music, the *tal*, or *tala*, is the meter of a piece of music, usually represented by a rhythm performed on a pair of hand drums, or *tabla*. In *Qawwali* the term *tal* means simply to clap, and does not refer to the specific meter. *Tali* refers to “clapping.”

rhythm and the improvisations on the melody as performed on the harmonium. This constant repetition, or *takrar*, quickly builds into what is called *lai ka halqa*, or an “encirclement of rhythm,” in which the rhythmic pattern is continuously reinforced until it builds to a climax and, in this case, ends abruptly, resuming the earlier, subdued, tones produced by the harmoniums long, sustained notes.

The *naghma*, or instrumental prelude, has lasted just a little over four minutes, yet this brief section encapsulates much of the symbolic musical pattern that will be followed throughout the rest of the program. The dynamic flow of this section, like the pacing of repertoire and song dynamics throughout the rest of the *mahfil* program, is an aural experience specifically constructed to encourage spiritual arousal, while simultaneously representing spiritual arousal symbolically. The *dholak* is used explicitly to represent the heartbeat of the listener, and the rhythm of *dhikr*. With the *tabla*, the pulse, or *zarb*, of the *dholak* rises in intensity and tempo as the musical section progresses. This increasing tempo and intensity of rhythmic accents and expressions, together with the increasing melodic volume and flow of improvised notes, all work together symbolically to mirror the desired ecstatic state of the listener. The musical pattern followed in this *naghma* is a condensed version of the dynamic pattern that will unfold over the next several hours. As the song *Qaul* progresses, there will be more subtlety and nuance in the expression of the same dynamic and rhythmic themes, but the basic symbolic pattern is the same. In this brief musical section of the song *Qaul*, the dynamic flow of ecstasy and the rhythm of *dhikr*, discussed in chapter one, are well represented. What is missing here is the beautiful voice, which is introduced immediately after the climax of the rhythmic prelude is reached.

As the harmoniums continue to swell, with long, sustained notes, the *alap* section begins (Music track 7). This section emphasizes the voice, and is performed without meter, only occasional accents on the *dholak*. Using no text, Mohammed Ahmed Warsi improvises vocally, singing long notes which emphasize aspects of the melody, staying within the confines of the *raga*, or melodic form, within which the melody has been composed. The accompanying vocalists join him, first singing in unison with the sustained notes, then answering his phrase with a complimentary vocalization. This leads into the *ruba'i*, a section of improvised verses of text which are connected to the main song thematically, but are not part of the song itself. These passages are aural symbols of the beautiful voice, the voice of God speaking to the believer before the creation of the world, and the voice of the created responding with longing, and consciousness of separation.

As the call and response section of the *alap* continues to build, the themes of ancestry and Islamic history become evident in the lyric (Music track 8). The names of Muhammad the Prophet, and his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali ibn Abi Taleb are invoked³⁶, and the historical grounding of the song begins to emerge. Amir Khusrao composed *Qaul* by adapting a famous hadith, or saying of the Prophet, which is both important and controversial in the history of Islam. Known as the hadith of *Ghadir Khumm*, the reference is to a statement made by Mohammed at a particular oasis (*Ghadir Khumm*) found between the cities of *Mecca* and *Medina*. Muhammad is said to have stopped at this oasis when returning from his final pilgrimage to *Mecca*. In this statement, the Prophet says: “Whoever has me as his master (*mawla*), has 'Ali as his master” (Glasse 1989:136). The statement is controversial because

³⁶ Note the lyrics: 'Ali, 'Ali, la fata illa 'Ali; Urdu: 'Ali, 'Ali, there is none like 'Ali; and, 'Ali, 'Ali, al-hum di-Allah 'Ali; Urdu: 'Ali, 'Ali, praise God for 'Ali, etc.

Shi'ah Muslims interpret this to mean that Muhammad was appointing 'Ali to be his successor as leader of the *ummah*, or Islamic community. *Sunni* Muslims say that Muhammad was simply praising 'Ali as a disciple, and did so in order to address criticisms that had been leveled against 'Ali by others in the group. The use of this song, and its emphasis on 'Ali, might seem to suggest to the listener that Chishti Sufis are *Shi'ah* Muslims, but this is not the case. Chishti Sufis are *Sunni*, but, like most Sufis, they recognize 'Ali as the first Sufi and spiritual, if not political, successor to the Prophet³⁷. The main line of the song, oft repeated throughout, is “*Man kunto maula, fa 'Ali-un-maula*” [Whoever accepts me as master, Ali is his master too (Qureshi 1995:21)]. This line is shortened in the refrain to the simple *dohrana*, or repetition, “‘*Ali maula, 'Ali maula,*” in a style reminiscent of a *dhikr* repetition.

Although the primary function of the *mahfil-i-sama'* is to arouse the internal state of the listener, in keeping with the external form of *darbar-i-Awliya*, there is an established external expression as well. Almost as soon as the singing begins, one by one, sometimes in pairs, sometimes as many as three at once, men rise and approach the *Shaykh* with an offering of money which the *Shaykh* accepts by touching, and then letting the bills fall to the floor in front of him. This offering is both a sign of submission and deference to the *Shaykh*, in the spirit of the *darbar-i-Awliya*, and may also be a spontaneous expression of spiritual arousal, manifested internally and concretized in the form of the monetary offering. Both expressions of appreciation are complimentary aspects of the same phenomena, *nazrana*, or formal offering. Qureshi describes it in this way:

In its standard form the devotee rises to approach the spiritual superior, bows down or kneels before him and extends on his open palms – right and over left –an offering of money, usually a single note. This note is lightly picked up or touched by the recipient as

³⁷ On the important position of 'Ali within another Sunni Sufi order, see McGregor 2004:143-145.

a gesture of acceptance and placed on the floor before him. The donor may respond to the blessing of the *Shaykh*'s touch by touching his forehead or by raising his palm to his eyes. If he is a personal disciple, he may well kiss the hand or knee of his guide, or the ground before him, as a gesture of ultimate devotion, or he may prolong the encounter by remaining in a prostrated position, indicating ultimate submission. When returning to his seat, he may further show extreme deference by retreating backward so as not to turn his back to the saint (156).

This method of showing deference through bowing and other submissive behaviors has Islamic precedents, as well as imperial court precedents. Although a similar ambiance of deference can be seen in the relationship between a Hindu devotee and his or her guru, the explicit and obligatory inclusion of a monetary gift points strongly to the imperial tradition. The gift implies both submission, and the expectation of a continued positive relationship with the recipient as a spiritual benefactor. The practice of offering *nazar* to the *Shaykh* continues throughout the program (Fig 45). This is often a joyful display, two friends laughing and smiling, holding the offering together as they hold each other's hands and approach the *Shaykh*. At other times the expression is a deeply personal one, as an individual, overcome with emotion, approaches and is comforted by the *Shaykh*. Periodically, a representative of the *Shaykh* collects the money that has accumulated and brings it to the musicians. In this way, the spiritual offering becomes a charity offering, and through the intervention of the *Shaykh* is transformed into payment for the *Qawwali* performers.



Figure 45 - Devotees approach *Shaykh* to pay respects during *mahfil-i-sama'*.

As the *alap* continues to build, Mohammed Ahmed Warsi signals the percussionists to introduce the *lai*, or rhythm, and to begin the main body of the song. All up to now has been an introduction. As the drum pattern, or *theke ki bandish*, begins, the *dholak*, signals the other accompanists, to begin the *tali*, or clapping. This is first introduced with a measured *chal*, or gait, which will increase as the piece progresses. The primary points of dynamic flow throughout the song are the sung verse couplets, which usually begin by dropping in volume, followed by an increase in volume and intensity as the *sathi* answer the lead singer, culminating in the group

singing of the refrain, where everyone joins in on vocals and handclapping, or on individual instruments. The song, which lasts almost thirty minutes, is edited on the CD for convenience, but this fluctuation in dynamics can be heard (Music track 9) in the closing section, as the *partigana*, or group singing, of the refrain gives way to the verse, then builds to a climactic final refrain, followed by a decrease in *chal* [tempo], and the ending of the song.

The dynamic patterns first observed in the *naghma*, or instrumental prelude, and repeated in both the *alap* and the main body of the *Qawwali* song, *Qaul*, are an essential element of *Qawwali* performance. These patterns are repeated and expanded upon throughout the evening. The songs texts themselves are chosen with the intention of playing upon the patterns of waxing and waning intensity, mirroring the desired emotional states of the participants. The song *Qaul* is followed by a *n'at*, or song in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. Later in the evening, the more mystical *ghazal* [love song] texts are introduced, expressing themes of the lover longing for the Beloved. Throughout, the creative use of vocal inflections, long, sustained vocal patterns in the verses, followed by abrupt, crisp, intense group repetitions during the refrains, add to the ebb and flow of expressive sound designed to arouse and evoke intensely emotional subjective states in the listener. All of these techniques are combined with the use of percussive, rhythmic accents which emphasize the cognitively received textual messages, which are heavily laden with profound symbols of their own.

After almost two hours of *sama'*, the musicians take a break, and hot *chai* [spiced tea] is served all around. When the music resumes, there is a renewed urgency reflected in both the musical performance, and in the participants. Many more now rise and come forward to meet the *Shaykh*

and offer *nazrana*, as all are aware that the *mahfil* has likely reached the halfway point. With a good deal of excitement, devotees continue approaching the *Shaykh*, often two or three at a time offering *nazrana* together. Eventually the offerings begin to subside, and the tone of the music shifts to a more meditative cadence. The dynamics of the musical performance continue to rise and fall, but now seem considerably more subdued, as the hour approaches three o'clock in the morning. Eventually, at 3:30am, the closing hymn is performed, and the entire company (excepting the musicians) rises to their feet (Fig 46). The program concludes with a recitation from the Qur'an.



Figure 46 - The gathered assembly rises for the final hymn of the *mahfil-i-sama'*.

Cultural intersections of worldly and spiritual power

Although it is typical, especially in the case of a Chishti saint, for a South Asian 'urs celebration to feature a *mahfil-i-sama'*, the *mahfil* is a separate and distinct occasion from the 'urs itself, and is often enacted outside of the 'urs context. I have sketched out some of the details of the 'urs of Hazrat Babajan, along with a history of the *dargah*, to provide context for my description of the *mahfil*, and to illustrate some of the ways in which various cultural factors influence the character and features of the *mahfil-i-sama'* in practice. The key features that I emphasize here are intersections of worldly and spiritual power (Fig. 47), and how these intersections impact the *mahfil*, as well as the performance of *Qawwali* in other contexts outside of the formal, religious enactment of the *mahfil*. When considered in their entirety, these cultural intersections represent a complex network of power relations which extend from the worldly power of multinational conglomerates who market *Qawwali* music as mass entertainment on the one end, to the spiritual power of the saint whose power [*baraka*] is understood to have ultimately derived from her connection to the Islamic tradition extending back to the Prophet Muhammad, the angel Gabriel, and God [Allah] on the other.

The religious setting of *Qawwali* is both an assembly for listening [*mahfil-i-sama'*], and a royal court of saints [*darbar-i-Awliya*]. As such, from its very inception, the listening experience is circumscribed by strict guidelines directing the heart and mind of the listener towards God [Allah] via both the medium of the *Shaykh* presiding over the program, and the lineage of the shrine. These guidelines, which have been discussed and debated within Islam for over a thousand years, are largely in response to the controversial question of the legality of music as an aid to spiritual development. *Qawwali* in the enactment of the *mahfil* is an explicit affirmation

and performance of Sufi ideology which responds to this controversy. As described earlier³⁸, the narrative which expresses this ideology describes the transformation of identity through the individual's experience of union with the sacred other. This union is described as the annihilation [*fana*] of individual identity, which is then experienced as union through subsistence [*baqa*] in the sacred other [Allah]. In this sense the *mahfil* can be understood as a mystical practice, but only if the term "mystical" is understood in a broad, socially dynamic sense.

There has been a great deal of discussion among scholars regarding the modern, post-enlightenment tendency to marginalize mysticism and mystics as manifestations of private, personal religious experience, having little power or impact on the social world (Safi 2001; King 1999; Jantzen 1995). This trend in Western scholarship emphasizing the private aspects of mysticism is often traced to the influence of William James and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Although James is often recognized as a philosopher, he was also an important and influential psychologist who emphasized the nineteenth century technique of introspection. As James has said regarding his psychological method, "*Introspective Observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always*. The word introspection need hardly be defined - it means, of course, the looking into our own minds and reporting what we there discover" (James 1950:185). That James, with his interest in consciousness and mental processes, should choose to focus on the subjective aspects of religious experience, leaving its social manifestation for others to explore, should hardly be surprising. Nor should he be held responsible if subsequent scholars, finding James' work compellingly in tune with their own Protestant Christian leanings, should follow the line of inquiry which James had initiated. Even so, and although I share James' interest in consciousness and mental processes, it is important to recognize that the *mahfil* is a

³⁸ See chapter one.

communal, congregational mystical practice (*mahfil* means assembly) which serves the group by bringing worshipers together with a common goal, and relies upon the group process for its dynamic power and influence over the individual. In this sense, we can see the Western tendency to identify Sufism as mystical (non-rational), in the sense that it is marginal and unimportant to Islamic social life (rational), as unhelpful, a poor representation of the facts, and one of the first aspects of what I am calling an intersection of worldly and spiritual power.

The history of the *dargah* itself, and its presence in the middle of a busy intersection of the British cantonment, is a powerful symbol of the intersection (pun intended) of worldly and spiritual power as well, one which argues eloquently against the idea that mysticism, even in the form of private religious experience, has no social impact. By simply establishing her seat under a tree in a field some distance from the main business area of the British cantonment, and insisting on remaining there, Hazrat Babajan had a tremendous impact on the local community, and continues to impact the community some seventy years after her death. She was allowed to stay in the cantonment because the local community understood her to be an individual who represented an embodiment of mystical experience. Babajan's ongoing symbolic presence in the Pune cantonment continues to affirm her defiance of the worldly power of the colonial authorities, as well as her embodiment of the Sufi ideal of mystical union with God [Allah] as the divine Beloved, which is the central theme of the *mahfil-i-sama'*.

Babajan remains, however, an anomaly in relation to institutional Sufism. Although there is no evidence that she had any desire to function as a Sufi *Shaykh*, as a woman in the Islamic community of Pune in the early twentieth century, this would have been an impossibility in any

case. Her mental state, understood by local Muslims and others as a state of divine absorption, also served to move Babajan towards the margins, away from having any formal role in relation to institutional Sufism. A newspaper article cited earlier suggests that at least one of the reasons that Babajan's *dargah* was finally erected under the tree on the Malcolm Tank Road was so that *Qawwali* could be performed at her 'urs. Even so, the formal *mahfil* could not be conducted at her 2005 'urs unless a proper institutional link in the chain [*silsila*] of lineage back to the Prophet Muhammad was represented at the *mahfil-i-sama*'. For this reason, *Shaykh* Hussaini was invited to come from Gulbarga to preside over the *mahfil*. As a result, *Shaykh* Hussaini and his lineage, through the person of the prestigious saint of Gulbarga, Hazrat Khwaja Bandanawaz Gisudaraz (represented by the banner hanging above the *Shaykh* reading: "the abundant festival of Bandanawaz") were the primary representatives of the royal court of saints [*darbar-i-Awliya*]. Thus, in an effort to honor Babajan by linking her with the prestigious lineage of Bandanawaz, she is simultaneously further marginalized at her own *mahfil*. This is not to suggest that this state of affairs was meant to be disrespectful to the female saint at her 'urs. It does, however, demonstrate some of the difficult negotiations required in order to integrate the anomalous status of a female *majdhub* into the male dominated Chishti hierarchy. That such efforts were made at all indicate the level of respect with which all parties concerned hold the female saint.

The status of women in Islam is too important a topic to overlook in any discussion of a female Muslim saint. Although there is evidence in the Hadith and other early documents that the Prophet Muhammad advanced considerably the status of women in Arab culture, from the time of the philosopher al-Ghazali, the role of women in Islam has not been one in which power and status in the community were commonplace. As historian Julia Clancy-Smith (2004) observes,

As in other traditions, Muslim scholars regarded women in authority as an “unnatural state of affairs.” Chastity, modesty, and submissiveness constituted highly prized behavioral characteristics; moralists such as al-Ghazali legitimized that by appeal to the Quran, Hadith, and the Prophet’s women (131).

Anthropologist Erika Friedl (1980), writing about village life in Iran, describes an attitude toward women that is probably not unlike what Babajan experienced in nineteenth century Baluchistan, and what some modern Muslim women face today in Pune and elsewhere in the subcontinent:

...she is part of a religious universe that centers around men. She is largely excluded from their religious rituals, although participation in them is highly meritorious. She is considered inferior by nature and prone to sin; yet she is also held responsible for the moral offenses that she will inevitably commit (171).

Given these attitudes, it is all the more remarkable that Babajan has been held, and continues to be held, in such high esteem by the Chishtis of Maharashtra and elsewhere. Even so, and as we saw in chapter two, Taj al-Din Baba of Nagpur, also understood to be in a state of divine absorption, finds himself posthumously honored as a representative of a Chishti *silsila* [lineage], with a considerably larger shrine and following than Babajan. The issue of gender in Sufi worship in South Asia is a complicated one and contains many nuances. There is considerable scope for further research on this important topic.

Implicit in this already complex dynamic is the mimetic nature of the ritual itself and its representation of the saintly lineage as equivalent to (yet ultimately more powerful than) a worldly, royal court. This is the assembly as the *darbar-i-Awliya*, the royal court of saints. Although the presence of *Shaykh* Hussaini inadvertently marginalizes Babajan at her own *mahfil* on the one hand, on the other hand he represents the same kind of defiance of worldly power which Babajan demonstrated in relation to the colonial authorities of the cantonment. In the

context of the *mahfil Shaykh* Hussaini stands in a centuries old tradition which mimics a royal court in order to emphasize the spiritual power of the *Shaykh*, the saint whom he represents (in this case, both Bandanawaz and Babajan), and, ultimately, the Chishti lineage back to the Prophet Muhammad. The *Shaykh* himself, then, stands at the intersection between the worldly power of the traditional royal court of the Delhi sultanate (and, by extension, all royal courts in the tradition of Persian kingship), and the spiritual power [*baraka*] of the lineage which he represents.

In the *sama'* context, the symbolic diad of lover and Beloved (i.e. seeker and God) is represented primarily by the relationship between the devotee/listener and the *Shaykh*, who represents saint and the lineage [*silsila*]. The listener's relationship to the *Qawwals*, and to *Qawwali* itself, is also through the medium of the *Shaykh*. The listener makes the *nazrana* offering to the *Shaykh*, but the money offered as *nazrana* is meant for the *Qawwals*. The *Shaykh* blesses the offering, which is then transferred to the *Qawwals*. The listener, then, is the patron. Through his patronage, the listener honors the *Shaykh*, the lineage, and the *Qawwals*, all at one and the same time. This concrete offering creates a symbolic link between all of these entities, which is sanctified by the transmission of spiritual power through the musical sounds of *Qawwali*.

In much the same way that Babajan was inadvertently marginalized at her own *mahfil*, the *mahfil* itself was in a way marginalized by the previous nights' *Qawwali* performance. There were far more attendees at the pop *Qawwali* concert than there were at the *mahfil*. *Qawwali* has been popular as a form of entertainment in India since its earliest development in the 13th century. This popularity has grown enormously in recent decades, especially in the form of "Bollywood"

film music. Still more recently, especially through the work of legendary *Qawwali* star Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, *Qawwali* has become a global pop music phenomenon in World Music, Dance Music, and Western film scores. This popular form of *Qawwali*, where the song texts switch to more worldly themes, has had an impact on religious *Qawwali* all over India. Lovers of religious *Qawwali* often complain that the best *Qawwals* have deserted the *dargahs* and sought out more lucrative work in the recording and film worlds (Begg 1999). In this aspect of *Qawwali*, the consumer is the patron, and the film and recording companies, often multinational conglomerates, are the ones who mediate the *nazrana* for the *Qawwal*. The blessing here is purely material, with every trace of *baraka* [spiritual power] removed. Both the *Qawwal* and the listener/consumer offer submission to the capitalist model, emphasizing worldly power over spiritual power in this reenactment of the original dynamic of courtly musicians and listeners subservient to a royal patron in the early days of the Islamic Caliphate, as well as, later, in the Delhi Sultanate. Although this shift in *Qawwali* performance often emphasizes a more secular message, it has also served to help *Qawwali* become a global phenomenon, which many *Qawwals* believe has helped to spread the Sufi message. As Ziuddin Sadar (2003) has observed, the assembly [*mahfil*] is no longer limited to the *dargah*. Now the entire world is an “assembly for listening” to *Qawwali*, and to the message of Sufism.

When considering the trajectory of *Qawwali* from the religious, Sufi, assembly for listening, to the world as assembly for listening, one way to understand the intersections of worldly and spiritual power is through the lens of anthropological categories. The categories of shamanic and priestly religious specialists have often been used to represent the normal workings of religious systems cross culturally (Pandian 1991; Turner 1968; Lessa and Vogt 1958). Shamanic aspects

of religious practice are understood to involve revelation and healing, priestly aspects of religious practice are understood to involve social organization, law, and the commemoration of past revelation. Although these categories are relative, and heuristic, if we apply this model to the various intersections of power described above, we can see elements of the shamanic in Babajan and her state of absorption. This idea of the potential for individual ecstatic states relates directly to the prophetic lineage in the sense that many Sufis understand their supererogatory practices of prayer and meditation to be analogous to the supererogatory practices of the Prophet on Mount Hira, which led to his encounter with the angel Gabriel, and to the Islamic revelation. We can also see elements of the shamanic in the emphasis of the *mahfil* upon the importance of the individual listener, and at least the potential for individual ecstatic experience derived from the dynamics of congregational worship. These shamanic aspects are in direct contrast to the priestly role of the *Shaykh*, and his responsibility to preside over the *sama'*. Part of the *Shaykh's* role in the *sama'* is to see that the proper rules of etiquette [*adab*] are observed, and that the activities of the participants of the *sama'* are focused upon the prophetic revelation, and the link to that revelation through the lineage of the shrine. As already noted, these categories are relative. When contrasted to a sultanate ruler, the *Shaykh* could more easily be seen as representing spiritual power, the sultan fitting easily into the category of worldly power.

The goal of this chapter has been to introduce and describe the *mahfil-i-sama'*, the central religious practice of *Qawwali*. The *mahfil* itself has been discussed at length by Qureshi (1995, 1994, 1987, 1986), primarily in the context of the traditional South Asian *dargah*. Our discussion here of the *mahfil* at Hazrat Babajan's 2005 *'urs* celebration shows how the details of the context of the *mahfil* can vary significantly from *dargah* to *dargah*. The history of the saint, and of the

dargah itself impact how the *mahfil* is conducted, and how it is understood by the participants. Even so, the essential elements of the assembly, the emphasis on listening, submission to the *Shaykh* and to the lineage [*silsila*], proper formal behavior [*adab*], and the implicit understanding that a subjective experience of union through ecstatic trance is imminently available to everyone in the assembly, remain, for the most part, constant.

A key conclusion that I draw from the field research presented in this chapter is that, as the ceremonious elements of institutional Sufism become more and more prominent in worship practice, and as popular *Qawwali* takes the music farther away from its religious context, individual exemplars like Hazrat Babajan and Taj al-Din Baba carry more meaning for the general populace. As symbols of the shamanic sacred self, Hazrat Babajan and Taj al-Din Baba continue to function as tangible affirmations that a subjective experience of union through ecstatic trance is not only for the elite, but is also accessible to the average worshipper.

<u>Worldly Power</u>	<u>Spiritual Power</u>
Rational	Non-rational (mystical)
Colonial Authorities	Hazrat Babajan
Institutional Sufism	Hazrat Babajan
Institutional Representative (shaykh) at Mahfil	Hazrat Babajan
Sultanate King	Shaykh
Shaykh	<i>Allah/Lineage</i>
Lover	Beloved
Listener	Shaykh
Listener	<i>Allah</i>
Listener	Qawwali
Patron (shaykh/listener/consumer)	Qawwal
Qawwal	Shaykh/Lineage/ <i>Allah</i>
Pop Qawwali	<i>Mahfil</i> Qawwali
Priestly	Shamanic

Figure 47 - Intersections of Worldly and Spiritual Power.

CHAPTER V

PERFORMANCE OF CULTURAL MEMORY: *QAWWALI* AT THE SHRINES OF KHULDABAD



Figure 48 - Torab Nizami *Qawwal* performing *Qawwali* at the *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar Baksh.

Personal Fieldnote—*By the time we arrived at the dargah of Zar Zari Zar Baksh, the mid-morning sun was so hot that, after removing our sandals as required before entering the dargah, we had to run across the blazing hot stones of the outer courtyard in order to get to the cooler, shaded area beyond. As we reached the welcome coolness of the inner courtyard, we saw the musicians, who had begun setting up opposite the entrance to the tomb of Zar Zari Zar Baksh.*

After offering flowers and sweets to the saint, we sat to one side, where we could see the musicians. The tomb on our right, the musicians on our left, we made ourselves comfortable, as Torab Nizami Qawwal (Fig. 48), the lead Qawwal, began to sing his first selection of the program (Music track 10). Torab began with a solo vocal, accompanying himself on harmonium. Next came the parti ghana, or group singing, praising the name of the Prophet Muhammed, joined instantly by the dholak, and then the hand claps. The sound of the dholak reverberated against the surrounding buildings as a few visitors approached the Qawwal to leave an offering of a few rupees on his harmonium.

The Performance of Cultural Memory

Torab Nizami *Qawwal* has been a *Qawwal* for over fifty years. He has performed with many *Qawwali* parties in his day. At one time he even appeared with the world famous Gulam Sabri of the Pakistani *Qawwali* group the Sabri Brothers. Today Torab is a *khadim* [servant] of the *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar Baksh (Fig. 49), which is to say that he has permission to perform *Qawwali* programs there on a regular basis. The *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar Baksh is located in the small township of Khuldabad, near Aurangabad, in central Maharashtra. Zar Zari Zar Baksh³⁹, a mysterious figure about whom little is known, was the elder brother of Shaykh Burhan al-Din Gharib (d. 1337), one of the successors of the great Sufi master of Delhi, Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya (d. 1325). Although Zar Zari Zar Baksh is a prestigious *dargah*, Khuldabad is in a relatively remote location. The shrines here, though well preserved by patrons in Hyderabad and elsewhere, do not attract as many visitors as they once did. The income that Torab receives as a *Qawwal* who sings religious *Qawwali* is barely enough to support his wife and his disabled son, who often performs with him. If lucky, Torab may take in a hundred rupees or more (about two

dollars) in an afternoon, but even this small sum must be split among a party of three or four other *Qawwals*, and in the end does not amount to much. Torab's plight is shared by many *Qawwals* who remain committed to performing religious *Qawwali*. Those *Qawwals* who are willing to tailor their performance to meet the needs of a popular audience entertain the possibility of finding more lucrative work in the film and recording fields. But such *Qawwali* songs would not be appropriate at the *dargah* of a Muslim saint. To perform anything but religious *Qawwali* here would not be a proper way to preserve the memory of the saint, or to preserve the tradition within which Torab performs his service as a *Qawwal*.

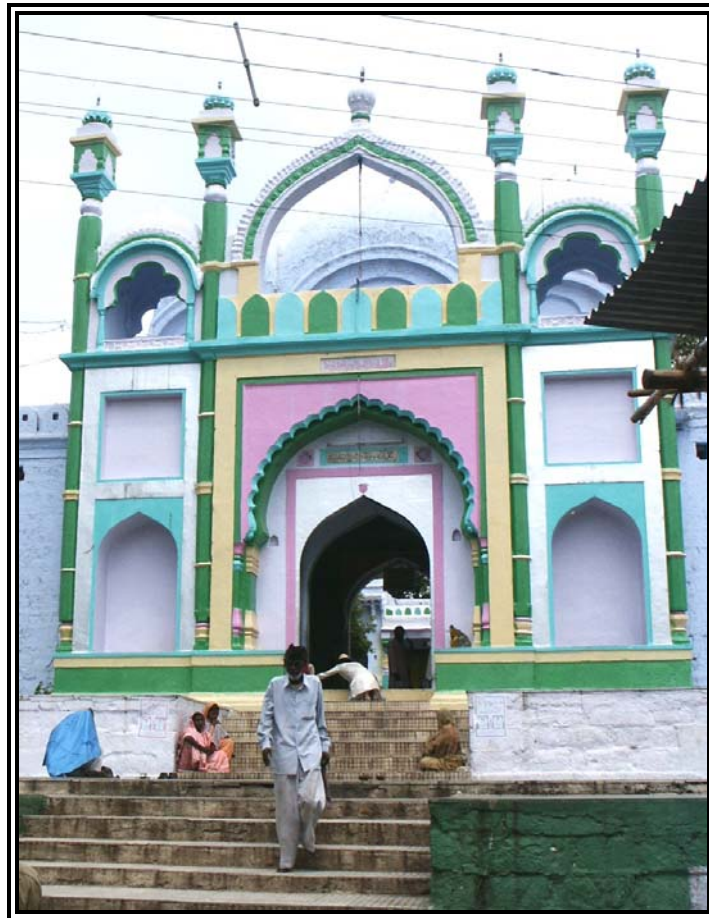


Figure 49 - Entrance to the *dargah* complex of Zar Zari Zar Baksh at Khuldabad.

³⁹ Literal meaning, "The Giver of the Essence of Gold "

Torab Nizami *Qawwal*'s performance of *Qawwali* at the *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar Baksh is a performance of cultural memory. In the spirit of social anthropologist Paul Connerton (1989), I see Torab's performance as a commemorative re-enactment of social memory. Mieke Bal (1999) makes a distinction between social memory and cultural memory, seeing cultural memory as something that connects the past to the present and the future. She suggests that "The interaction between present and past that is the stuff of cultural memory is, however, the product of collective agency rather than the result of psychic or historical accident" (vii). For centuries Chishti Sufis have actively preserved cultural memory through compulsory Islamic practices, *malfuzat*⁴⁰ literature, the establishment of shrines, the practice of *ziyara* [pilgrimage], and through the performance of religious *Qawwali*.

When the musical sounds of *Qawwali* are understood, as discussed in chapter 2, as the spiritual power of the sacred self, the performance of cultural memory takes on a broader multiplicity of meanings. At Khuldabad, the musical sounds of *Qawwali* transmit the spiritual power of a particularly significant lineage of "sacred selves." This multiplicity of sacred selves is encountered in figures like Amir Khusrau (d. 1325), a culture hero who mingled socially with saints and kings; the saints of Khuldabad themselves: Zar Zari Zar Baksh (d. 1309[?]), his younger brother, Burhan al-Din Gharib, Raju Qattal (d. 1330), father of the famous Deccan saint Gisudiraz (d. 1422) of Gulbargah, and many others; as well as the masters of these saints, Nizam al-Din Awliya of Delhi, and the founding Chishti saint, Mu'in al-Din Chishti (d. 1236) of Ajmer.

⁴⁰ *Malfuzat*, meaning "spoken," and refers to the preservation of oral discourses given by past Sufi masters.

In previous chapters we have taken a synchronic look, that is, we have examined through field work the performance of *Qawwali* as it occurs in a *particular* moment in time. In this chapter, I look at *Qawwali* as the performance of cultural memory at a significant Muslim shrine center in central Maharashtra. I base my analysis upon a diachronic view, a view *across* time, of a lineage of sacred figures who have particular significance to both *Qawwali* as an art, and to Khuldabad as an Islamic sacred center. If, as I have claimed in chapter 2, the musical sounds of *Qawwali* are a transmission of the spiritual power of the sacred self, then the specific character and ethical qualities of the sacred self whose power is transmitted through the sounds of *Qawwali* is of particular importance. The qualities and personal histories of these individuals are the very stuff of the cultural memory which is performed, expressed, and transmitted by Torab Nizami *Qawwal*, and other *Qawwals*, when they perform *Qawwali* at the *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar Baksh or at other shrines at Khuldabad.

Although performing *Qawwali* at the *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar Baksh may be less lucrative than other performance opportunities, Torab Nizami *Qawwal* enjoys certain prestige as a performer of religious *Qawwali* at the shrine of a respected *wali*. With that prestige comes certain responsibilities. Torab began his program with a *na't*, a song in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. A more formal program might have begun with a recitation from the Qur'an, as was done at the *mahfil-i-sama'* discussed in the previous chapter. For an informal program, beginning with a *na't* was in keeping with *adab* [etiquette] appropriate to the occasion. By observing proper *adab*, remaining respectful to Zar Zari Zar Baksh as an exemplar of Islamic principles and practice, recalling the lineage from which the cultural practices of the shrine spring, and by performing religious *Qawwali* songs while avoiding *ajkal ki dhun* [popular songs], Torab

successfully negotiates the symbolic categories of *halal* [permitted] and *haram* [forbidden]. He also engages in the performance of cultural memory, preserving the memory of the sacred self as it is experienced through those individuals whose remains are housed in the many shrines at Khuldabad. It is the memory of these particular individuals that ultimately validates Khuldabad as a sacred site.



Figure 50 - Unpreserved royal tombs dot the landscape of Khuldabad, the *dargah* complex of Zari Zar Baksh is upper right.

One element of the performance of cultural memory at Khuldabad is symbolic, spiritual engagement with worldly power. Intersections of worldly and spiritual power at Khuldabad reflect engagement with a different, more ancient, imperial influence than found in Pune, discussed in chapter three. Khuldabad itself functions today as both a small township, situated between the two tourist sites of Daulatabad and Ellora, and as a vast tomb complex and pilgrimage site. Carl Ernst (1992) lists over fifty identified tombs in the general area of Khuldabad (Table 1), noting that there are countless others in the nearby region. Of these tombs,

it is interesting to note the large number of unkempt, royal tombs in comparison to the many well maintained sacred shrines associated with religious figures, their families, and followers (Fig. 50).



Figure 51 - Tomb complex of Zayn al-Din Shirazi, *khalifa* of Burhan al-Din Gharib.

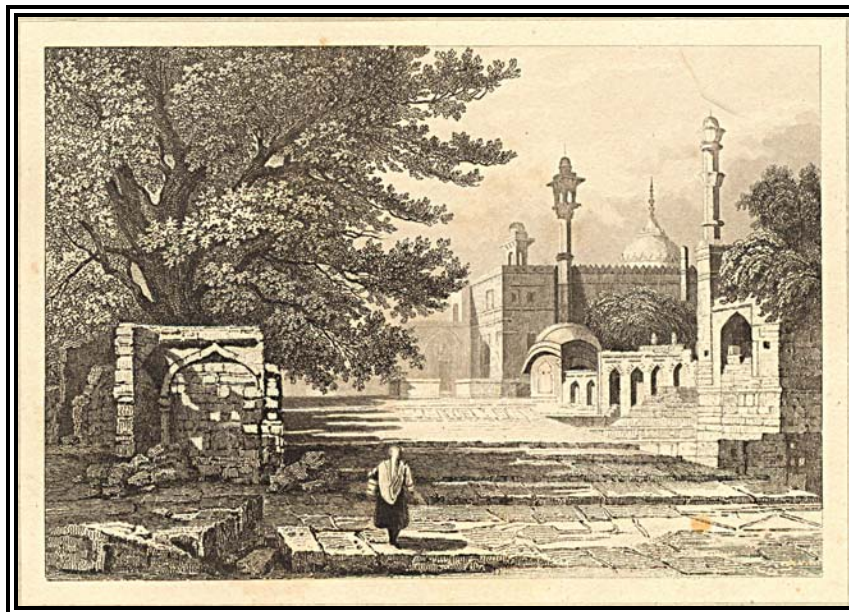


Figure 52 - 19th century print “Tomb of Aurangzeb” (author’s collection).

Perhaps the most striking representation of worldly power at Khuldabad is the presence there of the tomb of the last of the great Mughal emperors, Awrangzib (d. 1707). The legendary emperor is buried in a simple grave within the confines of the tomb complex of Zayn al-Din Shirazi, *khalifa* of Burhan al-Din Gharib (Fig. 51 - 52). Awrangzib's burial at this site is a curious fact in relation to *Qawwali*. Shirazi was an enthusiastic proponent of *sama'*, even more so than his shaykh, Burhan al-Din Gharib, who was himself well known for his love of *sama'*. Yet, Awrangzib exhibited a well known distaste for music of any kind. Niccalao Manucci (d. 1717), an Italian adventurer who met Awrangzib during his travels on the sub-continent, reports an oft repeated account of Awrangzib's dislike of music, and his poor treatment of musicians. Having adopted a conservative religious attitude, the emperor is said to have ordered all music outlawed in his empire. If any singing or instruments were heard in any house, the inhabitants were to be arrested, and the instruments destroyed. In response to this turn of events, a crowd of distressed musicians wished to attempt a ploy they felt might play upon the sympathies of the emperor. A thousand of them, it is said, arranged to hold a funeral procession in honor of the death of music. The procession was to pass by the mosque on a Friday afternoon, at a time when Awrangzib was expected to attend prayer. According to Manucci,

From afar Aurangzeb saw this multitude and heard their great weeping and lamentation, and, wondering, sent to know the cause of so much sorrow. The musician's redoubled their outcry and their tears, fancying the king would take compassion upon them. Lamenting, they replied with sobs that the king's orders had killed music, therefore they were bearing her to the grave. Report was made to the king, who quite calmly remarked that they should pray for the soul of music, and see that she was thoroughly well buried (Irvine 1907:8).

Even so, Awrangzib, this pious despiser of music, chose to be buried in a simple grave within the confines of the shrine of one of the most enthusiastic practitioners of *sama'* in Khuldabad. This speaks as much to the ambiguous position of music in Islam as it does to the reputation for

sanctity that Khuldabad had developed by the time Awrangzib had begun his Deccan campaigns. Awrangzib left his mark in Khuldabad in another way as well. The city was originally known as *Rawza*⁴¹. the name was changed to Khuldabad⁴² only after the burial there of Awrangzib in 1707. In spite of Awrangzib's objections, and the objections of many other conservative Muslims, *Qawwali* continues to be practiced at Khuldabad, by Torab Nizami *Qawwal* and others.

Amir Khusrau: Inventor of *Qawwali*?

Another important element of cultural memory invoked and preserved by Torab Nizami *Qawwal*'s performance of *Qawwali* at the *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar baksh is the saint's direct link to the accepted origins of *Qawwali* itself. Khuldabad is home to the *dargahs* of several important Chishtiyya Sufis connected with Nizam al-Din Awliya of Delhi. Zar Zari Zar Baksh himself is known to have been closely connect with Nizam al-Din, but Zar Zari Zar Baksh's brother, Burhan al-Din Gharib, whose *dargah* is also at Khuldabad, is particularly significant in that he is recognized institutionally as one of Nizam al-Din's *khalifas*. There is no evidence that any Sufis prior Burhan al-Din Gharib, and possibly his brother, engaged in *sama* ' in the Deccan region of what is now Maharashtra state. Based on this observation, it seems safe to claim that the first *Qawwali* in Maharashtra was likely performed in Khuldabad. In addition, Zar Zari Zar baksh's master, Nizam al-Din Awliya, has been closely linked historically with the origins of *Qawwali*, largely due to another of his disciples, Amir Khusrau, who is often credited with the invention of *Qawwali*.

⁴¹ In reference to, *Rawza-i muqaddasa*, the sacred garden (Ernst:1992:xxiv).

⁴² from Awrangzib's postmortem epithet, *khuld-makan*, or, "stationed in eternity." (Ernst:1992:281)

I asked one of the elderly *Qawwals* at Khuldabad, Shayyar Shaf al-Din, why *Qawwali* is used in Islamic practice. He explained to me that, first there come Qur'an and Hadith, and from them is distilled certain knowledge, which is known as "*qaul*," (word, or word of God), and from *qaul* comes "*Qawwali*." When I asked why music was added to *qaul*, without hesitation he told me that Amir Khusrau had invented the music that came with *Qawwali*, that before that there had been no music, but Amir Khusrau used to sing in front of Nizam al-Din Awliya and invented the music known as *Qawwali* to accompany himself. According to Shayyar Shaf al-Din, this music was modified and converted in different ways over the years⁴³. Although this story is widely circulated, and generally accepted, at the popular level, it is likely that something very like *Qawwali* existed long before Khusrau. Legend often supersedes what can be established historically. As ethnomusicologist Gregory Barz (2005) has observed, "...within any performance of cultural memory a reshaping of the past must necessarily occur..." (178). This may well have occurred in the process of preserving the popular memory of Amir Khusrau in Khuldabad and elsewhere. Even so, the narrative of Khusrau's invention of *Qawwali*, and his connection to Khuldabad, is an important aspect of the cultural legacy of Khuldabad, and of *Qawwali*, regardless of the true genesis of *Qawwali*'s musicological development.

It was common practice in medieval times for kings to keep a court poet as chronicler of the events of the king's life. Such writers were known for their panegyric slant and flowery prose. In 1321, prior to becoming a sultan, and some seven years before his decision to establish a second capitol for his empire in the Deccan, Muhammad Tughluq staged one of his military campaigns from the city of Daulatabad (Fig. 53), the walled, fortress city some eight miles from Khuldabad.

⁴³ Khuldabad, July 4, 2004, personal communication.

Traveling with him was one the sultan's (his father's) chroniclers, who described Daulatabad in effusive terms,

Wonderful and auspicious city, the queen of the blessed realm...It is no flattery to call it paradise...The air is so pleasant that it produces only joy similar to that promised men of good deeds in the next world. – How can I describe its fruit? The fruit of all the world is jealous of it. There are bananas curved like the crescent moon, and as pleasant as the Id-day. There is also mango whose sweetness delights every palate and which looks like a golden shell full of milk and honey... (quoted in Siddiqui 1976).

These lines were put to paper by Amir Khusrau, the legendary father of *Qawwali*. There is no way of knowing if Khusrau paid a visit to *Rawza* (Khuldabad) while visiting Daulatabad. He may have, either to visit his friend Burhan al-Din Gharib, who may have already been there at that time, or Burhan al-Din's brother, Zar Zari Zar Baksh, or other members of their family⁴⁴. It is perhaps more likely that Khusrau's duties required his presence at court, and that he gave *Rawza* a miss. Even so, his actual role in the development of *Qawwali* is rarely examined, and is of particular significance historically, musicologically, and in regard to the performance of cultural memory at Khuldabad.

Abdul Hasan Yamin al-Din Khusrau, also known as Amir Khusrau Dehlavi, was born in 1253 in the small town of Patiyali, in the district of Etah in what is today India. His father was a Turkish nobleman in military service, his mother of Indian origin. Although his

⁴⁴ Sources indicate that at least five (some say six) members of the family, aside from Burhan al-Din Gharib, and Muntajib al-Din Zar Zari Zar Baksh, are buried in Khuldabad: that is, their mother, and four (or five) sisters (Ernst:1992).



Figure 53 - Ruins of the fortress city of Daulatabad, near Khuldabad.

father died when he was a boy, Khusrau was well educated and by the age of 20 was composing poetry which earned him princely patronage for his work. Subsequently, Khusrau was in the employ of at least six Delhi sultans, the last being Ghiyas al-Din Tughluq, father of Muhammad Tughluq. Khusrau met Nizam al-Din Awlyia in 1284. Soon after this meeting Khusrau became a Sufi, accepting Nizam al-Din as his shaykh. Today Khusrau is respected as a Sufi saint in his own right, and many of his songs remain a central component of *Qawwali* performance in general, and the *mahfil-i-sama'* in particular. Historically, Khusrau is important for his role as a Sufi and disciple of Nizam al-Din Awliya, as well as for his role in the fusion of Persian and Indian culture in general in 13th century South Asia, and for his role in the Indianization of *sama'* (Desai 1979).

Khusrau's importance in the historical development of *Qawwali* as an art is indisputable. Exactly how that role was enacted is less clear. Khusrau has traditionally been credited not only with the

invention of *Qawwali*, but also with the invention of several musical instruments, including the *tabla* and the *sitar*, as well as a variety of musical forms and styles. There is no doubt that he was both a master poet and a master musician. His poetry continues to speak for itself, in both Persian and Hindi. Although none of Khusrau's music was transcribed, his contemporaries affirm his skill, and he discusses the art of music in a number of his writings, leaving many clues to his real accomplishments. In addition to this evidence, Regula Qureshi (1995a) has documented a considerable oral tradition at the Nizam al-Din Awliya *dargah* in Delhi which speaks to his role in the development of the art of *Qawwali*. There are a number of *Qawwals*, who perform regularly at the Nizam al-Din *dargah*, who are known as *Qawwal Bachche*. These *Qawwals* claim a lineage which stretches back to the original *Qawwals* of Nizam al-Din's time who were trained by Khusrau himself. One role of *Qawwal Bachche* performers has been to preserve intact original *Qawwali* song melodies composed by Khusrau, and pass them down through the centuries in an oral tradition which survives to this day. The song "*Qaul*," discussed in chapter 3, is one of these compositions.

Khusrau is often credited with integrating Arab-Persian musical elements into North Indian music (Nayyar 1988; Askari 1969), a musical form which he greatly admired, and which he praised eloquently ("...Indian music, the fire that burns heart and soul, is superior to the music of any other country" [quoted in Desai 1979]). Nayyar puts particular emphasis on Khusrau's integration of the song forms of *tarana* and *qaul*, which are thought to represent early forms of *Qawwali*. Professor S. Q. Fatimi (1975) has examined at length Khusrau's own statements regarding music, collated them with the writings of two of Khusrau's contemporaries, Abu Fazl, and 'Abd ul-Hamid, and then compares these with certain accomplishments popularly credited to

Khusrau. Fatimi agrees with others that Khusrau was a force in the integration of some Persian and Arabic elements into North Indian music. Although there have been a number of misattributions⁴⁵ to Khusrau, Fatimi's research affirms that Khusrau played a role in bringing together Persian and Indian musical forms and ideas.

Both Fatimi and Khusrau scholar C. P. Desai, however, see Khusrau mainly as a visionary who was attuned to the syncretic movement, the interweaving of Persian and Indian culture, that was already in process. For Fatimi, the main factor in Khusrau's cultural influence was his self-conscious affection for India, and all things Indian. It was this affection that encouraged him to purposefully integrate Persian and Indian influences in his own art. As Fatimi says,

It was his clear perception of the change, its knowledge. To know is to become. By discovering those qualities in his own peoples and through his enchanting poetry making them know it, he gave a direction to the movement, forced its pace and gave it an unending life (27).

Although this tendency no doubt influenced Khusrau's approach to musical performance and composition as well, Fatimi does not see Khusrau as an inventor of musical styles and form. Fatimi's Khusrau was an inspiration to musicians at court, and in Delhi at large. He encouraged an atmosphere of aesthetic syncretism and creativity which allowed other musicians to compose and perform music in new ways. Finally, Fatimi, citing archeological evidence, rejects the idea that Khusrau could have invented either the *tabla* or the *sitar*. There still exist carved panels, found in Northern India, dating to a thousand years before Khusrau was born, which clearly depict images of both instruments.

⁴⁵ See Table 3 for a summary of Fatimi's conclusions regarding Khusrau contributions to Indian music.

Khusrau's role in the *sama*' of Nizam al-Din Awliya is equally unclear. There is no question that he composed numerous devotional poems dedicated to his shaykh. Many of these remain in circulation and are still sung at *mahfils* throughout South Asia. There is evidence in Khusrau's own writings, however, that his poetry was often given to other musicians, who put them to music themselves (Askari 1969). It is impossible to know how many of the existing compositions actually originated with Khusrau, although the *Qawwal Bachche* have preserved several which are widely regarded as the most authentic versions of melodies composed by Khusrau.

The exact nature of the *sama*' programs held by Nizam al-Din is also unclear, further obscuring what we may know about Khusrau's role in them, and in early *Qawwali*. That Nizam al-Din held *sama*' programs is well documented. The gatherings created much controversy, even at one point resulting in Sultan Ghyas al-Din Tughluq convening a meeting of religious scholars to discuss the matter (see below). Nizam al-Din himself was known to fluctuate on his position regarding the use of musical instruments in *sama*'. For this reason special *band sama*'⁴⁶ assemblies are still held at *dargah* in Delhi, during which no instruments are used (Qureshi 1995a). This fluctuation of position may simply have been an example of Nizam al-Din being cagey, since he was being closely observed and harassed by the *ulama*. Bruce Lawrence (1976) concludes that the use of musical instruments was not the point at all, but, rather, Nizam al-Din objected to the use of musical instruments in *sama*' only when the listeners present had not the requisite spiritual sensitivity. These reflections call into question the idea that Khusrau may have performed his own *Qawwali* at *sama*' in the presence of Nizam al-Din. It seems most likely that Khusrau may have sung his devotional compositions for Nizam al-Din, but performed his syncretic

compositions outside of the *sama*’ context. In any case, his subsequent legendary status has assured that, whatever historical evidence, or lack of it, there may be, Khusrau remains the central figure associated with the development of *Qawwali* as an art form in South Asia⁴⁷.



Figure 54 - Cave of Zar Zari Zar Baksh.



Figure 55 - Cave atop Hoda Hill, Khuldabad.

***Qawwali* and History in Maharashtra: The Long Journey from Delhi to Khuldabad**

Personal Fieldnote—My driver and guide, Pathan, and I drove the short distance from the dargah of Zar Zari Zar Baksh to the dargah of Raju Qattal. After paying our respects at the tomb of Raju Qattal, we left the dargah area and climbed Hoda Hill, which overlooks the dargah. At the top of the hill there is a very old cave where, according to tradition, Zar Zari Zar Baksh used to meditate (Fig. 54 - 55). A small lamp is kept burning in the cave, and Pathan had brought an

⁴⁶ *Band sama*’ is literally “closed *sama*’,” i.e. *sama*’ enacted without musical instruments.

⁴⁷ For the comprehensive musicological study of the art of *Qawwali*, see Qureshi, R. B. (1995). *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

offering of oil for the lamp. After sitting quietly for a while in the small, dimly lit space, we walked back out into the brilliant sunlight. As we climbed down the steep hill we could see the dargah of Zar Zari Zar Baksh to the east, as well as the tops of several of the countless tombs of Khuldabad. The dargah of Raju Qattal was directly below us, to the north, and just behind that we could see the towering but crumbling remains of the tomb of Ahmed Nizam Shah (Fig. 56), the first king and founder of Ahmednagar. Beyond the darkened, unpainted walls of this royal tomb, the breath-taking green expanse of what is known locally as the “Valley of the Saints” lay stretched out before us as we continued our descent of Hoda Hill, past the dargah of Raju Qattal, and made our way back to Zar Zari Zar Baksh for the Qawwali program.

Raju Qattal was the father of the saint of Gulbarga, Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni Gisudiraz (known as “Bandanawaz,” discussed in chapter 3). A follower of Nizam al-Din Awliya of Delhi, Raju Qattal traveled with his wife and son from Delhi to Daulatabad during the enforced migration of 1328-29. In that year the Delhi Sultan, Muhammad Tughluq (d. 1351), in an ill-conceived attempt to shore up the expansion of his kingdom, had decided to move the elite Muslim population of the old city of Delhi to the new “second capitol” of Daulatabad, 700 miles to the south of Delhi, and approximately eight miles from what is now Khuldabad. The Hindu Yadava rulers of Deogir (the fortress city which was later renamed Daulatabad when conquered by the Delhi Sultans) had first been subdued by Turkish Muslims of the Delhi Sultanate when Ala al-Din Khalji (d. 1316) sacked the city in order to fund his planned overthrow of his uncle, Sultan Jalal al-Din Firuz⁴⁸. Under constant threat of invasion by the Mongols from the northwest, as well as from local rival kingdoms, attacking and conquering outlying Hindu rulers had

become a popular way for Turkish adventurers to obtain booty to finance their military campaigns (Jackson 1999, Ernst 1992). The Mongols eventually did destroy Delhi in 1398, when Timur landed the final blow to the glory days of the Delhi Sultanate. Some seventy years prior to the sacking of Delhi by the Mongol king, however, Sultan Muhammad Tughluq's establishment of his new, second capitol in the south provided the basis for the first real Islamic culture in the Deccan (Schimmel 1980), and eventually resulted in the establishment of Khuldabad as a major Sufi center (Ernst 1992). Though Amir Khusrau may never have visited Khuldabad itself, *Qawwali*, the art form so closely associated with him, probably made the journey in the company of Khusrau's friend Burhan al-Din Gharib, during Sultan Muhammad Tughluq's controversial project to transfer his base of operations from Delhi to the Deccan.



Figure 56 - Dome of Raju Qattal in foreground, tomb of Ahmed Nizam Shah at center.

⁴⁸ There has been some debate over the precise ethnicity of the Khaljis. Early scholars understood them to be Turks, Prof. Abdul Hayy Habibi (1976) has concluded that they were ethnically Pathans (Afghans) who had acquired Turkish names and customs.

Islamic Expansion

Islamic expansion into the Indian sub-continent was a long, slow process, and had little to do with any religious agenda. Most scholars have long since abandoned the idea that Islam was “spread by the sword” in India or elsewhere. The migration of Muslims into South Asia was largely the result of empire building conducted at the hands of ambitious individuals intent upon developing their own power, prestige, and wealth. That these empire-builders were Islamic had more to do with their culture and ethnicity than with any fanatical religious agenda or iconoclasm. Hindu conversion to Islam was most often the result of indigenous people seeking advancement at court, it was rarely if ever carried out by force (Ernst 1992).

The movement of Islamic warrior kings into the sub-continent was a continuation of a similar process going on elsewhere in the world. The prophet Muhammad reported his first revelation in 610. After the Prophet’s death in 632, Muslim expansion quickly dominated much of the area surrounding the Arabian peninsula, including Northern Africa, Persia, the Levant, and parts of Europe. Although there are reports of minor contacts as early as the late 7th century, the early period of Muslim expansion into the Indian subcontinent is generally thought to have been from the 8th to 12th centuries. The first Muslims to settle in India were probably traders who came in the wake of military raids in the 8th century. By 1236, After several centuries of struggles between rival ruling powers, Turkish Muslims had established the Delhi Sultanate as the dominant power in Northern India. In 1328, in an effort to expand his reach into the Deccan, Sultan Muhammad Tughluq began to implement his radical plan to move much of the elite population of Delhi some 700 miles south to Daulatabad. Tughluq felt that Daulatabad, centered as it was around an extraordinary fortress built into the middle of a mountain, with shaved cliffs

some 500 feet high which were impossible to scale, and a complex array of defenses which included a series of external walls and moats surrounding the central edifice, was an ideal staging area from which to expand his kingdom and add to his income through the domination and taxation of more of the Deccan kingdoms to the south (Fig. 57 - 58). Although official rhetoric concerning the move was often in terms of Islamic expansion, the real motivating factor was the consolidation of power and prestige for the Sultan and his legacy, not religious fanaticism (Jackson 1999; Ernst 1992; Schimmel 1980).

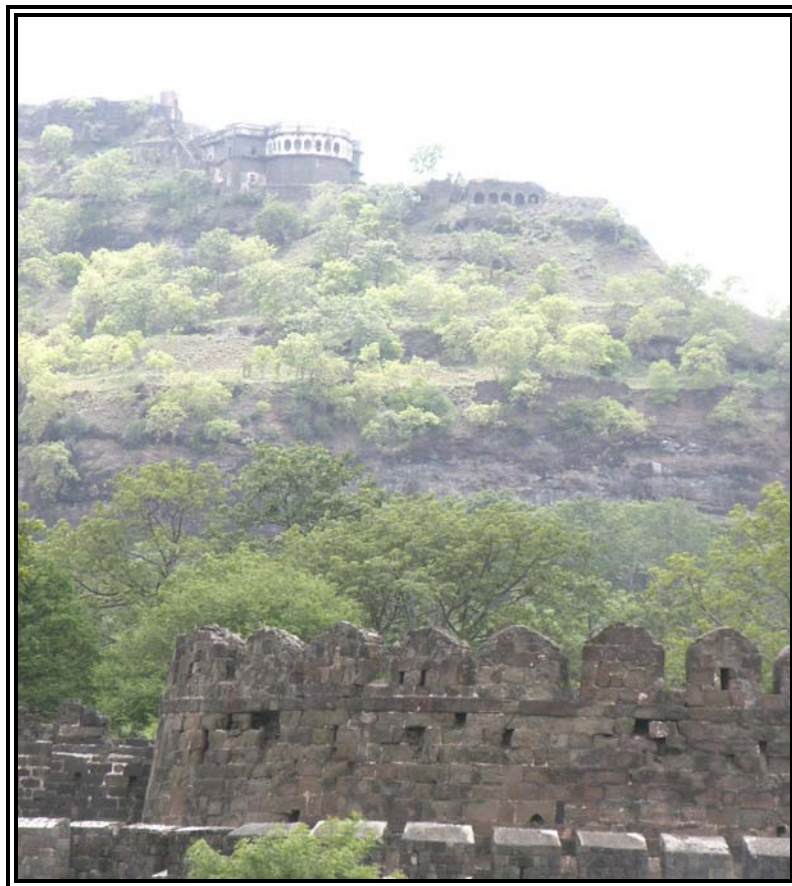


Figure 57 - Battlements encircling the Daulatabad fort complex.



Figure 58 - Remains of multiple protective walls encircling Daulatabad fort.

Lineage of the Khuldabad Chishtis

A number of legends claim alternately that either Burhan al-Din Gharib, Nizam al-Din Awliya's Deccan *khalifa*, or Burhan al-Din's elder brother, Muntajib al-Din (known popularly, and almost universally, as Zar Zari Zar Baksh), led a contingent of 1400 saints (some versions say 700) on a triumphal march from Delhi to Daulatabad, thus establishing what was to become the sacred pilgrimage spot of Khuldabad (Ernst 1992). Regardless of the veracity of the legends, it is clear from documents at Khuldabad that the Khuldabad Chishtis recognized Shaykh Burhan al-Din Gharib as the fourth *khalifa* of Khwaja Mu'in al-Din Chishti, and held his elder brother, about whom less is known, in high regard as well.

The religious and cultural importance of the Khuldabad Chishtis is based primarily on their place in the lineage of Mu'in al-Din Chishti, the first Chishtiyya shaykh to bring Sufism to India.

Mu'in al-Din Chishti is widely recognized as an important figure in the establishment of Islam as a cultural force in the subcontinent. Chishti entered the region by way of Afghanistan, arriving in Delhi in 1193, later moving on to Ajmer, in Rajasthan. It is not clear why he chose to move to Ajmer. Some reports say that he wished to avoid the huge crowds that clustered around him in Delhi (Khan & Ram 2003). Ajmer was at the far outskirts of the influence of the Delhi Sultanate, and it is also possible that he wished to avoid interacting with the royal powers in Delhi. It was a dream of the Prophet that directed him to go to India in the first place. Once there, he became a major catalyst for Islam in the sub-continent. Few concrete details remain about his early life, and much of what is known about his stay in Ajmer is laced with legends and miracle stories. His basic philosophy, however, seems to have been retained and passed down by his early *khalifas*, and on down to the Chishtis of Khuldabad. Chishti was a lover of *sama'* and encouraged the practice in Ajmer, a practice which continues at his shrine today in the form of *Qawwali*. He was known for his love of the poor, and his inclusive acceptance of Hindustani followers. He is still known affectionately throughout India as *Gharib Nawaz* [Patron of the Poor]. Chishti was especially particular that those in his order not accept gifts from kings. Although all were welcomed into his presence as equals, he was emphatic that dervishes should not mingle with royalty as a means of support. All of the major shaykhs who succeeded him took vows of poverty and refused to be intimidated by ruling powers. The resolve to remain aloof from royal patronage and the practice of *sama'* are the two main features which distinguish the Chishti *silsila* from other Sufi orders (Ernst & Lawrence 2002). One shaykh widely noted for the

observance of both of these distinguishing characteristics was Burhan al-Din's spiritual mentor, Nizam al-Din Awliya.

Nizam al-Din Awliya is one of the most well known Sufi saints in India, and the Sufi shaykh most closely associated with *Qawwali*. Nizam al-Din's ancestors were residents of Bukhara, in modern day Uzbekistan. They were among the few who escaped the savagery of the Mongol invasion of that city by Chingiz Khan in 1220, and were driven into India. Although many details of his youth are unclear, it is known that Nizam al-Din was born in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh, sometime in the mid 13th century⁴⁹, and it seems likely that his father died when he was quite young, perhaps even prior to Nizam al-Din's birth (Nizami 1992). His full name at birth was Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Ali al-Bukhari (Ernst & Lawrence 1992). As a young man he studied in Delhi under two noted scholars of the day, Mawlana Shams al Dia Damghani and Mawlana Kamal al-Din Zahid (Haq 1974). By all accounts he grew up in extreme poverty and remained a devoted *faqir* [poor one] for the rest of his life. Although living in poverty, Nizam al-Din was a devoted student, and was still attending to his studies when he was first drawn to meet the head of the Chishti order, Shaykh Farid al-Din Ganj-i Shakkar. He had first heard the shaykh's name from a local *Qawwal*, and he later met the shaykh's brother in Delhi. After only a short association with Farid al-Din Ganj-i Shakkar, and when Nizam al-Din was only 23 years old, Nizam al-Din was appointed Farid's *khalifa* and was sent to Delhi under Farid's instructions to expand the Chishti *silsila* (Nizami 1992).

Nizam al-Din's early days in Delhi were spent in poverty and privation, memorizing the Qur'an by order of his *pir*, Shaykh Farid. One hagiographic source reports that Nizam al-Din was

accompanied in poverty during these early days in Delhi by two *murids* (disciples), Burhan al-Din Gharib, and Kamal al-Din Yaqub (Begg 1999). Eventually, the saint attracted a large following of local poor people, as well as aristocrats, noblemen, and members of the military. He was soon overseeing a large following, and regularly fed hundreds of people. Nizami (1992) reports that on one occasion Nizam al-Din's *jama* 'at *khanah* [home of Sufi master where teaching takes place] became home to a large group of refugees from the Mongol invasions in the north. Throughout, Nizam al-Din maintained his routine of fasting, staying up late into the night in solitude, immersed in supererogatory prayers and meditation, and subsequently rising early and spending his days ministering to the needs of the people who came to him for help. One chronicler ('Abd al-Haqq) reported that this routine often caused Nizam al-Din's eyes to appear red, inspiring Amir Khusrau to compose the following verse:

You seem to be a reveler of the night –
In whose embrace did you pass the night
That even now your drunken eyes
Show the effect of wine? (quoted Ernst and Lawrence 2002:161)

Although Nizam al-Din accepted gifts for the purpose of feeding and ministering to the poor, these gifts were always distributed as quickly as possible, and Nizam al-Din had a standing order that there should be no food in the storeroom when he left for Friday prayers. Nizam al-Din's attitude is reflected in his instructions to his *murid* Burhan al-Din when the latter was sent to the Deccan as one of Nizam al-Din's *khalifas*:

...on the subject of donations, 'no rejecting, no asking, no saving.' If anyone brings you something, do not reject it, but do not ask for anything, and if they bring a little of something good, do not reject it (politely) in order to get it increased, nor should you specify everything (else that you need) in accepting it. (Ernst & Lawrence 2002:21)

⁴⁹ Nizami (1992) puts Nizam al-Din's birth at around 1243 or 1244, other sources suggest earlier.

In addition to his daily activities and supererogatory prayers, Nizam al-Din strictly observed the obligatory five times daily prayers, and the weekly Friday congregational prayers. In keeping with the traditions of the earlier Chishti shaykhs, he also held regular *sama* ' programs.

Nizam al-Din's fame and popularity, and his resistance to the influence of the Delhi Sultans, combined with his enthusiasm for *sama* ', led to a series challenges which some sources suggest were inspired by jealous *ulama* [Islamic scholars] in the Sultans' employ. Nizam al-Din had demonstrated in a number of ways that he was not interested in influencing the government, nor was he interested in receiving gifts from kings. Yet, his influence on those at court was considerable, and his influence was felt in many ways throughout the city, and the region. This enraged some of the *ulama*, who apparently had less spiritual integrity than Nizam al-Din, and tried to influence the Sultans against the Sufi master. One Sultan, Qutub al-Din Khilji, demanded that Nizam al-Din appear in court, which the saint had repeatedly refused to do, in keeping with the Chishti traditions of remaining aloof from the affairs of state. On the evening prior to the date set for Nizam al-Din to appear in court, the Sultan was murdered by his favorite slave, thus sparing Nizam al-Din the trouble which would have resulted from his failure to appear. In another instance, when Ghyas al-Din Tughluq (father of Muhammad Tughluq) came to power as the new sultan, the *ulama* insisted that he outlaw *sama* ', which they knew Nizam al-Din practiced regularly. The sultan called a meeting of *ulama* and other religious leaders in order to discuss the topic. Nizam al-Din was also invited, and, because of the religious nature of the gathering, and the importance of the topic, he agreed to attend. Nizam al-Din's arguments in favor of *sama* ' so impressed the sultan that Ghyas al-Din Tughluq eventually disregarded the

opinions of the *ulama*, and abandoned the idea of forbidding the practice of *sama* ' in Delhi (Haq 1974).

Burhan al-Din Gharib was one of Nizam al-Din's first *murids* in Delhi, and shared his master's love of *sama* '. According to one contemporary of Burhan al-Din, "In *sama* ' this saint was completely extreme, experienced much ecstasy, and said the prayers of lovers. He had a distinctive style in dancing, so that the companions of this saint were called 'Burhanis' among the lovers" (Ernst & Lawrence 2002:178). Although there are conflicting reports among early Chishti writers as to which *khalifa* of Nizam al-Din held the shaykh's primary authority, there is general agreement among modern scholars that Nizam al-Din made no distinction in rank between his *khalifas*⁵⁰. In any event, there was no question among the Khuldabad Chishtis that Burhan al-Din was an important spiritual figure who was devoted to Nizam al-Din, and was his *khalifa* in the Deccan. It is said that, during his trip from Delhi to Daulatabad, Burhan al-Din had a cot carried along beside him which bore the staff of Nizam al-Din, a sign of his succession and of his connection to his master.

Curiously, traditions associated with the illusive figure of Burhan al-Din's elder brother, Muntajib al-Din (Zar Zari Zar Baksh), although based entirely upon legend, often supersede the well documented reputation of Burhan al-Din. The earliest biography of Muntajib al-Din is found in a post-Mughal hagiographic collection, entitled, *Sawanih*, which appeared in 1775 and is attributed to a little known author named Sabzawari. In this work, Sabzawari reports that Muntajib was a disciple of both Farid al-Din Ganj-i-Shakkar (Nizam al-Din's master), and of

⁵⁰ For a complete account of the literature discussing Burhan al-Din's status among Nizam al-Din's *khalifas*, see Ernst and Lawrence (2002), pp. 178-183.

Nizam al-Din. The author also reports that Nizam al-Din gave Muntajib al-Din *walaya* [spiritual dominion] over the entire Deccan, and sent him there long before the forced migration of 1328-29. After Muntajib al-Din's death, Nizam al-Din is said to have transferred spiritual authority over the entire Deccan into the hands of Burhan al-Din, and then sent Burhan al-Din to Daulatabad (Ernst 1992).

If this account can be taken as accurate, Burhan al-Din would have arrived in Daulatabad prior to the 1328-29 forced migration, since Nizam al-Din died in 1325. Upon his arrival, Burhan al-Din stayed with a disciple named Malik Mubarak, who was already established in Daulatabad. Ernst speculates that Burhan al-Din may have selected Khuldabad, several miles from the Daulatabad Fort, as the seat of his work in the Deccan because of his desire for privacy and seclusion. This may be true, but if the legends regarding Zar Zari Zar Baksh are accurate, then Zar Zari Zar Baksh would have settled there prior to Burhan al-Din Gharib's arrival. Burhan al-Din may also have wished to be near the tombs of his brother and his mother, who is buried near Zar Zari Zar Baksh, within the confines of his *dargah*. In any event, Burhan al-Din quickly developed a large following at Khuldabad, basing his teachings on individual connections with disciples, established through initiation [*bay'a*] and *sama'*, rather than through preaching or the study of Islamic law. Burhan al-Din Gharib's approach to teaching is typified in the quote, "Our order...is known for two things: love and compassion" (Ernst 1992:126). His chief disciple and successor, Zayn al-Din Shirazi, arrived in Daulatabad during the general immigration from Delhi, and was initially opposed to Burhan al-Din and Sufism. He was especially critical of the practice of *sama'*. Zayn al-Din was eventually won over by Burhan al-Din, however, and grew to become

very close to the master. As already mentioned, he also became an enthusiastic proponent of the practice of *sama'* (Ernst 1992).

The specifics of the lineage of the Chishti order outlined above, and the personalities of the individuals who inhabit it, are all present when Torab Nizami *Qawwal* performs religious *Qawwali* at the *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar Baksh. These spiritual links are known to many of the visitors to Zar Zari Zar Baksh, and are affirmed by their commemoration in *Qawwali* performance. They represent for the believer an unbroken chain [*silsila*] back to the origins of the Islamic faith, and, ultimately, to the Creator (Table 2). In the case of Khuldabad, this connection includes a parallel movement of sound as spiritual power, in the form of *Qawwali*. The path traveled by *sama'* and *Qawwali* (or an early form of something very like *Qawwali*) through the Chishti *silsila* and across the subcontinent to Khuldabad, represents the basic ingredient of what Bruce Lawrence (1983) has called the “Indianization” of *sama'*. We can know little of the details of that process, but we do know that, through Khwaja Mu'in al-Din Chishti, *sama'* traveled from Afghanistan to Lahore, where Chishti visited the tomb of al-Hujwiri (who also likely practiced *sama'*), on to Delhi, and then to Ajmer. The practice was further developed by shaykh Farid al-Din Ganji Shakkari, and came to full flower in Delhi under the guidance of Nizam al-Din Awliya, and his talented disciple Amir Khusrau. Nizam al-Din spread the practice of *sama'* throughout the subcontinent via his many *khalifas*, Burhan al-Din in particular (and perhaps Burhan al-Din's brother Muntajib al-Din as well) brought *sama'* to the Deccan, and to Khuldabad, where it the practice was continued by Burhan al-Din's *khalifa* Zayn al-Din Shirazi, and where it continues to be practiced today. When Zayn al-Din Shirazi died in 1369 he left no *khalifa*. The Chishti lineage in the Deccan is generally understood to have passed on through

Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni-i Gisudiraz of Gulbarga, the disciple of another *khalifa* of Nizam al-Din, Nasir al-Din Mahmud of Delhi (Chiragh-i Dihli).

Establishment of Khuldabad as an Historic Islamic Sacred Center

By 1335, the project of a second capital in Daulatabad had been abandoned, and Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq allowed unhappy immigrants to return home to Delhi. Prior to this, there had been the danger of serious repercussions if one disobeyed the sultan's command to remain in Daulatabad. One disciple of Nizam al-Din who had been forced to immigrate to Daulatabad wished to leave the city for the purpose of a religious pilgrimage to Mecca. He was advised by a friend that such a plan would be dangerous. His friend, a judge, told him, "it is the Sultan's desire that this city should be famed to the ends of the earth because of the presence of scholars, shaykhs, and religious officials. And especially [you should not go] because he will be bound to oppress you" (quoted in Ernst 1992:115). In the end, however, the expense of attempting to expand his empire had proved too much for the sultan, and the entire scheme had to be abandoned. Although many returned to Delhi, others, who had become established in Daulatabad, stayed on and formed the beginnings of Islamic culture in the Deccan.

Muslim expansion in the area was again attempted in later centuries, notably during the late Mughal period. The Nizam Shahs of Ahmednagar founded the city of Khirki, just south of Khuldabad, in 1610. The city was renamed Aurangabad by the emperor Awrangzib in 1681, when the area was retaken by the Mughal armies. Awrangzeb used Aurangabad as a staging area for his unsuccessful attempts to bring the Deccan, and the *Marathas*, under his control. After

Awrangzib's death in Ahmednagar, and burial in Khuldabad, Aurangabad eventually became the first capitol of Hyderabad state in the early 18th century (Green 2004).

Although all of the Chishti saints, from Mu'in al-Din Chishti of Ajmer to Zayn al-Din Shirazi in Khuldabad, rejected the patronage of kings, later generations of Chishtis accepted patronage from a long line of royal entities, stretching from the Bahmani sultans (who had established an independent state in the Deccan after revolting against Muhammad Tughluq), to the Mughals, and the Nizams of Ahmednagar and Hyderabad. As with the keepers of the Chishti shrine in Ajmer, overseers of the holy places at Khuldabad devised creative explanations for accepting royal patronage, and as a result the shrine complexes grew in size and prestige. Today, the shrines of Burhan al-Din and his brother Muntajib al-Din are overseen by an institution called the "Greater Dargah Society," and the shrines of Zayn al-Din Shirazi (which houses the remains of Emperor Awrangzib) and Sayyid Shah Yussuf al-Husayni Raju Qattal are overseen by the "Lesser Dargah Society" (Ernst 1992). Although a deviation from original Chishti principles, royal and, later, institutional support served to preserve the shrines and establish Khuldabad as an historic Islamic sacred center.

Institutional and Popular Expressions of the Priestly and Shamanic Sacred Selves

It is interesting to note the relationship between Burhan al-Din Gharib, and his illusive elder brother, Muntajib al-Din Zar Zari Zar Baksh in regard to the categories of priestly sacred self and the shamanic sacred self discussed in previous chapters. Burhan al-Din's *dargah* is located in the center of Khuldabad, Muntajib al-Din's *dargah* is on the outskirts of town, outside of the walled area of the city. Burhan al-Din is the recognized *khalifa* of Nizam al-Din Awliya, Muntajib is

associated with both Shaykh Farid and Nizam al-Din, but has no official status as a *khalifa* of either. Burhan al-Din has clear institutional affiliations with the Chishtiyya lineage, with *mal'uzat* texts documenting his teachings, and several biographies throughout the Chishti corpus which mention him one way or the other. As to Muntajib al-Din, aside from the 18th century hagiography of Sabzawari, and other later mentions, the official record is virtually silent. Yet, to this day, in the minds of the local people of Maharashtra, both Hindu and Muslim, Zar Zari Zar Baksh is far more popular than Burhan al-Din Gharib. His 'urs is one of the most popular in the region, and he continues to attract large crowds annually. His nick name, "the giver of the essence of gold" suggests that he is understood to transmit *baraka* [spiritual power] to those who follow him. Though he has no official standing within Chishti Sufism in South Asia, he is widely respected by the Chishtis, as well as by local people. His mother's tomb is directly next to his own, and there are traditions that speak to his special relationship with women followers, as well as with farmers and local poor people. Although Burhan al-Din was especially interested in *sama*, his institutional affiliations suggest that his role as a religious specialist communicates something of the priestly sacred self to his followers. Muntajib al-Din Zar Zari Zar Baksh, like Taj al-Din in chapter two, and Babajan in chapter three, operates outside of institutional affiliations, and his legendary status suggests that he plays a role in articulating a sense of the shamanic sacred self to his followers.

Remaining outside of the restrictions and politics of institutional Sufism may have allowed Zar Zari Zar Baksh a certain amount of freedom in establishing a presence among the local, Hindu population. One of the most important legends related to him involves his disciple, Sona Bai ("gold woman"), a Hindu princess. Sona Bai's tomb is located within Zar Zari Zar Baksh's

dargah, between his and his mother's. Certain rituals associated with Sona Bai are enacted each year at Zar Zari Zar Baksh's 'urs, and both Hindu and Muslim followers participate in all of the activities of his 'urs (Ernst 1992). As Peter Gottschalk (2000) has suggested, it is often unhelpful to locate religious identity within the strict confines of a specific religious tradition, such as "Hindu" or "Muslim", when there continue to be competing factors of individual and group identity which mitigate the usefulness of such exclusive categories. This is certainly true among the followers of Zar Zari Zar Baksh. As Ernst has observed, Zar Zari Zar Baksh played a number of different roles for different audiences "...ranging from the political elite, to the local cultivators" (238).

Another interesting aspect of Zar Zari Zar Baksh's *dargah*, which is often overlooked, is its location, and the location of the spot which he chose for his meditations. It is often observed that Khuldabad is near the Daulatabad Fort, only eleven kilometers away. There can be no doubt that Khuldabad's proximity to Daulatabad is important, or that its development and its importance are related to the general Muslim expansion in the Deccan, which centered around the fort. Khuldabad is actually much closer, however, only a few kilometers in fact, to one of the great, iconic religious sites of India: the Ellora caves.

Although little is known about the details of the ancient history of the Ellora caves, the archeological evidence is plain, and quite stunning. The caves represent a blending of three indigenous Indian religious traditions: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. These caves, 34 of them, were hewn out of the solid rock of Charandari Hill, a healthy walking distance from Zar Zari Zar Baksh's small cave on Hoda Hill, a few kilometers away. The exact dates of the

excavations are disputed, but the caves closest to Khuldabad, the Buddhist caves, are thought to be the earliest, excavated between 200 B.C. and 600 A.D. Next are the Hindu caves, thought to have been excavated between 500 and 900 A.D. The Jain caves, about 2 kilometers from the Buddhist caves, are thought to have been carved between 800 and 1000 A.D., at least 300 years prior to Zar Zari Zar Baksh's arrival at what was then *Rawza*. At various periods during their long history, the caves have served as monasteries and temples. Some of the caves include sleeping cells carved into the rock for traveling monks (Ellora Caves 2007). The caves represent some of the finest examples of religious sculpture in India, and had served as the site of religious worship and contemplation for some 1400 years prior to the arrival of Muslims in the Deccan. Out of the vast expanse of plateau surrounding Daulatabad, Zar Zari Zar Baksh chose to inhabit a small cave on a hillside just a few kilometers from this centuries old religious site. Since the history of the saint is shrouded in legend and mystery, we can say little about him, or his choices so long ago, that is decisive. However, it seems unlikely that this choice was a coincidence, or that the symbolic association between the two sites would be lost on his local Hindu followers. Although historical details are not precise, it is a fact that the *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar Baksh continues to function today as one of the most important and popular shrines at Khuldabad and is regularly visited by both Muslim and Hindu pilgrims. Zar Zari Zar Baksh's popularity among the local people of Maharashtra, juxtaposed with his less popular, though institutionally recognized younger brother, Burhan al-Din Gharib, serves as an interesting example of the roles of the shamanic (Zar Zari Zar Baksh) and priestly (Burhan al-Din Gharib) sacred selves in popular Islamic piety in South Asia.



Figure 59 - Torab Nizami *Qawwal*.

Conclusion

Personal Fieldnote—Torab Nizami *Qawwal* is sixty-six years old. He first began singing *Qawwali* as a boy. At the age of seventeen he began studying with *Qawwali* master Abdhul Rov Jaush of Mumbai. He has sung professionally ever since. Torab is very serious when discussing his past (Fig. 59). His lined forehead wrinkles into a frown as he speaks. When I ask about his plans for the future, he smiles broadly, reaches in his pocket, and takes out a folded piece of paper. He unfolds the paper and spreads it out on the mat on the floor of the *dargah* where we are sitting (Fig. 60). The piece of paper is a formal document, a certificate from the Indian government granting Torab permission to start a college for *Qawwali* at Khuldabad. His face brightens as he tells me of his plans. He would like to pass on the tradition of singing religious *Qawwali* at Khuldabad, so that it does not disappear.



Figure 60 - Certificate granting Torab permission to start a college for *Qawwali* at Khuldabad.

In the centuries since its first arrival in Khuldabad, *Qawwali* has grown into more than simply a South Asian Islamic religious practice. As one Hindu gentleman told me “*Qawwali* is no longer the exclusive property of the Muslims, today everyone in India loves *Qawwali*⁵¹.” Indeed, today people around the globe love *Qawwali*. Although *Qawwali* has been a popular form of devotional practice among Muslims in South Asia for centuries, its popularity began to accelerate considerably in the early years of the 20th century when recording technology was first introduced to the Indian subcontinent. The earliest *Qawwali* recordings were produced by the British Gramophone Company in India in 1902 (Qureshi 1995b). *Qawwali* has continued to be a popular genre of recorded product ever since.

Soon after the emergence of musicals in the Indian film Industry in the early 1930s (Arnold 1988), *Qawwali* once again spoke to a broadening audience. Since the 1950s, *Qawwali* has

become a popular staple in Hindi, or “Bollywood” films, mostly produced in Maharashtra, in Mumbai, as well as in films produced in Muslim Pakistan. This has not always been to the benefit of the genre. Several prestigious *Qawwals* have voiced their disappointment in these modern developments in *Qawwali*. 94 year old Munshi Razi al-Din *Qawwal* (father of currently popular *Qawwal*, Fared Ayaz *Qawwal*), has voiced his opposition to the use of *Qawwali* in film.

...*Qawwali* is suffering many pressures and we are witnessing a mercenary phenomenon which uses this music for purposes of entertaining. The Indian cinema, for instance, uses the extraordinary qualities of *Qawwali* to portray scenes of humor and satire. Allah’s adoration, the love for the Prophet, and devotion to holy Muslim saints is mingled with themes like profane love between a man and a woman (La Presse 2002).

Khalil Muzaffar, a retired professor from Ahmednagar college, explains one of the key differences between religious and film *Qawwali* in the following way.

for example, *mashook*. *Mashook* is beloved, it is not feminine, *mashook* is *not* feminine, it is purely – not in a particular gender – so it means, it is directly God. And then they make it *mashooka*, and made it feminine for their own convenience. But in *tasawoof*, as we call it, spiritualism, *mashook* is taken to mean Beloved! So it is directly concerned with God. I, and *God*. *Mashooka* is the *worldly* Beloved (laughs). They concentrate much more on the worldly affairs.

Mashooka is a film thing, in order to attract the people, seeing a beautiful girl, huh? A beautiful woman, they say “Well, bravo, very good, very nice” But if there is not, even the slightest idea of sin, *that* is pure love. While looking at the *mashook*, if you remember God, that is something very extraordinary. The *Qawwali* poetry *takes away from* him all of these dirty elements about self centeredness, selfishness, narrowness, and all these things.

But the film *mashooka* is to attract the people, to give a certain concrete message. This way or that way, it definitely has become very popular...not very popular from my point of view, but they are trying to introduce it sometimes. Some *Qawwalis* in cinemas are very popular, huh?

The value of the jewel can be understood by two sides. Either he should be a king, or he should be a man who has the capacity to understand a jewel. Otherwise take it as a simple glass (laughs)⁵².

⁵¹ Gokoran Shrivastava, personal communication.

⁵² Ahmednagar, July 16, 2005.

Khalil's last comment expresses the sentiment that, if a person misses the true value of something precious, it is their loss, and not of concern to those who know its real worth.

Qawwali scholar Regula Qureshi (1995b), on the other hand, expresses the concern that recorded *Qawwali* has already had an impact on the quality of religious *Qawwali* as it is performed in the *dargah* context, due to the pressure from patrons for the *Qawwals* to perform songs that entertain them.

Where does all this leave the original context and function of *Qawwali*? Traditionally, spiritual leaders must pursue of the *Qawwali* ritual, which means encouraging traditional standards and a conservative repertoire and, above all, controlling the event in both setting and procedure. Performers must conform to these aims, but they also wish to please the audience whence their reward originates, and audiences are familiar and partial to recordings (161).

Biographer of Mu'in al-Din Chishti, W. D. Begg (1999) expresses a more practical concern: the promise of high paying careers in the recording and film industries has lured many talented *Qawwals* away from the *dargahs*. According to Begg, even the most popular *dargah* in India, *Ajmer Sharif*, the Shrine of Mu'in al-Din Chishti in Ajmer, has suffered from a scarcity of talent *Qawwals*.

It is a matter of deep regret that the standard of *Qawwali*, as compared to the pre-partition days, has considerably deteriorated in recent years at the Dargah of Hazrat Khwaja Saheb owing to the exigencies of changed times and the popularity of cheap songs which the Cinema world has brought in. Naturally many singers have found lucrative jobs in the Cinema trade, causing a serious setback in the old traditions of *Qawwali*. Moreover no good musicians are available at the old rates which the Dargah institution in India pay to the *Qawwals* normally (175).

As discussed in chapter 3, this situation shifts the intersections of worldly and spiritual power to a paradigm where the consumer is the one who holds the worldly power, wielding more influence than the shaykh, or the prestige and *baraka* of the saint who is commemorated in traditional *Qawwali* song and performance. In this paradigm, the musical sounds of *Qawwali*

have failed to successfully negotiate the symbolic categories of *halal* and *haram*, and have instead become vehicles for the transmission of worldly, not spiritual power.

It is against this cultural and socio-economic backdrop that Torab Nizami *Qawwal* is hoping to fulfill his dream of building a college for teaching *Qawwali* at Khuldabad. As a response to the continued encroachment of modernity, Torab, along with hundreds of *Qawwals* like him throughout Maharashtra, enacts his performances of cultural memory through *Qawwali*, preserving the rich religious and cultural legacy of the region. Individually and as a group, the *Qawwals* of Maharashtra provide a ubiquitous subtext for the worship practices of thousands of Muslim men and women who frequent Islamic shrines throughout the region. For them, the musical sounds of *Qawwali* are, or have the potential to be, literally spiritual power. By evoking the beautiful voice, the rhythm of *dhikr*, and the dynamic flow of ecstasy, the religious *Qawwal* enacts a performance of cultural memory which is expressed through the musical sounds of *Qawwali*. These sounds transmit a tangible, evocative, somatic experience of the sacred self as understood and expressed through the lives of exemplary individuals who embody for the worshipper the highest principles of Islamic faith.

CONCLUSION



Figure 61 - Alim Nizami *Qawwal* leads a *Qawwali* party in song at an evening *Qawwali*.

Personal Fieldnote – The *Qawwali* continues late into the evening, as more *chai* [spiced tea] is served, and Alim Nizami *Qawwal* (Fig. 61) alternates with Mahmud Nizami *Qawwal*, *bari ka gana* [singing by turn]. The atmosphere has become more relaxed now, and one can feel that the event is drawing to a close. The tempo and character of the song choices reflect the more casual feeling of the winding down of the evening (Music track 11), as the original excitement generated by the event begins to give way to a growing sense of sleepiness which gradually overtakes both the audience and the performers.

My primary purpose in this dissertation has been to show that the sounds of *Qawwali* are experienced as spiritual power by the Chishti Sufis of Maharashtra. When religious *Qawwali* is enacted as an expressive performance of cultural memory, it becomes part of the ongoing effort of worshippers to place themselves in an interactive relationship with the sacred other by observing obligatory Islamic practices and by linking themselves to the ancestral heritage of shrines associated with the Chishti lineage. In this context, music and religion are coextensive in South Asian *Qawwali*.

In chapter one I characterize the sounds of *Qawwali* as a cultural system of symbols that are designed to mirror the guiding concepts of the general ritual process of *Qawwali*. I explicitly link the sounds preserved in field recordings of *Qawwali* in Maharashtra with pertinent texts from Persian and Indo-Persian Sufi literature. These texts express an ideology that has historically linked sound with spiritual power, and they articulate the backdrop against which the Sufi negotiates the symbolic categories of *halal* [permitted] and *haram* [forbidden]. In addition, I explicitly link the sounds of *Qawwali* with the history of Islamic oral culture and embodiment.

In chapter two I broaden my view to see *Qawwali* as an affirmation of collective memory which asserts for the worshipper the importance of their Islamic heritage, Sufi ideology, and belief in the unseen, as it contributes to the individual's formation of a symbolic cultural self. I see this process as a form of symbolic healing, an idea adapted from James Dow (1986) and combined with the approach of Jacob Pandian (1999; 1991) which sees religion as a "projective system," a system which has personal/cultural functions and employs "...anthropomorphic,

anthropopsychic, and anthroposocial characteristics...” (1999:507) “...in the construction of supernatural reality” (507). Pandian’s approach is an

...anthropological approach to the study of religion, which focuses on the nature of the symbolic or cultural self, uses the insights and contributions of psychological, phenomenological, and hermeneutic/semiotic perspectives and analyzes how cultural/social integrity is maintained through the sacred or supernatural integration of the symbolic self. (514)

By combining Pandian’s and Dow’s ideas, I take the idea of symbolic healing beyond Dow’s original intention, suggesting that at least some religious practices, *Qawwali* among them, may be understood as forms of symbolic healing. In chapter two, and in the remainder of the dissertation, I position the sounds of *Qawwali* as aural symbols of the transmission of *baraka* [spiritual power] which is understood to emanate from the Sufi saint, or, in Pandian’s terms, the symbolic cultural self. As previously stated, I suggest this analysis as neither reductive, nor essentialist, but, rather, as a heuristic approach to understanding one aspect of the significance of the coextensive nature of music and religion cross-culturally, and, specifically, in the practice of *Qawwali* in South Asia.

Chapters three and four describe the centuries old practice of *mahfil-i-sama*’ in the context of a distinctly non-standard South Asian ‘*urs* [death anniversary] celebration. In chapter three, focusing on the symbolic cultural self as expressed and experienced by the worshipper through the form of the saint, Hazrat Babajan, I emphasize the non-standard aspects of the ritual’s context. These include: the celebration of the ‘*urs* of a female saint, who has no institutional affiliation, whose unusual behavior was understood locally as a state of *majdubiyya* [divine absorption], yet whose popularity was so great that she mutely empowered the local populace to defy the ruling British colonial government. In chapter four I focus on the traditional aspects of

the *mahfil-i-sama*’ ritual and the sounds of *Qawwali* which accompany it, remaining cognizant throughout of the efforts expended by the event’s organizers to enact the traditional ritual in such an unusual context.

In chapter five I broaden the lens further and show something of the centuries long migration of *sama*’ and *Qawwali*, through the Chishti lineage, from the Middle east, by way of Afghanistan and Khwaja Mu’in al-Din Chishti, across the subcontinent to Khuldabad, in modern day Maharashtra. Emphasizing *Qawwali* as a performance of cultural memory, I focus on several of the personalities in the Chishti lineage in an effort to outline the qualities and personal histories of those individuals who inhabit the narratives of the cultural memory which are performed, expressed, and transmitted by the performance of *Qawwali* in Maharashtra. This broader view places the local performances, documented earlier in the dissertation, in their historical, cultural context.

My goal in this dissertation, in addition to demonstrating that the sounds of *Qawwali* are experienced as spiritual power by the Chishti Sufis of Maharashtra, has been to articulate the coextensive nature of music and religion in religious practice, and to provide an example of this phenomenon through documentation of the practice of *Qawwali* in Maharashtra. It is a curious fact that the religious practice of virtually every culture throughout recorded history includes music in the worship experience, yet the academic study of religion has barely touched upon the subject. Textual studies, doctrinal comparisons, and philosophical commentaries abound, yet one of the primary experiences of religious worship cross culturally, musical performance, escapes with barely an honorary mention. Why is this? Although in recent years, mainly through the

emerging field of ethnomusicology, the importance of music to religious practice has received far greater academic attention than previously, much of this attention has been a recognition of the use of music as a part of religious practice in individual communities (Barz 2003; Summit:2000; Muller 1999; Sullivan 1997; Harris 1992). There are many studies as well considering music as used and understood in various individual religious traditions, especially Christianity. Little has appeared, however, considering music and religion as a coextensive cross-cultural phenomenon. One early exception to this trend is an ambitious work by Brian Wibberly (1934) entitled *Music and Religion: A Historical and Philosophical Survey*. Wibberly was an Australian Methodist minister and journalist who wrote primarily on issues concerning the Methodist faithful. Although, to his credit, he does discuss music cross-culturally in his work, including “Music in Primitive and Savage Religions,” and “Music in the Polytheistic Religions,” his emphasis is clearly on Christianity and “Music in the Monotheistic Religions,” (sparing barely a page and a half for the “Mohammedan Religion”). Although there is much of interest in the study, it suffers from an orientalist slant and the privileging of European values. Another, more recent study, *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* by Robin Sylvan (2002), reverses the lens and examines the appearance of religious experience in popular music, rather than music in religious practice. Ethnomusicologist Phillip Bohlman (1994) goes so far as to ask “Is All Music Religious?” in a brief article that surveys issues resulting from posing the question in the title, as well as examining some of the parallels between the disciplinary domains of music and religious studies. Though each is of value in its own way, these studies leave many questions unanswered in regard to the ubiquitous use of music in religious practice cross-culturally.

What I have emphasized throughout this dissertation is the importance of recognizing that music often functions in religious practice, not as a separate “musical” phenomenon, but as a religious phenomenon in itself. It is often true that music itself is experienced as religious, and that religion is experienced as musical. To attempt to separate the two in such a context is to commit violence upon the practices being observed and represented. The implications of this observation for ethnomusicology, anthropology, and religious studies is clear. What I am advocating for is the recognition that the role of music in religious practice not be overlooked in anthropological and religious studies research, and that, likewise, the role of religious sensibilities and ideologies in ethnomusicological studies of religious practices must be equally and responsibly represented as well. If music and religion are coextensive in other religious practices, in addition to what has been shown here in *Qawwali*, then this fact is of considerable importance, and must not be overlooked.

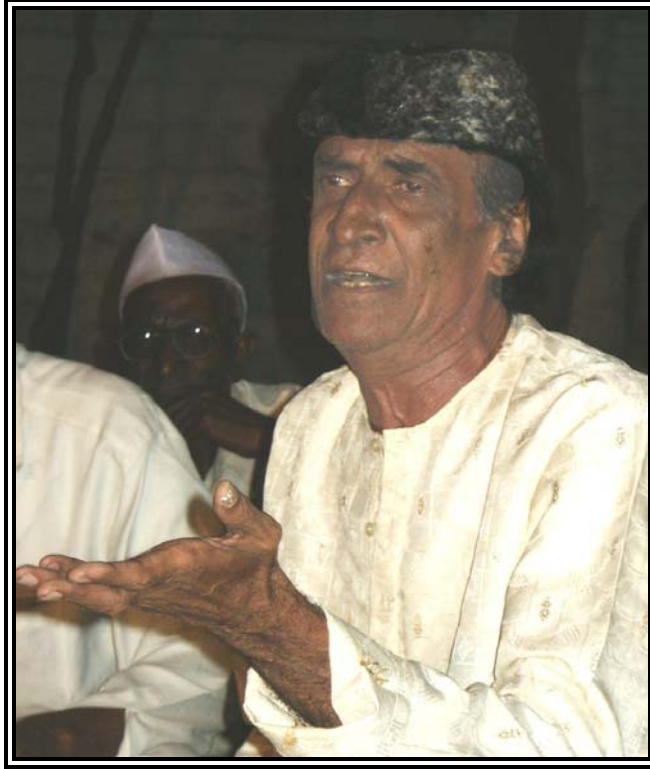


Figure 62 - Alim Nizami Qawwal.

Personal Fieldnote—Alim Nizami Qawwal (Fig. 62) is rightfully proud of the years that he spent with his mentor, the famous Maharashtran Qawwali singer, Master Habib Qawwal, who grew up in a poor family in Ahmednagar. He takes obvious pleasure in recounting his youthful experiences singing with Master Habib Qawwal before Meher Baba. As he reminisces, he remembers one of Meher Baba's favorite couplets. He doesn't remember the composer, but he recalls the couplet, and he asks my colleague, Pathan, to write down the following Urdu words:

*Shaikh masti isi ko kahte hai.
Maie parsti isi ko kahte hai.
Hath jata nahin gardan tak.
Tangdasti isi ho kahte hai*

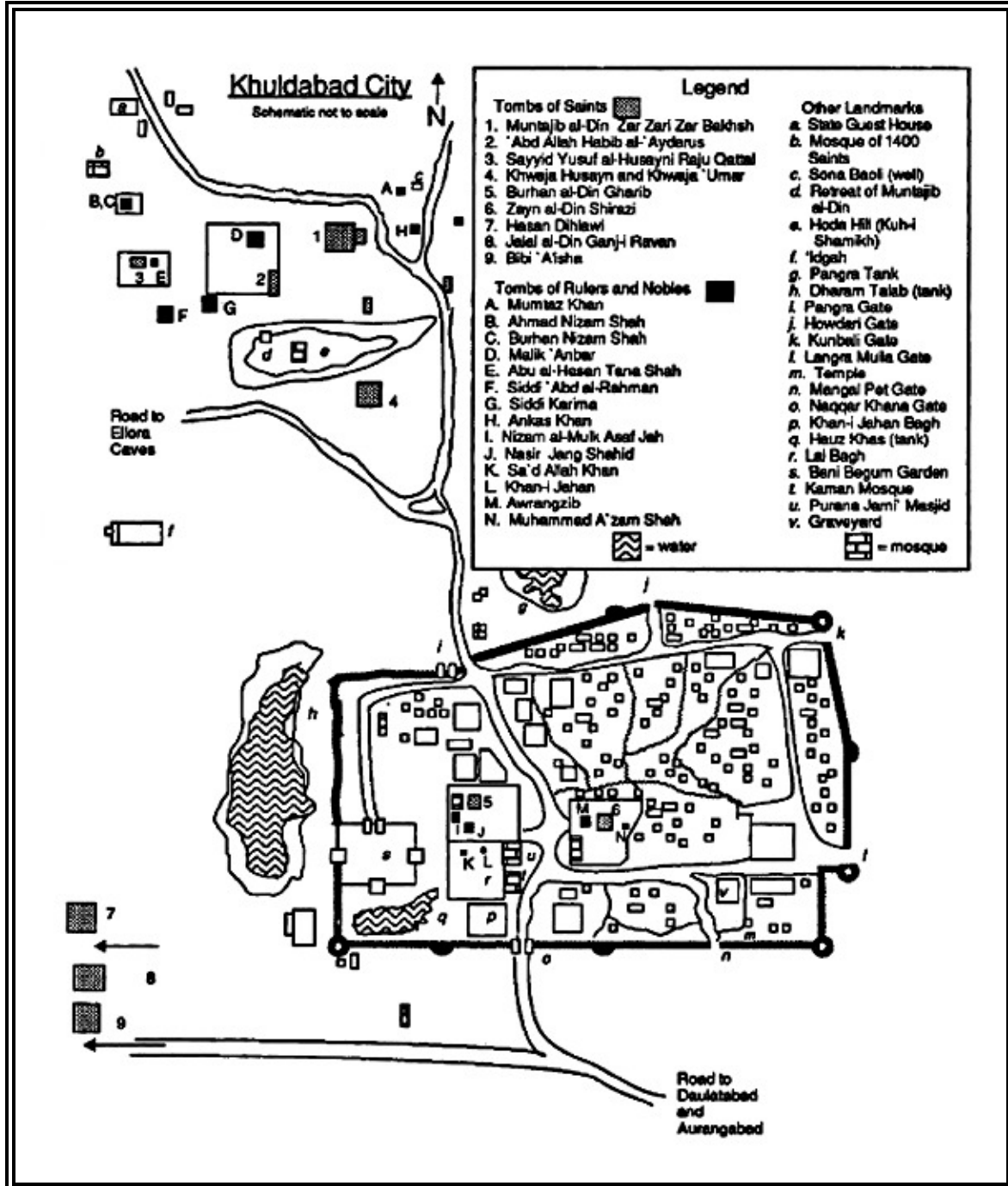
[*Shaykh*, intoxication is what they call this.
wine-worship is what they call this.
The hand reaches not the neck⁵³
Suffering from restriction is what they call this⁵⁴.]

The above *bayt*, or couplet, is meant to suggest that it is exactly the tension between what one desires, and what one is able to achieve, that sometimes creates the intoxication of divine ecstasy. It is the longing to achieve what is just out of reach that often provides one with the necessary will to progress farther than one might have done had the goal been more easily achievable. In this dissertation I have shown that the academic recognition of music and religion as a coextensive phenomena cross-culturally is not something that is unachievable, or out of reach. On the contrary, such recognition will improve the accuracy of ethnographic representations of musical performance in religious contexts.

⁵³ Colloquial, similar to saying “I am struggling to make ends meet.”

⁵⁴ I am indbted to my friends Sabir Hussain, Sarab Seth, and Muhammad Farrukh Hussain of the Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan listserve for their help in translating this couplet.

Table 1. - Map of Khuldabad



Map of Khuldabad, from Ernst, C. W. (1992). *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*. Albany: State University of New York Press, p. XX.

Table 2. - Initiatic Genealogy of the Khuldabad Chishtis

1. Muhammad the Prophet (d. 10/632)
2. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 40/661)
3. Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728)
4. 'Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd
5. Fuzayl ibn 'Iyaz (d. 187/802)
6. Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 163/779)
7. Huzayqa al-Mar'ashi
8. Hubayra al-Basri
9. 'Alu Dinawari
10. Abu Ishaq Chishti
11. Abu Ahmad Chishti (d. 355/966)
12. Muhammad Chishti (d. 411/1020)
13. Yusuf Chishti (d. 459/1067)
14. Mawdud Chishti (d. 520/1126)
15. al-Sharif al-Zandani
16. 'ursman Harwani (d. 607/1211)
17. Mu'in al-Din Chishti (d. 633/1236)
18. Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 633/1235)
19. Farid al-Din Ganj-i Shakkar (d. 664/1265)
20. Nizam al-Din Awliya' (d. 725/1325)
21. Burhan al-Din Gharib (d. 738/1337)
22. Zayn al-Din Shirazi (d. 771/1369)

Ernst, C. W. (1992). *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp xv.

Table 3. – Amir Khusrau’s contribution to the musical form of *Qawwali*

S. Q. Fatimi (1975) concludes, that, while Khusrau’s influence has been significant in the development of Indian classical and light classical music, a number of misunderstandings have occurred. Specifically, Fatimi’s study finds that:

- (i) Khusrau initiated the singing of Arabic and Persian verses and phrases in the most popular Hindwi raga of his times, namely, **dhurpad** in **ektala** (single **tal**), **ardha-chautala** (duple **tal**), **tin-tal** (triple **tal**), and **chautala** (quadruple **tal**) ;
- (ii) he mixed the Persian musical idioms, namely, **samit** and **tatar** with the above-mentioned Hindwi **raga**;
- (iii) upto the time of Akbar this new form of music was in vogue only in Delhi and was known as the Delhi style of singing **dhurpad raga**; and
- (iv) it was called **qaul** which was originally the term for the most popular Persian form of music. (Fatimi 1975:25)

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