

Indian Horizons

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Indian Council for Cultural Relations

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was founded on 9th April 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first Education Minister of independent India.

The objectives of the Council are to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes relating to India's external cultural relations; to foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries; to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people; to establish and develop relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture; and to take such measures as may be required to further these objectives.

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Editor

Subhra Mazumdar

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Foreword

Satish C. Mehta
Director General, Indian Council for Cultural Relations

Sufism, an integral part of Indian philosophy and thought process, has influenced and continues to influence Indians. Sufism has as much appeal for the learned and the masses alike. The simple lifestyles of the founders, who had lived among common people of their time, inspired an entire range of cultural outpourings in music, dance, rituals beliefs and more. This issue examines how, despite the passage of centuries, Sufism has remained relevant and continues to resonate in our heart and mind.

The essay by Kumkum Srivastava on the *Qalandar* traditions elicits this viewpoint. The informal, often unschematic ways of the Qalandars simplifies complex philosophical thoughts into an everyday affair and thus the Qalandari movement has become a part of the folklore of the countryside. On the opposite end of the scale, Raza Rumi traces the journey of one of the pioneering figures of Sufism of the subcontinent, Shah Ahmed Bhattai, in his native Sind. Linking the old with the contemporary, the essay provides a chronological approach to this journey. Its links with the already existing fertility cult in ancient Sind and the unique flowering of a series of women Sufi saints, an enriching addition to this journey, is available through Raza's writings.

A more studied approach to an understanding of Sufism and its quintessential culture is elaborated by Sameena Siddiqui. In her essay, the core issues of Sufi thought, including the views of its critics are first laid bare, and then lucidly analysed through a scholarly coverage. On the opposite end of the scale, Rizwan Qaiser has cast his eye across the contemporary

standing of Sufism and its modern-day orientation right from Bollywood songs to opinions from more sedate quarters.

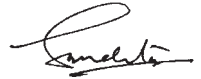
A more visual-cum-personal look at the subject is available in the photo essay of this volume. The annual Sufi Festival of the ICCR has been drawing attention regularly as participants are drawn from across the world and the telling camera shots of the artistic-cum-philosophical moments of the performing musicians, dancers and instrumentalists on stage have been made the subject of our photo essay segment. One of the pioneering efforts of dancer Manjari Chaturvedi to portray Sufi thought and its spontaneous appeal for the artist is part of the essay penned by her. In a forthright and convincing manner she has managed to relate her personal journey to dance the Sufi philosophy in the Kathak format.

Among the many centres which have imbibed the Sufi tradition, Delhi holds a significant status. On the one hand there are the renowned shrines of Nizamuddin Auliya and Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki and on the other hand there are the humbler precincts of others such as the Matka Pir and the shrine of Chirag-i-Dilli that draw attention to themselves because of their historicity and their place in the popular folklore. Rakhshanda Jalil's coverage of these places proves how these locales in the capital have continued to arrest attention, for the legends accruing to them as well as their unique positioning in the public gaze.

The regular sections of the volume feature a book review of a coffee table volume that has drawn accolades for its valuable content on the literary

genius of the poet-philosopher Amir Khusrau. The illustrated content, awash with the stylized kalams of the poet, photographs of live performances, many-angled views of the Nizamuddin Basti precincts,

make the work a delightful keepsake. The reviews of the many artistic explorations that were on display at the Azad Bhavan Gallery add to the attraction of this volume.



Satish C. Mehta

Editorial

Whirling dervishes, strident qawali singing, wandering Bauls, complete with matted locks and duggi, are the telling thoughts that would cross my mind at the mention of the word 'Sufi'. But working on this volume, made me aware of how enriching and multifaceted Sufism has been in the subcontinent. Hence bringing out this issue themed on Sufism, has been a sort of fact finding mission with each of the contributions being a mentor, introducing me to this treasure trove of human thought.

Of course what brought Sufism right to my writing desk was the discovery I made through Rakhshanda Jalil's article about the shrines in the capital. These modest shrines I learnt have been drawing the faithful right from the times of the emperor Ghiyasuddin located in offbeat tree groves, or in the midst of ruined monuments. Continuing on my quest to trace the ancient roots of Sufism to its earliest beginnings, linked me with Raza Rumi's take on the advent of Sufism into the subcontinent through the Sindh province.

Curious to know the subject in-depth, resulted in a request to Dr Sameena Siddiqui to lay bare the core aspects of this philosophy through an explanatory piece of writing. Rizwan Qaiser then gamely offered to map the course of Sufism as is prevalent in our everyday life where Sufi thoughts are a living tradition pan-India, not as a piece of exotica but as living culture.

The dance, music and mendicant links of Sufism are equally vibrant I realized when in conversation with artist Manjari Chaturvedi, who for a decade and a half, has relentlessly and single-handedly been promoting Sufi dance. Her personal journey has become a spontaneous outpouring on stage bearing the fragrance of her dedication to her art form. While still on the performance grid, Kumkum Srivastava's offer to explain the Qalandar tradition of Sufism, that has endured because of its inclusiveness with the common folk, nudged memories of Phoolwalon ki sair, an annual attraction in the city.

The unique aside from Sufism I discovered half-way through this issue was that the philosophy has a vibrant performative potential that has been energized across the centuries through the chorused singing of Qawali presentations. This culture has been pictorially captured in our book review section. The poet composer Amir Khusrau, verily the originator of this form is the subject of study through a volume brought out jointly with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. The ICCR's Sufi Festival with its select international performers provides a wide-angled international look at Sufism. For art lovers, the reviews of Azad Bhavan Gallery stress the variety that only art can provide to our aesthete.

Happy reading.

Editor



Subhra Mazumdar

Diversity and the 'Self' in Sufi tradition

Dr. Sameena Hasan Siddiqui

My heart has become the receptacle of every 'form';
It is the pasture for gazelles and a convent for
Christian monks.

And a temple for idols, and pilgrims' Ka'bah,
And the Tablets of the Torah, and the Book of the
Quran.

I follow the religion of love whichever way its camels
take,

For this is my religion and my faith. (Ibn al Arabi)

These lines written by Ibn al Arabi resounded in the
numerous sufi *khanqahs* and defined their practices
and precepts under the rubric '*Wahdat-ul Wujud*'.
Shaikh Muhyi al-Din ibn al 'Arabi (or ibn 'Arabi)

دوش دیدم که ملائک در میخانه زدند
گل آدم بسرشتند و به یمانه زدند
ساکنان حرم ستر و عفاف ملکوت
با من راه نشین باده مستانه زدند
آسمان بار امانت توانست کشید
قرعه گار به نام من دیوانه زدند
جنگ هفتاد و دو ملت همه را عذر بنه
چون ندیدند حقیقت ره افسانه زدند
شکر آنرا که میان من و او صلح افتاد
حوربان رقص گنان ساغر شکرانه زدند
آتش آن نیست که بر شعله او خندد شمع
آتش آنست که بر خرمن پروانه زدند
کسی جو حافظ نکشید از رخ اندیشه نقاب
تا سوزلف سخن را به قلم شانه زدند

ای بیخبر بکوش که صاحب خبر شوی
تا راه رو نیاشی کسی راهبر شوی
در مکتب حقایق پیش ادیب عشق
همان ای پسر بکوش که روزی پدر شوی
دست از مس وجود چو مردان ره بشوی
تا کیمیاى عشق بیابى و زرد شوی
خواب و غورت ز مرثیه خویش دور کرد
آنگه رسی بخویش که بی خواب و غور شوی
گر نور عشق حق بدل و جانت اوتند
بالله کز آفتاب فلک خویتر شوی
یکدم شریق بحر خدا شو گمان مبر
کز آب هفت بحر بیک موی تر شوی
از پای تا سرت همه نور خدا شود
در راه ذوالجلال چو بسی پا و سر شوی
وجه خدا اگر شودت منظر نظر
زین پس شکی نماند که صاحب نظر شوی
بنیاد هستی تو چو زیر و زبر شود
در دل مدار هیچ چو زیر و زبر شوی
گر در سرت هوای وصالست حافظا
باید که خاک درگه اهل نظر شوی

was born in Murcia, Spain on 17th Ramadan 560
A.H/28th July, 1165 C.E, in a renowned family of sufis
who belonged to the ancient Arab tribe Tayy. In his
quest for knowing the Ultimate Reality (*Haqq*) he
sought to gaze upon His Creation (*khalq*). For him
knowing *Haqq* or the indeterminate Monad was not
a human task. However, the indeterminate becomes
manifested when He creates, for His creation
manifests His attributes in the phenomenal world.

صلاح کار کجا و من خراب کجا
 چه نسبت به رندی صلاح و تقوی را
 دلم ز صومعه بگیرفت و خرقه سالوس
 بشد که یاد خوش باد روزگار وصال
 ز روی دوست دل دشمنان چه دریا بد
 مبین بسبب زنخدان که چاه در راهست
 چو کحل ینش ما خاک آستان شماست
 بین تفاوت ره کز کجاست تا بکجا
 سماع و عظم کجا نغمه رباب کجا
 کجاست دیر مغان و شراب ناب کجا
 خود آن کرشمه کجا رفت و آن عتاب کجا
 چراغ مرده کجا شمع آفتاب کجا
 کجا همی روی ای دل بدین شتاب کجا
 کجا رویم بفرما ازین جناب کجا
 قرار و خواب ز حافظ طمع مدار ای دوست
 قرار چیست صبوری کدام و خواب کجا

Thus the phenomenal world is in effect a reflection or acosmism, manifesting divine names and attributes. According to Ibn al Arabi this reality, which becomes determinate through the act of creation, has defining features. These features are marked by the centrality of multiplicity, expressed in a conglomeration of opposites. Thus, to perceive the ontological monad it becomes imperative to experience the epistemic duality of reality expressed through multiplicity in the phenomenal world as one. This oneness, Ibn 'Arabi called *Wahdat ul Wujud*. He emphasized the centrality of the beholder in perceiving the phenomenal world, to understand Haqq. The reality for the beholder is the multiplicity within the phenomenal world as the basis for oneness. So unity and multiplicity, transcendence and immanence are one. 'We can view reality as we know it i.e: uniting in itself all conceivable opposites. God can be known only by uniting these opposites, for each creation is invested with divine names and attributes. This universalism of experience through the 'self' accepted multiplicity is the basis of individualism. This individualism, represented through a 'personalized aesthetical experience', was the chord which established collectivism.

ساقی به نور بناده بر امروز حرام ما
 مطرب بگو که کار جهان شد به کام ما
 ما در پاله عکس رخ یار دیده ایم
 ای بی خبر ز لذت شرب مدام ما
 چندان بود کرشمه و تاز سهی قندان
 کناهد به جلوه سرو منور حرام ما
 هرگز نمیرد آنکه دلش زنده شد به عشق
 تبت است بر جریده عالم دوام ما
 ترسم که صرفه ای نبرد روز بازخواست
 تان حلال شیخ ز آب حرام ما
 منشی به چشم شاهد دیند ما عیوش است
 زان رو سپرده اند به منشی زمام ما
 ای باد اگر به گلشن احباب بگتری
 ز تهار عرصه ده بر جانان پیام ما
 گو نام ما ز یاد به عمدا چه میبری
 خود آید آن که یاد نباشد ز نام ما
 حافظ ز دیده دانه اشکی همی فشان
 باشد که مرغ وصل کند قصد نام ما
 دریای اعظم فلک و کشتی هلال
 مستغرق نعمت حاجی قوام ما

دوش رفتم بدر میکنده خواب آلوده
 خرقه تر دامن و سجاده شراب آلوده
 آمد افسوس کتان مغبجه باده فروش
 گفت بیدار شو ای رهرو خواب آلوده
 شست و شویی کن و آنگه بخرایات خرام
 تا نگرده ز تو این دیر خراب آلوده
 بهوای لب شیرین پسران چند کنی
 جوهر روح بیاقوت مناب آلوده
 بطهارت گذران منزل پیری و مکن
 خلعت شب چو تشریف شب آلوده
 آشنایان ره عشق درین بحر عمیق
 غرقه گشته و نگشته بآب آلوده
 پاک و صافی شو و از چاه طبیعت بدر آی
 که صفائی تسعد آب تراب آلوده
 گفتم ای جان جهان دفتر گل عیبی نیست
 گر شود فصل بهار از می ناب آلوده
 گفت حافظ لغز و نکته بیاران مفروش
 آه ازین لطف بانسواع عتاب آلوده

The Quran confirmed the revealed 'Kalam' or the revealed 'kitab' in a pluralistic setting. Multiplicity of regionality and chain of nubuwwat contextualized the universal Islam. The rendition of the 'Kalam' in multiple regions and languages did not detract from its single truth of *tawhid*. Ibn al Arabi's *Wahdat Ul Wujud* celebrated diversity and multiplicity of existence as a doorway to gnostic knowledge. The sufis clearly defined *ilm* or knowledge differently than the theologians. For the sufis, an *alim*, or one who has knowledge is just a beginner treading the path which leads to the creation of an arif or a gnostic. The difference according to the sufis was that the *alim* acquired *ilm* through *aql* or intellect, while an arif was granted *ma'rifa* (esoteric knowledge) through his *qalb* or heart. For the sufis the textuality of the *Kalam* was activated through orality. This oral rendition of the text as *zikh*, *sama* or tilawat enabled the sufi to experience the text in his heart or *qalb* leading to ecstasy. The sufis differentiated knowledge (*ilm*)

from gnosis (*marifa*). *Ilm* was instructional, verbally communicated and had to be acquired through *aql*. According to the sufis true knowledge was beyond *ilm* because it was an act of Divine Grace which revealed itself in the *qalb* or heart of the seeker as gnostic experience. Unlike *ilm* it could not be acquired nor could it be instructed or shared or communicated. It could only be experienced. Neither was it the product of the sufi's labour for it was an act of Divine Grace. This experience of withdrawing from one self into the Divine was true knowledge for the sufis. This was the gnosis of the *arif* as distinct from the *ilm* of the *alim*. An *arif* had to be an *alim* but an *alim* may not be an *arif*.

Elaborate *sama* and *zikh* gatherings where ecstasy was experienced in a state of elation or state of sobriety became a common feature of sufi *silsilas*. The sufis centralized the self through this personalized aesthetic experience, for the self was universal.

اگر آن شرک شیرازی به دست آرد دل مارا
 به عیال هندویش بخشم سمرقند و بخارا را
 باده صافی می بانی که در حجت نوحی یافت
 کنار آب رکتاباد و گلگشته مصلی را
 فدای کسین لولیان شوخ شیرین کنار شهر آشوب
 چنان بردند صبر از دل که ترکان خوان بهمارا
 ز عشق تا تمام ما جمال یسار مستغنی است
 به آب و رنگ و حال و حظ چه حاجت روی زیبارا
 حدیث از مطرب و می گو و راز دهر کمتر جو
 که کسی نگشود و نگشاید به حکمت این معنارا
 من از آن حسن روز افسون که یوسف داشت دانستم
 که عشق از پرده عصمت بیرون آرد زلیخارا
 بدم گفتی و عرضتم عفاک الله نکو گفتی
 جواب تلخ می زید لب لعل شکر خارا
 نصیحت گوش کن جانما که از جان دوست دارند
 حوالان سعادت مند پسند پسیر داننارا
 غزل گفتی و در سقی یسا و محوش بحوان حافظ
 که بر نظم شو افشاند فلک عقد ثریبارا

This universal self was perceived as a beholder of the diversity of *khalq*. The sufis celebrated diversity and multiplicity. Central to this was what Ibn al Arabi said that the One and many are two aspects of 'One'. Affifi interprets thus :

'The One reveals Himself in many ...as an object is revealed in different mirrors, each mirror reflecting an image determined by its nature and its capacity as a recipient. Or it is like a source of light from which an infinite number of lights are derived. Or like a substance which penetrates and permeates the forms of existing objects: thus, giving them their meaning and being. Or it is like a mighty sea on the surface of which we observe countless waves forever appearing and disappearing. The eternal drama of existence is nothing but this ever-renewed creation (*al-khalq al-jadid*) which is in reality a perpetual process of self-revelation.' (M.M. Sharif ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, I, p.413.)

خرم آن روز گزین منزل ویران بروم
راحت جان طلبم وز یسی جانان بروم
گرچه دانم که بجائی نبرد راه غریب
من بیوی سر آن زلف پریشان بروم
چون صبا با دل بیمار و تن بی طاقت
بهوداری آن سرو خرامان بروم
دل از وحشت زندان سکندر بگرفت
رخت بر بندم و تا ملک سلیمان بروم
در ره او چو قلم گر بسم باید رفت
با دل زخم کس و دیده گریان بروم
نذر کردم گر ازین غم بدر آیم روزی
تا در میکه شادان و غزلخوان بروم
بهوداری او ذره صفت رقص کنان
تا لب چشمه خورشید درخشان بروم
تازیان را غم احوال گرانباران نیست
پارسایان ممدی تا خوش و آسان بروم
ور چو حافظ نبرم ره ز بیابان بیرون
همره کسوکبه آصف دوران بروم

The numerous sufi *silsilas* emphasised this in their very existence. Varied styles and methods of *zikr* abound in the numerous *silsilas* all pointing towards this acknowledgment of diversity. This personalized aesthetical experience also established collectivism through the commonality of the 'self'. It was in the state of *sukr* or elation that Hallaj uttered '*Anal Haqq*' (I am God/Truth) or Muhasibi and Junaid reflected in a state of sobriety or *sahw*. Such utterances were termed as *shatahat*. Such a reference is cited by Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi: 'Of the many spiritualists gathered around Hasan Basri, the most gifted was Habib ibn Muhammad, an Iranian or Ajmi, who had settled at Basra. Prior to being Hasan's disciple, Habib had been a usurer, known for his evil habits. The preceptor and his disciple became so close that they even shared the same cell for a period after the former had sheltered with Habib while hiding from the governor of Iraq. The following passage from Hujwiri's *Kashf ul Mahjub*, related the significance of sincerity and devotion in prayers, rather than language and form:

'One evening Hasan of Basra passed by the door of his cell. Habib had uttered the call to prayer and was standing, engaged in devotion. Hasan was unable to speak Arabic fluently or recite the Quran correctly. The same night, Hasan dreamed that he saw God and said to Him: "O Lord, wherein does Thy good pleasure consist?" and that God answered: "O Hasan, you found My good pleasure, but did not know its value: if... you had said your prayers after Habib, and if the rightness of his intention had restrained you from taking offence at his pronunciation, I should have been well pleased with you.'

This emphasis on the self in union with diversity was the key to gnostic *ilm*. To cite from Rizvi:

"The way is manifest and the truth is clear ...God is like the blazing sun; do thou seek thyself, for when thou hast found thyself thou art come to thy journey's end, inasmuch as God is too manifest to admit of His being sought."

The experiential emphasis on *ilm* through persistent pluralism found rich ground in Sufi writings and poetry.

Sufi letters (*maktubat*) and discourses (*malfuzat*) are rich sources. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya said: "Every people have a religion and a house of worship."

In *Fawaid ul Fuad*, which contains a record of the meetings of the Shaikh from 1308 till 1322 C.E, Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya narrated a story of Prophet Abraham, who always invited a guest for dinner. One day he went in search of a guest to accompany him for dinner. He met a polytheist and hesitated to offer him the invitation. At that moment Divine admonition came to Prophet Abraham that: ' (When) I can give life to this man but you cannot give food to him?'

There are numerous references of visits of jogis to the *khanqah* of Baba Farid and Shaikh Nizamuddin Awliya. The *malfuzat* have no report of conversion by the Shaikh. Ziauddin Barani in *Hasrat Namah*, as referred by Mir Khurd, quotes Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya: "God Almighty has, in His wisdom, given a special characteristic to every age, and the people of

that age develop their customs, habits and traditions accordingly in a distinct way, so much so that the temperament of the people (of one generation) and their nature does not agree with that of the preceding generation." The depth of this statement is better explained by Mohammad Habib: "The Shaikh's life was in fact the embodiment of what psychological research shall one day prove to be the deepest principle of our human nature. That salvation of happiness in its highest form lies not in war with the attractions of worldly life or in indifference towards them, but in the healthy development of the cosmic emotion in a sympathetic identification of the individual with his environment'."

In the words of Ghalib :

Na tha kuch to khuda tha kuch na hota to khuda hota

Doboya mujh ko hone ne na hota main to kya hota

اتوہ ادخوات تو منہا ہت ا رختہ چکا ہت من
اتوہ ای کوئی می اتو منہا ہت من و موکہ چم ایوب د

Translation:

When I was nothing I was God, had I not been (created) I would have been God

To be was my undoing , had I not been (created) what would had I been !

Again Yagana Chengezi wrote:

Sab tere siva kafir akhir is ka matlab kya
Sir phira de insan ka aisa khabt e mazhab kya

ای کبیل طماک س ا رخ آرفاک ا وس ے ری تبس
ای کببضم طبخ اس ای اک ن اسن ا ے د ا رہپرس

Translation

Everyone is a non believer except you, what does this mean?

What use is this obsession with religion if it makes you inhuman?

Kabir was regarded by the sufis as a *muwahhid*. Shaikh Ruzqullah Mushtaqi sought to know its meaning



from his father Shaikh Sadullah who was Kabir's contemporary. Was Kabir a Muslim or a Kafir? To this he answered that Kabir was a muwahhid and to know who a *muwahhid* was, such knowledge could only be acquired gradually. Baba Farid's son had earlier defined *muwahhid* (cited from Rizvi):

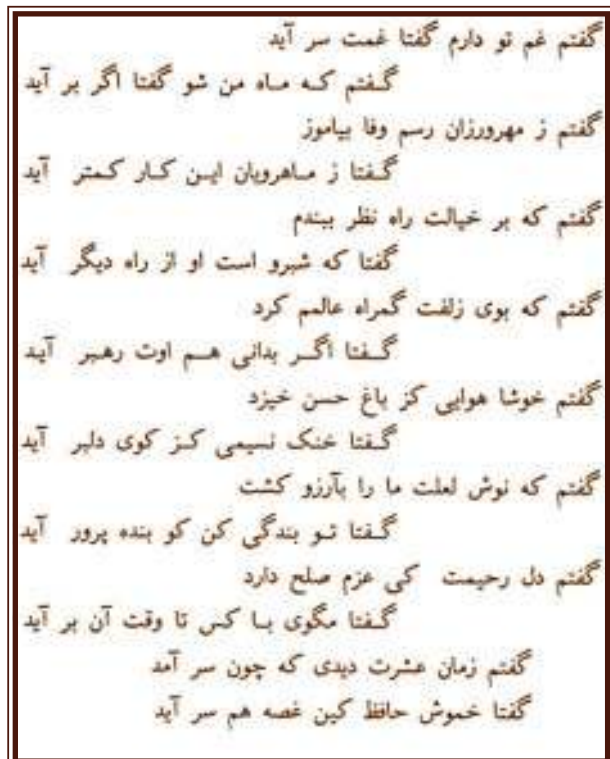
'The *muwahhid* is he whose main concern is good action. Whatever he does aims at seeking divine grace....Absorbed in *Tawhid* (*Wahdat ul Wujud*) he is in a state of self-effacement. A sufi or a lover belonging to this category is concerned with nothing. If he makes a quest for himself, he finds God, if he seeks God, he finds himself. When the lover is completely absorbed in the Beloved, the attributes of the lover and the Beloved become identical.'

Diversity as a medium of gnostic experience was the hallmark of sufi thought. However this diversity expressed itself through the universal language of experience through the discovery of the 'self'. This identification of the 'self' with diversity was based on an understanding of the dichotomous 'self', what the sufis called the split between the '*lahut*' and the '*nasut*' within, the *zahiri* (exotic) and the *batini* (esoteric) aspects of existence. The '*fitra*' (nature) of humans was defined by this inner struggle. No human was born completely good or completely evil, but carried an internal struggle between the two. This struggle within every individual was the reason for his creation. According to the sufis, this journey within finds fulfilment in the gnostic experience. The Quran cites numerous evils that reside in humans viz: hatred, pride conceit, injustice, despair etc, which are collectively referred to as '*zulm*'.

Knowledge or knowing, according to the sufis then was a state of awareness or a state of 'spiritual insight' based on moral certainty. The Quran defines that; "those of His servants only who are possessed of knowledge have *taqwa* (moral integrity)." Knowledge was then identical with spiritual quest and moral servitude. The Quran states that: '*Fastabiqu al-khayrat*' الْخَيْرَاتِ قَاتِلُوا or "Excel each other in good deeds." And also that '*la ikhra fi al-din*' or لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ 'There is no compulsion in faith'.

The 'free-will' of the 'self', according to the sufis was the only driving force which initiated the seeker on to the journey of true knowledge. This simultaneously qualified and disqualified all humans (to undertake or not to take) for such a quest, irrespective of religion, region, language, gender etc. This also established a personalized form of worship and imparted collective identity on the basis of humanhood alone. This encapsulated all diversities under the concept of the 'self' as a seeker from within. This imparted collectivism to all seekers of the 'self' through 'free-will'. Imam Ghazali emphasized the centrality of the seeker through deed.

The sufi silsilas by the twelfth century, incorporated influences as diverse as neo-platonism, near-eastern Hellenism, semi-orientalized by Aramaic, Christian influences, the doctrines of Hermetic origin, corpus of Greek literature, the monastic Buddhism, vedantist and yogic philosophy. Early sufi centres rose in Basra, Kufa, Khurasan, Syria, Egypt, Baghdad, Azarbaijan, Gilan, Tabaristan, Gorgan etc. However, new elements were awaiting to re-invent cultural



fusion. The mystic engagement with the 'self' in a pluralistic Indian setting, re-invented the collective 'self'. This celebration of diversity found new partners in the nirguna-sampradaya, sahaj-samadhi, sahayani Buddhists, Mahayana-vajrayana Buddhists, tantric hathiyoga, nathpanthi-kanphata yogis, sahayja vaishnavas, bauls of Bengal and others and offered a wide range of interactive platforms. Centrality of the experiential 'self' imparted 'collectivism' to the diverse esoteric terminology.

The presence of sufi tradition in this, marked its indigenization, based on collectivism. It is no surprise that Guru Nanak emerged in Punjab and expressed this 'collectivism'. The symbolism of this 'collectivism' was *bhagat bani*, which chose Baba Farid, in conjunction with Kabir and others, which marked the 'Indianization' of sufism through re-defined collective identity and 'oral memorization and recitation' of the *Naam*. Guru Arjan Dev compiled an anthology *Adi Granth*, which became a sacred text of the Sikhs. However, this contained not just the *banis* of the Sikh Gurus but also *banis* of sufi and bhakti saints viz: Baba Farid, Jaidev, Namdev, Trilochan, Parmanand, Sadhana, Beni, Ramanand, Dhanna, Pipa, Sain, Kabir, Ravidas, Bhikhan, Surdas. This was a unique feature where 'oral participation' gave way to 'a textual community' through devotional literature, which also included those belonging to diverse traditions. The Indian sufi presence was not exclusively 'muslim space'. It was eclectic. The popularity of Sakhi sarwar was not a *silsila*-based devotion. Instead it was based on the *pir's* personal *baraka*, which was perceived in a highly indigenous regionalized universe. The myths and literary narratives about the *pir* revealed a 'syncretic cult'. In the popular imagery the *pir* had Bhairavi, Lord Shiva's manifestation, as his messenger. The



shrine at Nagaha near Dera Ghazi Khan, included four tombs like those of the *sahaba* of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), besides two sacred sites associated with Hazrat Ali (the historicity being irrelevant for the believers). What, however, marks this sacred space is the cultural and religious interpenetrative ethos, which provided collectivity to popular spiritual aspirations. Their reverence was based on inclusivity without boundaries.

Similarly, *Phool walon ki Sair* is organized every year where visits to Yogmaya temple and the *dargah* of Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki simultaneously

blur the boundaries of religion to reveal the 'self'. The multiple sufi imagery brought together diversity on a platform which could sustain sub cultures of collectivism. The Meo-Muslims adopted multiple customs and traditions, viz: of *nikah* and also circumambulations around the fire, of celebrating Eid and Diwali in conjunction. Niazaris adopted the symbol of OM as representation of ALLI. Imamshahis considered Hazrat Ali as the tenth incarnation of Vishnu. The Pranam Panthis are half Hindu and half Muslim and

their holy book *Qulzum sarup or Kullum/ Kalam Sharif* carries *slokas* from the Geeta and the Quran and other scriptures.

Dynamics of 'religion' constitutes a moving frame of reference. It defies taxonomies which are blind to a 'lived' notion of their vibrant ever-changing interpenetrative continuum. This pervasive mosaic gets visible only in its dynamism. Diversity expressed through the sufi understanding of the 'self' and '*ilm*' escapes such taxonomies. De-constructing identities through shared religious concepts like the 'self' and '*ilm*' points towards a vast canvas awaiting diverse strokes.

Delhi: Axis of the Islamic East and the Beating Heart of Sufism in India

Dr. Rakhshanda Jalil

*I am the mystic gypsy called Qalandar;
I have neither fire, home nor monastery
By day I wander about the world, and at night
I sleep with a brick under my head.*

It was the *qalandar*, the wandering mystic, the Sufi-at-large, an earlier-day Hippie as it were, who made the history of Islam in India so colourful. Belonging to the Qalandariyya sect, an order of Sufism originating in Iraq, the *qalandars* sought to do away with custom and religion and live their own rather idiosyncratic life as vagabonds. Renouncing all worldly things,

they wore a coarse garment of horse hair reaching the knees and tied about the waist with a sash. Some shaved their head, beard, moustaches, even eyebrows – to fully reveal the beauty of the face – and wore a profusion of iron rings around their neck and arms. Their distinctive appearance – a cross between a sufi saint and a *naga yogi* – provoked some, attracted others.

From the 13th century onwards, *qalandar*-type dervishes had started coming to Delhi from Iran and Iraq and begun to arouse much curiosity because





of their odd appearance and behaviour. One such wandering mendicant was Shaikh Abu Bakr Tusi Haidari, who settled in Delhi in the mid-thirteenth century. He set up a *khanqah* on a mound beside the Yamuna and began to attract fame and renown that matched that of the legendary Hazrat Nizamuddin who had his own *khanqah* not far away. Few would know Shaikh Abu Bakr by his proper name today, though many in Delhi venerate him as Matka Baba and go to his small shrine on Mathura Road known locally as Matka Pir. Delhi's former Chief Minister, Sheila Dixit is said to be an ardent devotee and a frequent visitor to this shrine which attracts over 50 visitors from diverse backgrounds every day.

Situated opposite the National Sports Club, occupying the south-western corner of Pragati Maidan, it is hard to miss Matka Pir because of the *matka* or small, clay pots hanging from the branches of trees that screen the shrine. Next to a petrol pump, you enter a gate and park beside stalls selling the usual paraphernalia of offerings. The devout come here to seek the saint's

blessings, make offerings of rose petals and small crunchy sweet balls called *shaker dane*, and when their wish comes true, make an offering of a *matka* – usually filled with *sherbet* – at the shrine. According to the caretaker, this often causes problems of plenty. Once the trees around the shrine have taken all the *matkas* they can possibly bear on their slender branches, the pots have to be taken down to create space for new ones. The old ones are then re-sold!

Legend has it that Hazrat Abu Bakr Tusi Haidari, or Matka Baba as posterity would call him, had an earthenware pot which he would fill either with the water from the Yamuna nearby or with gur-sweetened sherbet and offer to those who thronged his hospice. This was said to have *karamati* or miraculous powers. Soon, stories of his amazing powers reached Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban. Remember, this was a Delhi when power was short-lived and sultans were skittish about being usurped by the next more ambitious nobleman or soldier of fortune who might grab the throne of Delhi. In such an unstable and volatile

climate, the sultans and the Sufis were naturally wary of each other; each formed parallel centres of power – the sultan’s court was where people went for civic and social redress and the Sufi’s khanqah for spiritual respite. In a sense, this was a near-perfect arrangement where the twin centres ensured that no single force – either political or spiritual – ever held sway. While the Sufi saints, content in their own ecstasy, didn’t bother too much with whoever happened to be the current incumbent on the throne, the sultan, for his part, was invariably leery of the Sufis whose popularity they saw as a threat to their own all-too intransigent authority.

While Ghiyasuddin Balban ruled for a record 22 years, his predecessors and successors managed to retain the throne for no more than a couple of years and were naturally wary of the Sufis and the power they had begun to exert. Since my own work has been on the lesser-known monuments of Delhi, I am tempted to draw a parallel between the contrasting architectural styles of the Sufis and Sultans of Delhi. While one built monolithic, massive fortified palaces

and mausoleums, the khanqahs were much more modest and open spaces. Often little more than a series of hujras around a large central courtyard, it was only later – often after the saint’s death – that a cluster of buildings would come up, such as cenotaphs, mosques, boundary walls, etc.

In Matka Pir’s case, it is said that Sultan Ghiyasuddin instead of coming himself to pay obeisance, sent a slave girl called Tamizan to seduce the saint. Instead, Tamizan became a devotee and spent her entire life tending to the saint and his hospice. She lies buried close beside the grave of Matka Pir. Undeterred, the Sultan then sent an emissary carrying a clod of earth and iron pellets. Far from being offended, the saint miraculously turned them into *gur* and *chana*, which was then distributed among the devotees. To this day, people make offerings of *gur* and *chana* at the shrine. Matka Baba, it is said, put the *gur* into a pot of milk and sent the *sherbet* to the Sultan. Much chastened, the Sultan henceforth became a believer in the Sufi who in his lifetime had acquired the appellation of Baz-i Safid (the White Falcon) for his rare mystical achievements.



There are numerous stories attributed to the saint and to his fondness for holding *sama*, gatherings where the quest of Truth, hitherto confined to the exclusive domain of the spiritual elite, was made a part of the public audience. *Sama* was an occasion for the saint to mingle with not just those who stayed in his hospice but even those who gathered from villages and hamlets far and near. It was through these gatherings that the Sufi saints expressed their understanding of Islam, and it was possibly through these, and not the power of the sword, that Islam spread across much of northern India all through the medieval period. However, with time, the various convents and hospices established by the dervishes fell into ruin or were run over by rapacious and squabbling heirs. Shaikh Abu Bakr, the saint of Matka Pir, was stabbed to death by one of his own disciples. And with that, his proud lineage descending from the Haidariya-Qalandariyya *silsila* died out, for he had appointed no one as his spiritual successor.

By the early thirteenth century Delhi had emerged as the beating heart of the Sufi movement that had sprung in Central Asia and swept across much of north India. Sultan Shamsuddin Iltutmish (1210-35) had set himself up as the ruler of Hindustan and established his capital at Delhi. Central Asia and Iran had fallen to the Mongol hordes and a virtual exodus had begun — of scholars, holy men and wandering mendicants. While Ajmer and Nagaur remained important centres of the Chishtiya *silsila*, Delhi was fast gaining popularity as the axis of the Islamic east. And it was to Delhi that they came — to set up hospices, to gather the faithful around them, and to spread the word about a new kind of Islam. The Islam of the Sufis spread faster than the Islam of the sword. Soon it became the popular religion of the masses as opposed to the orthodox, often puritanical Islam of the theologian. So much so that medieval scholars referred to Delhi as Qubbatul Islam (the Cupola of Islam).

A mystically-inclined young man, Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar, a native of Ush in Farghana, had heard of

the fabled land of Hindustan. In a mosque in Baghdad he met Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, one of the most outstanding figures in the annals of Islamic mysticism and the founder of the Chishtiya *silsila* in India, and became his disciple. Then, traveling through Khurasan, he reached Multan. It so happened, that the Mongols invaded Multan and the ruler Nasiruddin Qubacha asked Qutubuddin for help. Qutubuddin gave him an arrow and suggested it be shot blindly into the enemy's camp. Qubacha obeyed. The arrow was duly shot and the very next day the Mongols retreated inexplicably. Qutubuddin's stock rose with both the laity and royalty. Yet he chose to leave Multan for Delhi where he was warmly received by Iltutmish and invited to set up a hospice. Qutubuddin, however, chose to stay at Kilokari near the Jamuna, only later shifting to Mehrauli, just outside the walls of Iltutmish's Delhi. Iltutmish also offered him the title of Shaikh al-Islam, which too he declined. The Qutub Minar started by Qutubuddin Aibak and completed by Iltutmish in 1229 is believed to derive its name from Qutubuddin or Qutub sahib as Khwaja Bakhtiyar was affectionately called.

Soon Qutubuddin's reputation grew to near-legendary proportions, aided in no small measure by the incredible stories of supernatural powers attributed to him. One that highlights both the piousness of his persona and his awe-inspiring faith is to concerning the construction of a tank. Iltutmish wanted to construct a tank to put an end to the chronic water shortage in Delhi but a dispute arose over its site. Tradition has it that Qutubuddin saw the Prophet Muhammad in a dream, and the Prophet indicated the exact spot for the construction of the tank. Hauz-e-Shamsi was duly constructed at that very spot and soon became not just a source of water, but a cultural and spiritual landmark of sorts for the denizens of Delhi. Every year, still, an annual procession called *Phoolwalon ki Sair* begins at this very tank and offers large, flower-bedecked fans or *pankhas* first at Bakhtiyar Kaki's dargah and later at the Jog Maya temple in a unique display of syncretism.

How Qutubuddin acquired the far more popular moniker of Kaki has not one but two stories attached to it. The first says that in true ascetic fashion, Qutubuddin fasted and prayed and meditated to the extent that he had time for neither food nor rest. His family would place small pieces of bread known as *kak* beneath his prayer mat and that was his only source of sustenance. According to another version, once when his wife complained of chronic shortage of funds in the household, he pointed to a niche in the wall and bid her go there, recite *Bismillah* and she would find as much bread as she needed. Both stories revolve around Kaki, the Man of Bread.

Soon Qutubuddin's *khanqah* began to attract large numbers of people. There would be regular *sama* gatherings where both the saint and his followers would strive to achieve spiritual ecstasy through repeated, ritualized chanting. In fact, it was at one of these *sama* gatherings that Qutubuddin was to meet his sudden end. A musician among his devotees had just finished reciting the following verse written

by the celebrated Sufi, Shaikh Ahmad of Jam, when Qutubuddin was seized by ecstasy:

The martyrs of the dagger of *taslim* (surrender)
Each moment get a new life from the Unseen World.

In that state of ecstasy he was taken home where he regained consciousness briefly and asked for the same verse to be repeated over and over again. He lapsed into a state of ecstatic reverie from which he never recovered.

Bakhtiyar Kaki died on 27 November 1235 and was buried at a place he himself had chosen. A humble grave was constructed over it. Later a pavilion supported by 12 fluted columns was raised. The present structure has a bulbous dome rising above the grave and there is copious use of marble *jaali* screens and mirror-studded walls. The ostentatious *dargah* that now exists was built upon by later rulers, most notably Aurangzeb who provided the rather lovely floral multi-coloured mosaic on the western wall. An



enclosure wall came up as more and more disciples, and later rulers, chose to be buried close beside the saint's grave. Soon, the entire complex came to look like a vast though somewhat opulent necropolis.

Among those buried here are Bahadur Shah I, Shah Alam II, Murad Bakht (wife of Shah Alam II), Mirza Fakhru (son of Bahadur Shah II), Akbar II and various members of their families. The one to share the closest proximity with the saint's grave is the tomb of Khwaja Abdul Aziz Bastami. Bastami was a saint of the Suhrawardi order but not much is known of him. A marble balustrade runs around the saint's cloth-covered grave and a marble arched pavilion encloses it. Another saint to share a similar privilege was Qazi Hameedudin Nagauri, a contemporary and associate of Bakhtiyar Kaki. His grave is surrounded with a pretty red sandstone and marble enclosure. There is also the grave of Bibi Hambali, better known as Daiji, the wet nurse of Qutub Sahib. Only women are allowed to enter this enclosure.

The dargah has several gates, halls for different purposes such as a Naubat Khana (drum house), Majlis Khana (assembly house), Tosha Khana (which served both as a robe chamber and to house assorted supplies), mosques, tanks and a baoli. The main northern gate was erected in Sher Shah's time by one Sheikh Khalil, a descendent of Baba Fariduddin Ganj-e-Shakar. Farrukh Siyar is said to have built two gates. The first gateway is built entirely of marble and is profusely decorated and inscribed with the names of Allah, the Prophet and the first four Caliphs. You cross the second gateway, also built by Farrukh Siyar sometime during 1713-19, and enter the dargah. Close to a gateway called the Gateway of Maulana Fakhruddin is the grave and mosque of Motamad Khan. Motamad Khan was a noble in the court of Aurangzeb and his mosque was built during 1673-74. Decorated with *kangura* patterns and cusped arches in relief, the mosque has quite regrettably been painted over with *surkhi* (brick dust).

The exquisite little Moti Masjid peeps out from a clutter of buildings at the western periphery. Built

by Bahadur Shah I (1707-12), it has three domes with marble pinnacles. Just outside the western entrance, known as the Ajmeri Gate, are the ruins of Zafar Mahal, a palace built by Akbar II but used extensively by Bahadurshah Zafar as a summer retreat and a weekend getaway from the Red Fort in Delhi. Built of red sandstone relieved by marble, it is an imposing three-storey structure, now sadly in ruins and hemmed in from all sides by the pernicious "encroachments". Within Zafar Mahal lie the ruins of a much older building – the tomb of Alauddin built during Iltutmish's reign. Its gray stone pillars and small squat dome speak of a far more austere architectural style.

After the death of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer, the mantle had clearly fallen on Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. He became the beacon of the Chishtiya *silsila*, one of the most popular – and influential – mystic orders of India. The Chishtis scrupulously avoided identification with the centre of political power, refused to accept *jagirs* and government service, nor perpetuate spiritual succession in their own families. Yet, in the Era of the Great Shaikhs, a clear line of succession can be traced: Khwaja Moinuddin of Ajmer was followed by Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki of Delhi, then Farid al-Din Ganj-e-Shakar of Pakpattan, Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi, and finally Nasiruddin Chiragh-e-Dehli. After Nasiruddin, the central organization of the Chishti order broke down and provincial *khanqahs* sprang up all over the country – in Hansi, Kalyar, even in far-away Gujarat, Deccan, Bihar and Bengal. The golden age of the Chishtis is aptly illustrated by the life – and death – of Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki.

Sometime in the fourteenth century, a humble settlement sprang up beside a *nulla* or water stream that flowed through the sluice gates at Satpula into the city of Jahanpanah. This was the abode of Sheikh Nasiruddin Mahmud, better known as Roshan Chiragh-e-Dilli or the Bright Lamp of Delhi. He chose to be buried in the room in which he had lived and with him were buried all that he cherished most

in life – the cloak, the staff, the cup and the prayer carpet bequeathed by his Master, the great Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya. Some say it was his self-denying life and pure religious zeal that earned him the epithet by which he – and after his death the entire area around his hospice — was better known. Others ascribe many miracles and apocryphal stories to this much-loved patron saint of Delhi who headed the Chishtiya silsila after Hazrat Nizamuddin.

Today, Chiragh Dilli is a typical South Delhi urban village on the outside. Along the periphery there are the DDA housing societies. You pierce those and come to a formidable array of timber shops, electric repair shops, and motley commercial establishments. Dive into any of the openings between the seemingly impenetrable façade of shops that display all the accoutrements of urban India. Pretty soon every last vestige of Shining India would have disappeared literally before your eyes. A warren of ever-narrowing lanes, winding and snaking, twisting and turning, will take you deep into a sub-culture far removed from the twenty-first century.

Garishly printed nylon saris and synthetic frilled and buckramed children's dresses flutter over shop doorways. An itinerant bangle seller goes from house to house with glittering glass bangles looped over his shoulders. Open drains run beside narrow lanes, occasionally spilling over and creating mini floods which everyone nonchalantly jumps across. With every twist in the gully, past crumbling monuments, scattered tombs, ruined arches, canopies and fragments of battlemented walls, you reach the heart of this urban village. In a clearing stands the *dargah* of Chiragh Dilli and peeping over its shoulder the tomb of Bahlol Lodi – the founder of the Lodi dynasty.

Peace and quiet reign over this green-domed *dargah*. There is none of the hustle and bustle of Nizamuddin, certainly none of the commercialisation and 'token' system for feeding the poor that so distract the visitor at most big *dargahs*. In fact, there are no beggars here. No one pesters you to buy flowers or joss sticks as

offerings, though you may do so if you wish from the row of shops at the entrance. Take off your shoes at the cool, high arched gate and you are on your own. No one 'offers' to show you around as inevitably happens in most shrines. There are no *qalandars*, *dervishes* or *qawwals* here as you would find in the *dargah* at Nizamuddin. Nor is there the cacophony and rose-scented claustrophobia.

You enter a large open courtyard with a massive tree growing close beside the entrance and several scattered graves, some surmounted by *chhatris* and a ring of buildings and residential quarters. In the middle stands the *rauza* or grave of the saint. It consists of a 12-pillared square chamber with pierced *jaali* screens. Much of the original structure built in the fourteenth century has been changed, including the *chajja*, columns, floor, roof and *jaalis* giving it a surprisingly later-day appearance. The grave chamber is surmounted by a plastered green painted dome rising from an octagonal drum with small turrets at the four corners of the roof. A golden bowl hangs from the soffit of the dome, just above the grave. Incongruous symbols of modernity are the fairy lights that twinkle inside the sanctum and a large wall clock! Women seeking the saint's blessings, especially those praying for a child, tie bits of thread to the *jaali* around the enclosure. These serve both as a reminder and a pledge. A wooden cot – said to be 700 years old and made from special wood bought from Bengal – is housed in a small fenced-in enclosure. Legend has it that the saint prayed on this very cot.

The site has been continuously venerated from the time of the great Sufi saint – and also continuously renovated and built upon. Several mosques were built over the years in and around the *dargah* complex including one built by Farukh Siyar. This Mughal style mosque with three bays was built in 1713-9 and has been inexplicably whitewashed like everything else inside the complex. There are also several tombs belonging to the Lodi period including that of Sheikh Zainuddin and the grand daughter of Sheikh Farid Ganj-e-Shakar illustrating what a great honour it was

to be buried beside the saint. A single domed random rubble masonry tomb at the south-east corner of the complex has been encroached upon from three sides. Modern-day multi-storeyed houses have been illegally constructed, belonging probably to the caretakers' extended families. A Majlis Khana has been partly walled up and converted into a residence.

Random rubble masonry boundary walls were erected in the Tughlaq period shortly after the *dargah* came up. No signs of these walls remain today as they seem to have been 'integrated' into the walls of shops and houses that ring the *dargah*. Emperor Mohammad Shah Rangila (1719-48) had an outer enclosure erected with four imposing gateways. These survived till the 1950s. Sadly, except for a ruined *chhatri* or two, a few broken fragments of these battlemented walls and the southern gateway, nothing survives. Everything else has been gobbled up by the rapacious city.

The northern gateway built of Lahori bricks is in ruins – its western pier has been altered for residential purposes while the eastern pier has shops and stores. The eastern gateway – its plaster peeled off, its brickwork gaping – bears an inscription stating it was erected by Firoz Shah Tughlaq. Apparently this was renovated and included in the four-gated outer wall built by Mohammad Shah Rangila. The western gateway is completely encroached. A printing workshop runs in the nearby tomb of Haji Khanam of whom nothing is known save her name. A turret juts out from the warren of closely built houses – probably part of the enclosure wall of Haji Khanam's tomb. A late Mughal-period Jain temple near house no. 341 speaks of a syncretic culture, now dying, as does the Hanuman Mandir just outside the eastern gateway. Once a domed *chhatri* it was part of a Lodi-period tomb; over the years it has been much altered, the spaces between the *chhatri* filled in to take its present avatar as a temple. All around there are tombs and



monuments of unknown vintage being used either as residences or 'integrated' into homes.

On the western side of the Dargah complex is the small but exquisite tomb of Bahlol Lodi. This pitifully neglected and completely hemmed in structure is a far cry from the Lodi Gardens where Bahlol Lodi's sons and successors lie in regal splendour. Bahlol Lodi ruled from 1451-1488 and founded a dynasty that has left its mark on Delhi through the many buildings that survive. Built by his son, Sikander Lodi, it was once surrounded by a garden, of which no signs remain. A rather fine gateway with traces of corbelling and moulding stands nearby but it is completely encroached upon and is an incongruous extension to a rather hideous house.

Bahlol Lodi's tomb has a cluster of five domes, the central one being fluted and higher than the others.

North, south and east facades have three archways shielded by protruding *chhajjas* while the west wall has only two archways flanking the central *mihrab*. Niches above the *chhajjas* and incised plaster medallions are the only outer decorations. A family of squatters has free run of the place. This 'protected' monument has neither boundary wall nor fence.

Shaikh Nasiruddin was the fifth in a line of Chishti saints. With his death, not only did the Chishti *silsila* come to an end but the focus of power shifted in Delhi – from the saint's hospice to whoever happened to be the current ruler. All five of the Chishti saints wielded considerable power in their times. They provided effective checks and balances against the temporal powers and the common man looked upon them as the alternate means of redress. With Shaikh Nasiruddin's death in 1356, this Lamp was extinguished forever.

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Who is a Qalandar?

Kumkum Srivastava

I'm a wanderer whose name is Qalandar,
I've neither home, nor goods, nor kitchen,
When day comes, I wander round the world;
When night falls I lay my head on a brick.

--- Baba Tahir Uryan's quatrain on Qalandars

The strains of *dama dam mast Qalandar*, one of the most well-known devotional songs (called *qawwali* in this context) reverberate in the air in metros, in small towns (*qasba*) and remote villages too. Daily newspapers have headlines like 'Delhi's date with



The *heraks* (rags) tied to the grill of the gate of sanctum sanctorum of Abu Bakr Tusi of Matkey Shah



The clay pots being bought by the women visitors to the shrine to be offered to the saint at the fulfilment of the vow

Sufi music', 'city grooves to Sufi tunes', Sindhi music festival celebrates a 'shared heritage', audience in 'raptures' at the Sufi 'theme evenings' at a particular pub, or a high end restaurant. A fashion show has models sashaying down the ramp to the beats of popular Sufi verses (*Sufiana kalam*), from films, like *mera ishq Sufiana; faqira, man ja, tu hai ek mast Qalandar, tez hawa ka ek bawandar; dam mast, mast, dam mast*; and many more in the same vein.

Pre-wedding musical programmes and what is popularly called '*ladies*' *sangeet* proclaim that a reputed Sufi singer will add lustre to the evening. Repeated requests for *dama dam mast Qalandar* rent the air. Young and old, men and women, can be seen clapping their hands, tapping their feet, swaying to and fro, rocking their heads, and many seem to go

into a trance. This Sufi song has become almost an item number. Classical dancers, performing to Sufi poetry, call their dance Sufi Kathak. They have a vast and appreciative audience.

Many religious song (*bhajan*) singers have in their varied repertoire of devotional verses the widely popular 'Qalandar song'. Bollywood, as early as 1955, had a film entitled *Mast Kalandar*. One out of five films contain at least one Sufi song, such as *Khwaja mere Khwaja; Maula Ali; mast Malang; ya Ali madad Ali; Ali, Ali, main chali; kun faya kun*; and sometimes the entire *dama dam mast Qalandar* litany as in the film *David*.

Why has this *Qalandar* 'number' gained so much popularity in recent years? This song is said to have



The pots on the roof proclaiming the *mazar* (grave) of the revered saint Abu Bakr Tusi

Amir Khusrau as its author. Sharfuddin Bu Ali Shah Qalandar of Panipat wrote a reverential poem in praise of Ali, the son-in-law of Prophet Mohammad.

*haiderum, Qalandarum, mastum
banda-e-murtaza Ali hastam
peshwa-i-tamam rindam num
ke sa-ga-e-sheer-e-yazdan num.*

Bulle Shah, a Sufi saint of Punjab, modified this song – the *Qalandar* number – in Punjabi. It appears that later this litany was dedicated to the Qalandar saint of Sehwan (Sind, Pakistan), known as Usman Marwandi Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. Other devotees and disciples (*murid*) of this saint added new verses, new lines, emphasizing his prowess, miraculous powers (*karamat*) and his grace (*barkat*). The second line, *Ali*

da pehla number, cannot be part of the original lyrics. It seems quite a modern addition. As for including the Sindhi religious icon, Jhule Lal, in the song, the people of Sind wanted to show that this song is an anthem of their composite culture.

These lyrics were sung more than two decades ago by Runa Laila of Bangladesh. The other famous singers, such as Reshma, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and Abida Parveen, mesmerized the scholarly, appreciative audiences with their powerful, evocative rendition. However, it was appreciated only by a limited audience. In recent years, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have increasingly started taking interest in the mystical side of Islam – Sufism, its various dimensions, philosophy, poetry, musical assemblies (*sam'a*), its institutions such as the Khanqah and

dargah. Sufism and its poetry restrained earlier to the confines of the Sufi shrines has now been decentred and has entered the public sphere.

The song *dama dam mast Qalandar* has taken the world by storm. Qalandar has become a household word – the most heard of, after Sufism. The soul-stirring repetition of this song creates a hypnotic effect. It takes its audience into a trance and raptures, brings forgetfulness, unmindfulness, a *jazba* (feeling), leading to a state of ecstasy (*wajd*). It is as inebriating, as heady as wine. Its elegant verses, delicious melody, celebratory and ecstatic tones, its language, literary tropes from the local environment add to its appeal. It also undermines rigid gender polarities, creating an ecological template charged with spiritual fervour and engagement. In this, the individual consciousness

disappears in the *collective conscience* of the community of listeners.

This brings us to a battery of questions: 'Who is a Qalandar?', 'Why is he in a state of bliss (*mast*)?', 'Why is Ali the first and the foremost?', 'How has this song in praise of a Qalandar saint of Sind become a global Sufi anthem?'

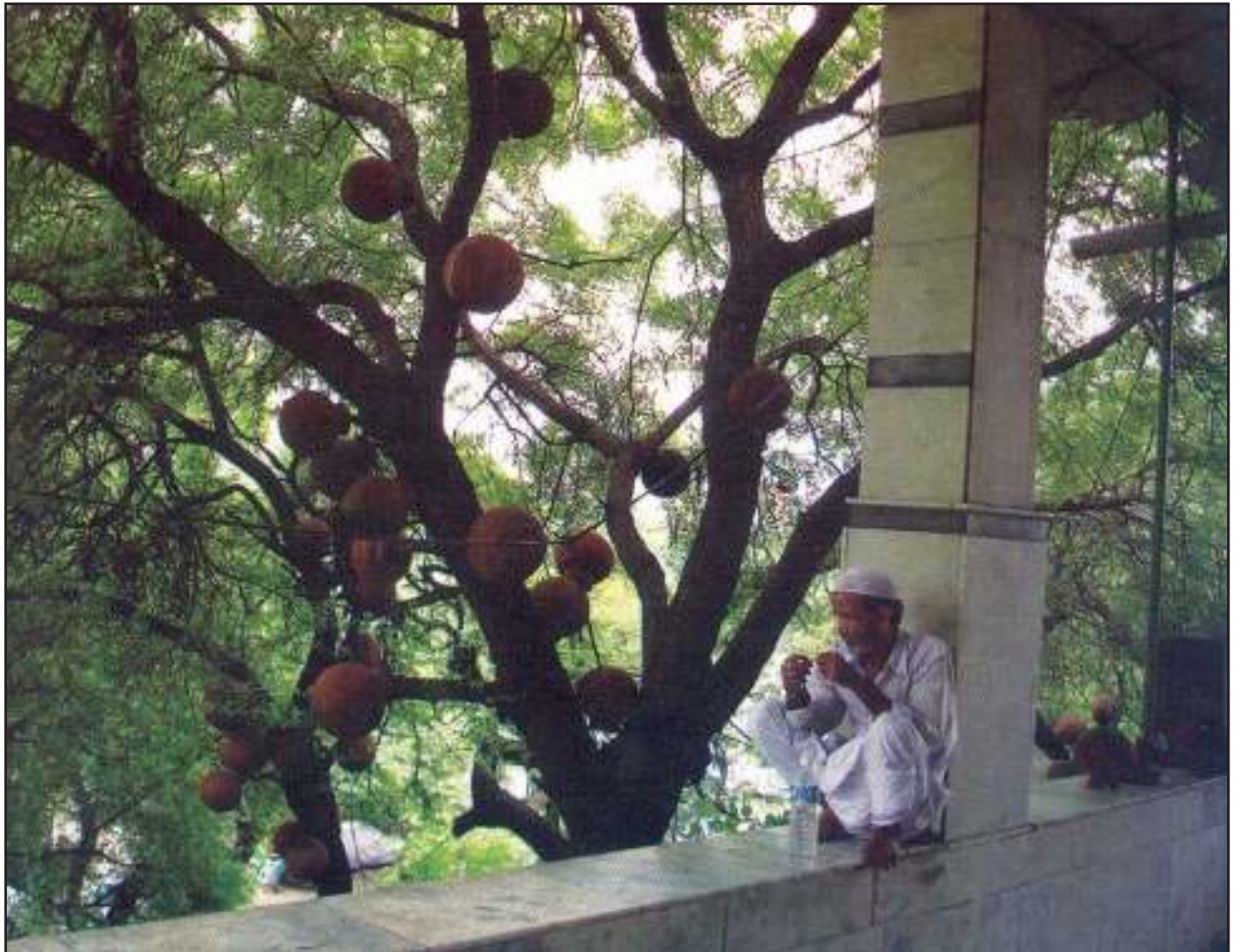
The word Qalandar has a wide spectrum of meanings. Rabbani (2005) says that the Qalandars are mystics who have an overdose of inspiration, resulting in constant ecstasies and raptures. They are overwhelmed in their own state (*hal*). For some, Qalandar means 'love' (*ishq*) and 'love is God.' This word in Spanish means 'pure gold' (*qala*). It seems to be one of the names of God in Syriac Ebrani. It may



Another view of the inner vestibule where the saint lies buried

also be derived from the Persian *qalandar*, meaning 'thief', 'ugly', 'uncouth', 'ungainly man'. It also means a 'whittled piece of wood put behind a door to stop it from opening.' It might have been taken from the word *qalantar* signifying large or great. Some speculate that it may have been derived from Greek *kaleotor*, meaning 'truth workers'. In Persia, the lax dervishes, undisciplined, were called *qalandar ma'ab*. The word *qalandar* was also used for a particular type of cloth (canopy) called *sarpardah*. It was 150 by 150 yards and contained 16 divisions. It had a double roof, the upper one was tent-like in shape and was termed *qalandari*. Schwerin (1981) notes that the copper coins offered at the *dargah* of Salar Masud Ghazi in Bahraich (Uttar Pradesh) are called *qalandar*. This word may have its origin in the Turkish word *qurinda*

or *qalandari*, which was used for a dervish who had withdrawn from the world and who wandered like a vagabond, who had renounced worldly things, who had seen the truth, and was a philosopher. Qalandar is also the name of a particular tune in Turkish – it is usually spelled *karendal* or *kalender*. The term *qalandar* is applied also to an ensemble of saints (*faqir*). The Calandar of *The Arabian Nights* are not really an order (*silsila*). Sell (1985 [1928]: 176) and Titus (1959: 135) equate Qalandars with jugglers, going around with performing monkeys and bears. In fact, the People of India Project, undertaken by the Anthropological Survey of India, also found a Muslim community of the same name which went around with performing bears and monkeys. They are sometimes called *madari*. In North India, the stereotype of a Qalandar is that he



Getting ready to hang another *matka* on the branch of the tree



A signboard proclaiming the method of offering the clay pot to the saint after fulfilment of the vow

is a Muslim, who goes from door to door, singing and asking for alms. Sharif (1921: 295) described them as 'begging monks.' If the householder responds, divine blessings are bestowed on him, and if refused, then abuses are hurled at him.

Another set of writers regards the Qalandars as pious people, who carry out the severest acts of austerity and mostly live in a state of ecstasy. In mystical terminology, a Qalandar is a saint who finally and totally annihilates himself in the love of God by reaching the stage of 'disappearance in oneness' (*fana-i-fillah*). Through love, the Qalandar becomes one with the Creator. He reaches a zenith of spiritual divinity through hard perseverance, practice, and prayers. He adheres to three concepts of life: love of the Creator, love of his fellow beings, and indulges

out of divine ecstasy in certain acts and practices of extreme devotion, which are within the limits of ethical rules and values. Some of the practising Qalandars are 'Qalandars' when they are in a certain period of their lives. In this period, they are totally absorbed in divinity; they have no desire or interest in mundane concerns. Qalandarism 'is only a condition, not a permanent status.'

We have now, therefore, two concepts of a Qalandar:

- As a cultural type; and
- A stage in the Sufi's journey towards God.

The first is a relatively 'fixed status group'. We understand it in terms of physical appearance, the material cultural traits, attitudes, and behavioural characteristics. The second meaning of Qalandar is a

state of mind, a process which seizes every Sufi in his journey towards God. The following verse from Kurrat'ul Ayn eloquently expresses the state of a Qalandar:

Sikandar's pomp and display be thine;
the Qalandar's habit and way be mine.
That, if it pleases thee, I resign,
while this, though bad, is enough for me.

The image which the Qalandar conjures up in the minds of people is of a renouncer, a *faqir*, totally indifferent to the external world and its normative order. They are always in a state of *masti* (ecstasy), which is further intensified through uninterrupted musical concerts, and consumption of barbiturates and hallucinogens (such as *bhanga*, *charas*, and *ganja*). Eaton (1978: 269-70) gives the examples of the saints of Bijapur who captured the attention of the general public due to their nakedness and indulgence in *bhanga* and wine. Digby (1984: 97) writes that the Qalandar saints were 'irresistibly drawn away individuals, who were not accountable for their actions'. Lewis (2000: 34-5) also says that they are 'withdrawn from all social conventions'. What distinguished them from the other orders of the Sufis was their 'divine frenzy or madness'. The Qalandars are regarded as one of the antinomian types of Sufis who were contrapuntal to the established types. For Jackson (1985), Qalandars are Sufis without any affiliation, 'beyond the law'.

A key to understanding the antinomian cults is the distinction between the *bashara* and *bashara* orders. The former are orthodox and conform to Islamic traditions. They observe the customary Islamic practices of fasting and prayer. The second one – the *bashara* – are 'without the law'; they openly criticize Islamic tradition and reject the authority of the Shari'at. In their personal lives, they are not sedentary, but are wanderers, peripatetic, and nomadic, living like vagabonds and tramps. They are believed not to be subscribing to the Islamic norms because they are 'absorbed in meditation or interior doctrines' (de Tassy, 1997). This view may be coupled with Subhan's opinion (1970: 310) that Qalandars, who have 'pulled

from their necks the bridle of Islam, are 'so absorbed in religious reveries or overcome to such an extent by ecstatic experiences that they are unable to distinguish between things lawful and unlawful.'

In spite of their antinomianism, the *bashara* saints commanded a wide following among the Muslim. Some of them rose to become extremely famous and boon-granting saints. Among the *bashara* are the sub-orders of the Malamati, Qalandari, and Siyahposh. Though they have retained their Muslim identity, their saints (*pir*) became more famous primarily because they provided 'supernatural medicine' (such as performing magical rituals, preparing talismans and amulets) to their supplicants. The revolt of the *bashara* sects was against the austerity and rigidity of their religion. They argued that salvation was not possible unless man lived an unshackled and free life (*be quaid wa benawa*). In the beginning, this ideology started as a philosophy of freedom; in practice, it later degenerated into licentiousness. 'Madmen' and 'naked men' were respected because of the supernatural powers they were believed to possess (Mujeeb, 1976: 296).

Digby (1984) and Liebeskind (1998) distinguish the Qalandars from the others by (a) peculiarities of their appearance, (b) costume and insignia, (c) failure to perform Muslim duties, (d) indulgence in occasional violence, and (e) episodes of immoral conduct. The members of the *bashara* sects of Haidari and Jawaliq wrapped blankets round their body, wore iron collars and bracelets, loin-cloth (*langoti*), and shaved off their hair on head, beard, eyebrows, moustache (*char abru safaya*), and practised celibacy. Some wore garments made of leather (*charam posh*). Because of their cultural practices, Rizvi (1978: 301) describes them as 'colourful'.

By the end of the twelfth century, the Qalandar emerged as a separate and identifiable group, which was portrayed as enjoying moods of exaltation. In India, some opine that Shah Khizr Rumi introduced the Qalandari tradition. He was a resident of Delhi before 1235 A.D. Sell (1985 [1928]: 3) believes that

the order was introduced in India by Ali Abu Yusuf Qalandar, known as Bu Ali Qalandar, a native of Spain. He had joined the order of the Bektashi and then the Chishti order. He left both of them and organized an order of his own. He finally settled down at Panipat (Haryana). Titus (1959) says that the tomb of Bu Ali Qalandar is the chief shrine of this order, venerated by his followers. He was the contemporary of Abu Bakr Tusi Haidari-Qalandari (also known as Matka Pir or Matkey Shah) of Delhi.

Abdul Ghani Musiff (in Sehwardi, 2005) has projected the idea of an 'Era of Qalandars' (*Daore-Qalandar*). It was the period when the 'garment of religion turned inside out', which amounted to the 'universal dissemination of psychological and spiritual truths'. The 'Era of Qalandars' means that

all the Qalandars (two and a half in number) have manifested themselves in this world. This is the idea of the *dhai qalandar* (2 ½ Qalandar) and they are: Bu Ali Qalandar of Panipat ('one'), Lal Shahbaz Qalandar of Sehwan, Sind ('one'), and Rabia of Basri ('half', she being a woman). Ghani extrapolates that 'half' here is a scale of feminine equivalence in the Islamic context. Besides this concept of 2 ½ Qalandars of universal appeal, the others of local importance are Abu Bakr Tusi Matka Pir, Fatima Bi (near Hotel Oberoi, Mathura Road, Delhi), the Qalandars of Kota Takia Sharif Nadvi (Kakori, Uttar Pradesh), saints of Khanqah Kazimia Qalandariya, and Basit Ali Qalandar of Damgarah Sharif near Allahabad.

The religious scholars (*ulema*) and orthodox Sufis found the way of life of the Qalandars 'aberrant'. They



The qawwal and his assistant in the courtyard of Abu Bakr's shrine. A cloth is spread for collection of tips



were called 'pseudo-dervishes' and were proverbially described as 'clean-shaven', with shaven eyebrows and heads, wearing a conical head of woven hair and a yellow or black shawl, carrying a drum and standard (*alam*) (Yazici 1973: 472). Ibn Batuta adds to the above, the perforation of hands and ears for inserting iron rods as symbols of penitence, and an iron ring around the penis (*tathquib-al-ihlil*). The ring or rod was called *sikh-i-muhr* (Rizvi 1978: 307). They also used to carry a razor (*ustara*), a large needle (*jiwaldoz*), and a begging bowl (*kachkul*). Their congregations (*sa'ma*) had the 'practice of gazing at good looking boys' (*nazr ila'l murd*); they also had handsome boys in their company (Digby 1984: 69).

In spite of these practices, the Qalandar saints (particularly Lal Shahbaz Qalandar) gave the Qalandari order a status. Their adoption of the belief in the unity of being (*wahdat-ul-wujud*) made it difficult for the orthodox Sufis to reject them. Many scholars taught their *murids* (disciples) how to know God, though they drank, sang, danced and whirled. They were the prime mediators of religious experience to the faithful through poetry.

The language of spirituality breaks the barriers that human beings have imposed on their kind. The spiritual masters have challenged the strata, the classes, the rules of superiority and inferiority, thus bringing all human beings together and creating cultural unity. It was against this backdrop that Turab Ali Shah Qalandar had said:

*woh basti ujar jaye jahan hoye na dervish,
abad hai har shahr faqeeron ke qadam se.*

[The settlement without a dervish is deserted,
The city prospers with the entry of saints.]

The Qalandars conveyed their ideas of living with poverty, moving from one place to the other, conveying to all the message of human unity, and the medium they chose for this was poetry. The words they used were from the everyday life and from the language of the people. Their exhortations were mild,

conveyed poetically. Poetry, as it is known, is pithy and touches the self, the heart and the mind. Poetry created a triangle between the singer of the verses, the listeners, and the saint (or his *dargah*).

The Qalandars experienced a powerful affection, which in Sufi parlance is love. Their charisma was rooted in the all-embracing form of love, and this touched everyone who came in contact with them. The common people could not miss the fact that the Qalandars were different; they were unmindful of the presence of others; it did not bother them that people were looking at them, making fun, ridiculing them because of their different appearance and accoutrement. They considered it futile to engage in any debate with the orthodox teachers and forbears. However they firmly held that Ali was the sole repository of divine truths and knowledge that was passed on to the Prophet by divine agencies. It is believed that Ali was entrusted with the cloak of poverty (*khirqā-e-gadai*) which Hazrat Muhammad, the Prophet, had received on the night of his heavenly journey or nocturnal ascension (*miraj*). Therefore, he was made the sole link of dissemination of spiritual knowledge. The most revered Sufis possess a lineage that ultimately connects them with the Prophet through Hazrat Ali.

Most of the Sufis receive their initiation and training in an established Sufi order (*silsila*). This however was different for the Qalandars. The Qalandars adhered to the value of celibacy; therefore, there was no question of these saints having descendants. The path of the Qalandars provided an alternative pattern of living. The recruits to this path were runaway children and adolescents. They were those who 'opted out' of the demands made by the high medieval Muslim society. In other words, the reason of their joining was not a religious motive, or a spiritual yearning, or an inspiration received from a teacher (*sheikh, pir*). But once they had opted to join the Qalandar route, they were intrinsically transformed. They rejected the institutionalized religion or the battery of practices, and searched for love, inner peace, and

God. The Qalandar path made them 'individuals', as autonomous beings, who established their own independent cults.

The Qalandars were famed for renunciation, piety, simplicity, and non-conformity to usual Islamic practices. Because of their individuality and a way of life which was free-floating, spontaneous, and eclectic, they were believed to have the power to produce miracles and the power to intercede on behalf of the visitors, coming to seek their intervention on various mundane matters. In other words, *silsilas* were seen differently from the individual saints; if it was routine that characterized the first, the latter was charismatic.

Many scholars have observed that the Qalandars were antithetical to the Khanqah. Rizvi (1978: 303) writes: "From the Punjab, the displeased qalandars moved to Delhi creating scenes whenever they saw Khanqah." Khanqah symbolized the 'routinization of charisma, whereas the Qalandar was the bearer of

'pure charisma', which is individualistic. If Khanqah was the embodiment of order, the Qalandar was its opposite. But, then, charisma cannot survive for long; it gets routinized, and this is what what happened with Qalandars also, and several hybrid orders came up, such as Qalandariya-Chishtiya or Qalandariya-Suhrawardi. In fact, in some place Bu Ali Shah is recognized in the category of Qalandariya-Chishtiya.

Today, one does not come across the Qalandar saints, of the same repute and charisma as were those in the past. What we come across are their *dargahs*, where they are buried and it was there that at one time they lived. The commonly-shared belief is that although they have died, they are there, quite animatedly, and those approaching these places receive not only their grace and benevolence, but also their wishes are fulfilled. This would explain the fact that a large number of people, from diverse religious communities, visit these shrines and partake of the glory (*faiz*) of the saint.

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Photo Essay

The Sufi Festival by the ICCR is a merger of the many forms of Sufi thought. Together they bring forth the essence of its philosophy, its humanistic side and its appeal to minds and hearts across the globe. It is the

Tagorean essence of the 'absent figure', the mystery so delightful, a tremor so deep that it pains, pleases and enlightens the human race and its Soul.



Piñana brothers group from Spain



Piñana brothers group from Spain



Piñana brothers group from Spain



Mugam group from Azerbaijan



Mugam group from Azerbaijan



Mugam group from Azerbaijan



Sidi Goma group from, Gujarat, India



Sidi Goma group from, Gujarat, India



Sidi Goma group from, Gujarat, India



Bengal-Bihar Sufi folk group, India



Bengal-Bihar Sufi folk group, India



Bengal-Bihar Sufi folk group, India



Otava Yo group from Russia



Otava Yo group from Russia



Otava Yo group from Russia



Ghazal Sufi Ensemble from Iran



Ghazal Sufi Ensemble from Iran



Ghazal Sufi Ensemble from Iran



Indira Naik from, Mumbai, India



Indira Naik group from, Mumbai, India



Mechket group from Tunisia



Mechket group from Tunisia



Mechket group from Tunisia

The Contemporary Outlook on Sufism and Sufic Practices in India

Dr. Rizwan Qaiser

With the emergence of the Jihadi outlook in India's neighbourhood, a new climate of opposition to the Sufic practices has been shaping up, resulting in targeting shrines linked with Sufis of one kind or the other. The rationale which is marshalled to justify these acts of violence is that these shrines are against the larger principles of Sharia, because Muslims indulging in tomb-worship, is forbidden in

Islam. Therefore, these practices must be stopped. And according to the representatives of these forces, if these could not be stopped by persuasion, then they must be stopped by force.

The Sufic practices are opposed by the Tablighi Jamaat, a world-wide Islamic missionary movement, which invites Muslims to come close to Islam and become



Regula Quresh introducing Qawwal Meraj Ahmad Nizami and his sons at Jashn-e-Khusrau opening concert Chaunsath Khamba, Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti, 2010. (NS). Photo courtesy: Jashn-e-Khusrau

better Muslims. They seem to suggest that Muslims must perform Namaz five times a day, fast during the month of Ramadan, go for Hajj if means permit, lead a life of piety and not indulge in shirk (making some one partner in the work of God) and biddat (innovation). According to them visits to shrines of Sufis are considered biddat, which means, practices not approved in Islam.

There are other groups too, which are ideologically against the practices of visitations to the shrines of Sufis, such as Ulema (theologians). But these people have been less rigid in their opposition to these practices. Eventually, it is conceded that such practices are carried out of ignorance and therefore, people need to be educated in matters such as these. There must be sharper focus on inculcating values based on Sharia and prevent people from going astray. In many cases it is argued that these practices are due to the influence of Hinduism as many Sufis allowed such influences to come, including the accompaniment of musical instruments, which is forbidden in Islam.

Seen in these perspectives, it is not difficult to surmise that Sufis and Sufic practices have had a fair share of critics and opponents and the same has continued on. However, one would wonder as to how far their critics were justified in their criticism and opposition. Two issues are of vital significance to understand the significance of Sufism in India. One, the hospices that they had built emerged as rauza (shrine) of these Sufi saints, which became a centre of pilgrimage for a large number of people. And in today's context they can be described as the hardware of the Sufic philosophy. These structures and the spot of burial, merely symbolise their existence at certain points in time, which alone may not hold much meaning to the contemporary generations. However, there is this software linked with their existence in the realms of philosophy, cultural practices, morals, ethics and socially composite spaces, which constituted the hallmark of the life of the Sufis. So, there is this blending of the hardware with the software, which is important to explore and put in perspective so that

the current generation of people can develop a better understanding, which would make sense, apart from deriving spiritual solace.

However, there are impediments to developing a picture and perspectives about lives the Sufis lived. One, the entire band of sajjadanshins (descendants) hardly inspires the current generation of people to make sense of the teachings of these Sufis, especially the Chishtis as their conduct and practices hardly subscribes to the standards of piety and ethics. They are more into seeking charity rather than giving lessons of the life the Sufis lived. Moreover, they (sajjadanshins) compel the pilgrims to indulge in practices, which may never have been approved by the Sufis in their life. This is done to create an impression of spirituality and derive satisfaction out of such visits. However, the larger purpose of such visits is lost as there are hardly any arrangements to distribute small literature as regards teachings and practices of these Sufis. The managers of these shrines have the sole concern of maintaining certain order within the complex as they are never bothered about developing modules for pilgrims to have a peep into the life of these Sufis and therefore derive inspiration and solace from their life experiences. Second, pilgrims themselves are not too keen to know about spiritual, moral and ethical aspects of the life the Sufis lived as they are more interested in invoking their capacity to perform miracles as they had done in the past and seek blessings for cure of the ill, a baby for those wanting parenthood and many other things. These practices are opposed by the conservatives among Muslims. In the process, an impression is generated that these shrines are against the grains of Sharia as preaching and practices of many Sufis too are not in conformity with it.

These and other difficulties are there in developing a clearer and coherent picture of the preaching and practices of Sufis. But it is not entirely lost and it is important to retrieve the values, morals and ethics these Sufis taught in their life. What is known about them is generally confined to academic conferences, symposiums and books. However, in the popular

domain there is hardly anything serious except the hagiographical literature. Such a bleak scenario must compel anyone to seek a comprehensive account of the times and life these Sufis, especially of those belonging to the Chishti Silsila.

The most striking features of the Sufis' life was they always adhered to the Sharia and strictly followed five times supererogatory prayers, fasting not only in the month of Ramdan but on a regular basis, maintaining a routine of zikr and developing the

institution of piri-muridi. These Sufis ensured that the mantle of the Shaikhs was passed on to those murids (disciples) who lived a life according to the Sharia. Building a khanqah by a Sufi had become an essential feature of their life in India. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that most Sufis had established their hospices, where a kind of community life was organised whose expenses were met with donations and other charitable contributions from the rich and poor alike. These khanqahs did not necessarily follow any normative manual of dos and don'ts as everything



Basant festival procession culminating at Dargah Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. (RR). Photo courtesy: Jashn-e-Khusrau

revolved around the personality of the shaikh and his manner of teaching and preparing an array of murids (disciples) within the larger framework of Sharia. It is important to underline that while piri-muridi was an essential feature of Sufic practices in India, there are instances, where a particular Sufi or the other hand did not care to have murids (disciples) at all.

Adherence to Sharia was seen as a pre-condition for any murid to get wilayat, the place to implant the teaching of a particular shaikh. It is stated that in *Siyar al Awliya*, a long list of qualifying markers have been identified for both, the pirs as well as murids. For the pirs (shaikhs) the laid out conditions were; a. attainment of spiritual eminence was necessary before being considered to impart instructions; b. he must have gone through the same path before inviting others to follow; c. he must know the rules of conduct before teaching the same to his murids; d. he must be generous and sincere; e. he must not demand and desire anything that a murid may possess; f. he must command what has already been commanded by the Sharia.

It becomes quite convincing by that that Sharia is something which is not compromised by Sufis, particularly of the Chishti silsila. In the course of the expansion of the Sufic influence, there are instances of Majzoobs and Qalandars adopting practices, which certainly went beyond the pale of the standards established by Sufis. Innumerable instances have been recorded where Qalandars and Majzoobs did not adhere to acceptable norms and were subjected to scrutiny of moral and social conduct. Moreover, these people could never establish an institutionalised order of teaching and practices and therefore, left the field barren after their death, whereas the Sufis of the Chisti silsila were keen on building and maintaining an institution of piri-murid based on moral conduct, teachings and subscribing to Sharia.

Adherence to Sharia was one of the chief conditions for Nasiruddin Chiragh Dilli to receive khilafat from Hazrat Nizamuddin. And thereafter, he (Nasiruddin)

for the entire course of his preaching and spiritual guidance kept emphasising on his murids to remain steadfast to Sharia. Two instances should suffice to complete the arguments. One, his murid worked as a superintendent of the jewellers' market, and was clearly instructed by him to follow Sharia and do things approved by it and not do what was forbidden. In another context Shaikh Nasiruddin instructed another disciple to offer his prayers in congregation, particularly the Friday prayers, fast and observe things approved and abstain from what was forbidden.

Given such a scenario, it is possible to argue that these Sufis and their precepts and practices must be spared the charge and criticism of operating outside the pale of Sharia as has been the view in certain circles and that becomes one of the key factors for dissuading people from paying respect to these Sufis by visiting their shrines.

What is interesting in the context is such practices were advised to be followed not in a life of isolation but in the mainstream of life.

It is stated that Hazrat Nizamuddin's pir, Sheikh Faridudin expressed his desire to live a life of isolation but was dissuaded from doing so because it should be considered God's blessing that so many people wanted to seek his company and he should oblige them by meeting them. Similarly, Hazrat Nizamuddin though generally open to meeting and interacting with people had once turned a beggar away and was admonished by his Pir in his dream that he must never do such a thing again and courtesy must be shown to all, without any distinction. In turn, Shaikh Nizamuddin commanded his murid to stay in Delhi and not retreat to any secluded place. He is reported to have said, 'You must remain among the people and bear the hardship they inflict on you and repay them with generosity and self-sacrifice.'

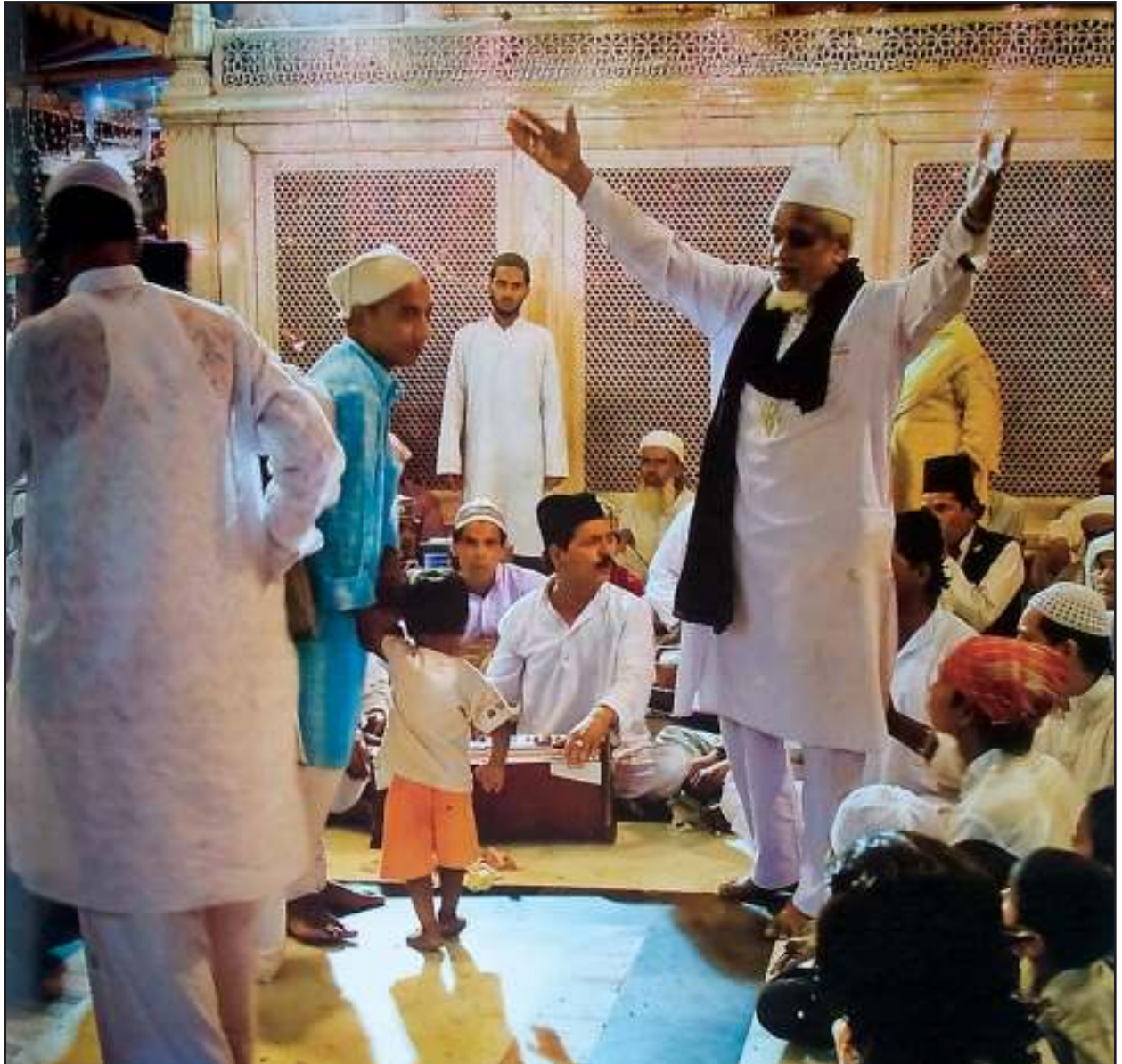
It must not surprise anyone today that the shrines of these Sufis still attract people from diverse backgrounds irrespective of distinction of being rich or poor, Hindu or Muslim, powerful or the ordinary.

Another feature of the lives of these Sufis was that they consciously chose to live a life of pecuniary even though there were possibilities of living a life in opulence. It is not that there was any dearth of means that was offered to them by the rulers of the time but they consciously chose to keep away from these temptations. There are innumerable instances, where it has been reported that many of these Sufis returned the gift of the rulers of the time though politely, by saying that they depended more on God's charity rather than humans. Does it mean that they never accepted any endowments from the nobles and other powerful people of the time? They did accept for the upkeep of their khanqahs but in the process

also ensured safe distance from the rulers and their courts as they apprehended that proximity with courts would undermine their piety. However, the Suhrawardy silsila Sufis were not averse to receiving grants from the state and they enjoyed proximity with rulers. Their understanding was that such proximity enhanced their powers and capacity to intercede in the affairs of their murids and other followers. As regards acquiring wealth and other resources is concerned there is no uniform picture which emerges out of Sufic belief and practices but what can be said with certain certainty about the Chishtis is that they believed in avoiding contacts with political authority as this was believed to bring about negative and evil



Mehfil-e-Sama' - Qawwali assembly at Dargah Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya during the urs of Amir Khusrau, 2010 (NS).
Photo courtesy: Jashn-e-Khusrau



Qawwali performing at Dargah Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. (SA). Photo courtesy: Jashn-e-Khusrau

influence. While not approving proximity with the existing political dispensation, they never defined as to what could be the right political authority with which they could keep contacts. Personal physical deprivation for the sake of high moral standards and ethical practices was considered desirable. Therefore, it is safe to argue that khanqahs never suffered for want of food. These Sufis presented themselves as a model to be emulated and not be daunted under adverse circumstances.

Another distinctive aspect of the Sufic life in India, especially of the Chishti variety, was their eclectic approach to social diversity, which they came across. They were conscious of the fact that in India not only social but religious diversity was quite pronounced. Therefore, it should not surprise anyone that among the visitors to these khanqahs, there were many non-Muslims, who were equally welcome. There has been another lingering impression about these Sufis that they were indulging in missionary activities and

inviting non-Muslims and converting them to Islam. The historical facts don't support such an impression. On the contrary, many of these Sufis chose to live in crowded areas, which were inhabited by Hindus and they moved about freely among them without sending out any invitation to become Muslim.

Many of them were not averse to accepting cultural and linguistic influence from the Hindus. For instance it was in the lifetime of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, that the practice of celebrating Basant Panchmi as Basant Mela had started and wearing of yellow caps or turbans became an acceptable fact of life. These practices are still continuing at the dargah complex and are participated in by different sections of society. It is stated that he was quite impressed by the devotional songs in Hindi and some seemed to have cast an influence in the making of sama at the khanqahs of Sufis.

Last but not the least was the concept of these Sufis performing miracles to overcome a situation of adversity, impress upon the opponent the power of a particular Sufi, or for that matter create conditions of greater acceptance among the ordinary folk. It is this notion, which has lingered on since then that even today a large number of pilgrims go to the shrines of these Sufis in the hope of some miracle happening, provide cure from ailments, get them out of adversity or create conditions for finding jobs etc. There may be many more such dreams of desire fulfilment. It is true that not all Sufis were given to perform miracles but the fact that there has been considerable belief among the ordinary folk that invoking the intercession of a Sufi is possible if one was to keep *mannat* (secretive expression of wishes) in one form or the other. And many visitors to the shrines of Sufis are motivated by such desires and urges.

It is this practice which is viewed with suspicion in the orthodox circles and charges are levelled that these are not only *biddat* (innovation in Islamic practices) but goes to the extent of *shirk* (making someone partner in the work of God). The practice of touching the grave of a sufi in the form of prostration has been

viewed as tomb worship, forbidden in Islam, therefore subjected to all-round criticism and ridicule. In the whole of South Asia, there is tension-like situations as regards these practices and criticism against them. The moot question is to find a way out of all this and find a balance between the two extremes.

It would perhaps help everyone that the shrine of these Sufis cannot be wished away for many reasons. First, they are reminders of certain historical times in which these Sufis lived and preached Islam not in its juridical form but social, cultural and spiritual form with the spirit of accommodating diversity. These Sufis had faced similar challenges even in their lifetime and yet managed to carve out space for themselves. Even today they would continue to enjoy similar space despite these tensions.

However, it is important that those associated with the management of these shrines ensure that with the help of modules, pamphlets, booklets and other literature they make the teaching of these Sufis popular and discourage them from indulging in practices, which these Sufis themselves had not appreciated in their life. It is important to underline that these Sufis maintained the highest standards of the moral and ethical. Many of these Sufis had the courage to not bow to the people in authority and create a standard of their own.

Equally important it is to highlight the fact these Sufis with the help of their practices had created an inclusive space where religious and cultural distinction was not of any great significance. It was with the touch of humanity that they treated all, irrespective of anything else. These practices too made considerably adequate space for Islam. It remains a fact these Sufis had a clear mind and conviction in adhering to the Sharia but more in the spirit of accommodation rather than promoting the fault lines. Such eclectic practices are disappearing from the life of people in recent times. It is vitally important that the literati as well as the laity rediscover and revisit the philosophy of Sufism and revive their practices to generate an all-inclusive space.

1 Dancer, 89 Musicians, 167 Patrons 16 Years of Sufi Kathak

Manjari Chaturvedi

ABOUT SUFI KATHAK

Sufi Kathak Breaking boundaries.... Connecting hearts.... breaking manmade boundaries of caste, religion and nations... through poetry, music and dance... creating a universal communication... a prayer.

Sufi Kathak is a living tradition that integrates the rich heritage of poetry, literature, philosophy and the spiritual and emotional thoughts.

Sufi Kathak, a unique dance form, covers the delicate nuances of expressiveness... alluring grace in movements... unique abhinaya to the accompaniment of spiritual poetry and music... to the rhythm of Qawwali. My own quest for the inherent spirituality in dance led me to this style and form, Something ... Some force... Someone that makes me dance.

In Sufi Kathak, I incorporate the mystique of Sufism... the moving meditation... thereby blending both the Hindu and Muslim divine traditions.... I dance in surrender to Him... to His Glory... to His Love... to the other world with an underlying lilting melody and a strong rhythm... of separation and union... of hope... a pattern of light and shade... the fire of the eternal dance of a moth.

My dance form spans from earthly romance of Hindi folk to the evolved Sufi imagery of love in Persian poetry... from a beloved in flesh and blood to the abstract presence of the Almighty... from a form to formlessness...

Qawwali is a typically mystical Sufi devotional vocal music form which inspires me to dance and elevates the soul and takes both performer and the audience to the same plane of confluence ... with the Almighty.

Persian Sufi Music is mystical sounds that reverberate with the name of the Almighty.... Persian compositions lead to the state of complete ecstasy...

Sufi Kathak brings out the nuances of Sufi Qawwali and Persian Sufi music through the language of the body in order to enthrall the audience into the Sufi ambiance. The dance gradually becomes ecstatic... the synchronization of movements with music... the beats are joined with the clapping of hands... in praise of the Beauty of the Soul.

Q.1) What constitutes, and how would you define Sufi Kathak? What is the concept behind this form?

Sufi Kathak, is a dance form created by me that melds the philosophical depth of Sufi poetry with the narrative beauty and grace of classical Indian dance forms. What results is a new dance form that uses classical dance to narrate and interpret Sufi poetry.

Sufi Kathak conceptualised and created by me, has taken 16 years of intense work in Sufi music and Classical Indian dance. I have traveled extensively in countries like Egypt, Krygyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and worked with artists from Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Morocco and also artists and scholars in India (Punjab, Lucknow, Kashmir, Rajasthan) and studied the dance and music forms of those regions as far as it is related with Sufi thought.

Sufi Kathak brings out the nuances of Sufi music and poetry through the language of the body, which

expresses the rapturous heights of spiritual ecstasy. The abstract presence of the Almighty is given concreteness through its being the prime focus and object of one's rapture. The dance thus becomes a communication of the Self into the Almighty of the union that is desired between creation and Creator, or soul with Spirit.

Because Sufi saints used the language and music of the region they were able to convey their emotions. Their poetry changed in accordance with where they spoke. Hence like Sufi thought, Sufi Kathak, instead of using one dominant language, uses various dialects also in which the Sufi saints had written the poetry. The poetry used in Sufi Kathak, has a history of always being sung, but never danced to. With dancing to this poetry in Sufi Kathak, comes a responsibility of the dancer to portray the poetry in its truest sense. The purpose of the poetry used was never literary. It is therefore necessary for the dancer to first understand the message of the poetry in order to be able to do



Photo credit : Amit Mehra



Photo credit : Amit Mehra

justice to its presentation through dance. There are implicit messages in the poetry, based on one's interpretation, which the dancer should incorporate in the performance

Sufi Kathak now, after a decade, has its own visual entity separate from other Indian classical dance forms. The dominant thought of the formless Almighty, the nirgun brahma (the only Indian dance that follows the concept of nirgun brahma) and poetry is separate, the use of language, the use of movements, the music genre to be used, the costume and the aesthetics are all specific to a Sufi Kathak dancer.

Q.2) You were brought up in Lucknow. Is there an influence of it on your work and how do you represent the Ganga-Jamuni traditions through your dance?

Art has always drawn influences from the times in which the artists and performers live and so that becomes true of the fact that my association with the city of Lucknow is very deep and has a deep impact on my own persona and my work.

However for Sufi Kathak it was not merely Sufism in India but the philosophy of Sufism in the subcontinent, that became the reference points. The language of expression changes according to the place where a particular Sufi saint resided. Hence there are many common trends in terms of music and dance styles also. The dance styles associated with Sufism all over this region are spontaneous and do not follow a classical format except for the whirling dervishes in Turkey. I have realized that the dance has not been a part of extensive research by people who have studied the Sufi thought. Hence on my own I have had to recreate some movements by hearing the stories at the Sufi shrines.

My whole work of Sufi Kathak represents the unique syncretic traditions of the erstwhile Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb of Awadh, wherein Qawwals sang in praise of Hazrat Ali as well as Lord Krishna with their voices reaching out to the Almighty. I grew up in Awadh where syncretic traditions and secularism are a lived reality rather than being taught in text books and that is what, through my work, I still represent and believe in. Going back is never an answer.



Photo credit : Amit Mehra



Photo credit : Amit Mehra

Reliving them in modern times is the reality. India is a politically volatile country and hence everything here is dominated by politics. The cultural traditions are somehow relegated to insignificance, whereas it is these cultural traditions that people live in their day-to-day lives and hence in my view are of extreme importance.

I also give the reference of a small part of the recent verdict of Justice A.U. Khan on Babri Masjid, Ayodhya, (a web link below,) in which he says:

This below given reference by Justice Khan is very special to the presence of the Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb

"It was very unique and absolutely unprecedented situation that inside the boundary wall and compound of the mosque, Hindu religious places were there which were actually being worshipped along with offerings of



Photo credit : Amit Mehra



Photo credit : Amit Mehra

Namaz by Muslims in the mosque", Justice Khan said in his order.

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/100909/no-evidence-temple-demolition-justice.html>

Hence I am proud to represent these rich syncretic traditions of Uttar Pradesh through my work. Sufi Kathak is an embodiment of *Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb*. This is a futuristic vision of bringing people of different religions together through music and dance. In Sufi Kathak, I incorporate the mystique of Sufism... the moving meditation... thereby blending both the Hindu and Muslim divine traditions, a dance form that spans from earthly romance of Hindi folk to the evolved Sufi imagery of love in Persian poetry, from a beloved in flesh and blood to the abstract presence of the Almighty, from a form to formlessness, making Sufi Kathak, the Dance of the Soul.



Photo credit : Amit Mehra

Q.3) - Did the traditional dance gurus oppose your initiation? If no, how well have they received it? Also the acceptance of this new art form by the society and lovers of art.

Even as today I am acclaimed for my efforts to create a new classical dance form, it has been an arduous journey for me as I trod upon a path not traveled earlier in classical art forms to create the emergence of a completely new art form based on a thought that was, till now, not extensively used in dance – The Nirgun Brahma or the love for a formless Almighty, depicting formlessness through dance.

Initially when I launched Sufi Kathak in 1998, the critics were skeptical, though they wrote excellent reviews about the dance form and the completely new work that they were witnessing. But many still thought Sufi Kathak to be a - one off, kind of concert which would not sustain..... But in 2008, we celebrated a decade of Sufi Kathak and 10 years and it is still going strong with new dance productions every year and the friends of Sufi Kathak increasing with each concert.

Initially, the dancers and dance gurus who felt threatened by this new work even questioned things like my wearing complete black on stage, saying that it is inauspicious for classical dance and has not been done before!!! Initially not understanding my take for wearing black, a colour that negates the love for the body and takes the viewer to experience dance

beyond the bodily limits..... they questioned the genre of music used for Sufi Kathak like Qawwali and Persian music..... again not understanding the relevance of the age old Sufi music traditions which obviously will be an essential part of Sufi Kathak.....

Now after a decade many of the dancers are trying to copy Sufi Kathak... wherein I have to request them not to distort and present Sufi Kathak.... I repeatedly say that just any dance to Sufi music cannot be titled Sufi Kathak just as any dance to Carnatic music cannot be titled Bharatnatyam!

As I mentioned earlier it has not been an easy journey but my belief in Sufi Kathak is complete and will take it forward.

My work of Sufi Kathak has gained appreciation from a wide section of audiences. International researchers find it interesting saying that, "in modern times any new dance form that is created is either modern or contemporary dance but *Sufi Kathak* is a new dance form that still follows 600-700-year-old Sufi traditions. Hence Sufi Kathak is new, yet it is old.

The general audiences find the simplicity and the sheer energy of the dance along with use of spoken language easy to relate to and understand. Hence there is a wide range of audience, from the youth who wishes to understand the form to the simple people who wish to lose themselves in love for the Almighty. Sufism relates to humans as an individual and Sufi Kathak follows the same concept.

Also Sufi Kathak has a lot of what we call the MTV generation, the youngsters as audience, whom I am extremely happy to have. I know that if an art form has to live in future I have to groom this young generation to appreciate my dance form and be a part of the audiences. They are the people who will carry the cultural traditions forward in future.

Q.4) Most people watching your performance have always mentioned the spiritual trance it puts them under.

Dance is my way of reaching out to the unknown energy source... my connect... dance also takes me to heights of emotions as while performing sometimes its, ecstatic, sometimes you feel the pain of still being limited to the body and whereas sometimes the dance outlives the body.... There are so many emotions involved which I feel not only during a concert but even in my own practice. There is a tranquility that comes to me through Sufi Kathak a way to reach out to the ultimate energy source. This is the Sufi thought of longing for the Divine.

*"Manjari dances in surrender to Him, to His Glory, to His Love and to His world
there is an underlying lilting melody and strong rhythm in her dance,
which depicts separation and union, the fire of the eternal dance of moth..."*

My dance form is representative of the great Sufi traditions of our subcontinent. Poetry, music and dance has been an important aspect of most Sufi traditions.

I see my dance as a prayer. When we use only our tongue to speak the Almighty's name it is called a prayer with words but when we use this complete body given to us to speak about the Almighty... for me that becomes a prayer too... a dance... Sufi Kathak.

In our traditions we consider that the whole universe revolves and dances so it can also be said to be the dance of existence. It is my firm belief that people perceive the energy that the artiste wants them to feel if I see my dance as a prayer.... my audience will feel the same... The whole process of Sufi Kathak



Photo credit : Amit Mehra

is remembering God and hence it itself becomes a mystical dance of surrender.

Q.5) - What does Sufi mean to Manjari? Kindly elaborate on the inspirations you draw and have drawn and what it means to you. What is Manjari without Dance?

MANJARI - I do not come from a traditional family of dancers or musicians and my parents were not associated with Sufism. Hence I believe in powers beyond our so-called knowledge which leads on to a path that takes you to spirituality. I believe that as long as the soul, the *ruh* is inside our body, *ruhaniyat* or spirituality is there inherent and takes you on the path of Divine will.

My dance form is representative of the great Sufi traditions of our subcontinent. Poetry, music and dance has been an important aspect of most Sufi traditions. Hence I accept all mystical traditions and take them into the fold of Sufi Kathak. I have been particularly influenced by the *Chistiya Silsila* and the Mevlevi traditions in Sufism. Poetry — the language of metaphor — became the need as the Sufis wanted to connect hearts and souls. Mevlana Rumi started the whirling dance to represent this metaphor through the body and that was very natural.

Dance was never only a mere interest. Dance was a calling, is an overwhelming emotion, that led me on this path. It was my medium of expression to reach out to people with the message of love as written and propagated by the great Sufi mystics. Hence came the development of Sufi Kathak as a dance form.

Q.6) How does Sufi Kathak relate to modern audiences?

In my own way of relating to audiences through dance, I spread the message of the great Sufi saints and poets.... of His love and surrender in His love... this is relevant in today's world where we are being broken into fragments... borders... boundaries... castes... religion... classes... but where is Humanity?

We need to connect the hearts as the minds have developed so much that they are causing more destruction...

Personally for me, Sufi Kathak is beyond the gender... beyond the creed.... beyond the identities.... this is a journey through dance to understand beyond our usual sensibilities.... my belief is that if the Almighty wanted me to dance as a man, I would be born a man.... but since He wanted me to dance as a woman, He made me a woman.... simple, I dance as a woman...

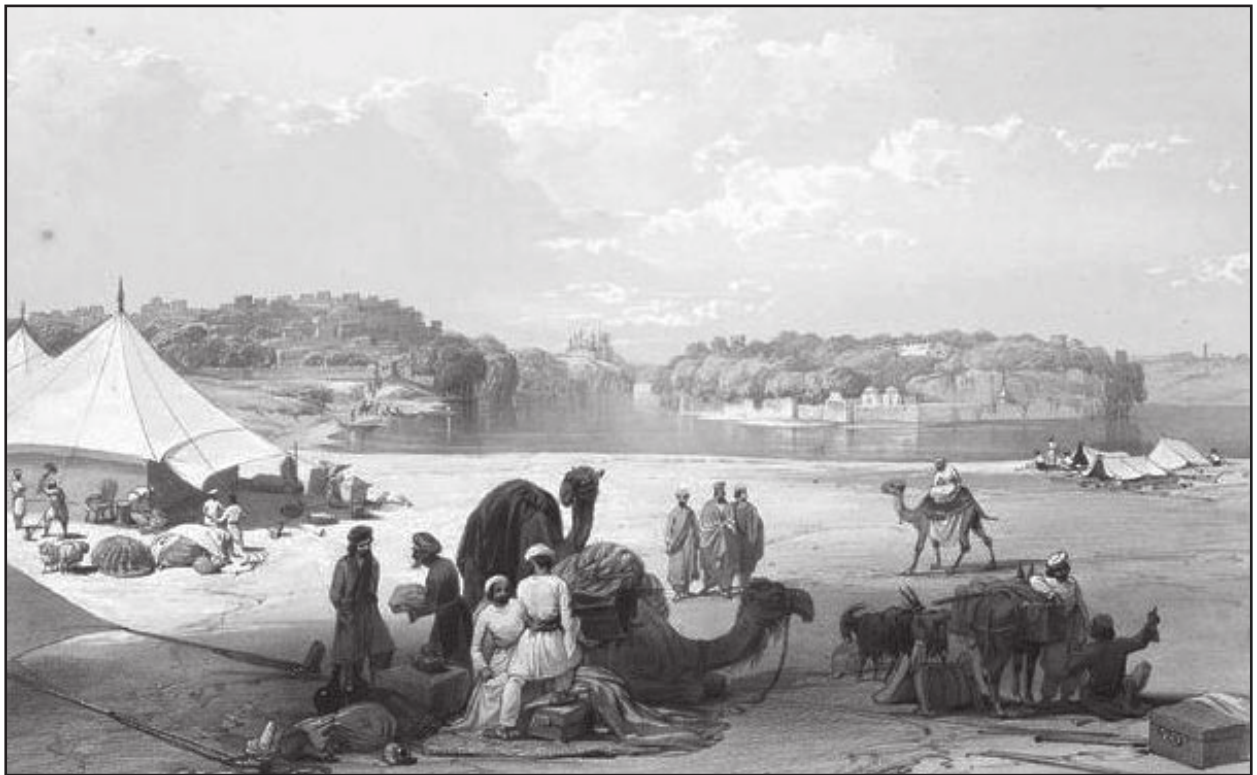
The Divine, the Feminine & the Sufis: Pakistan's plural Sindh Province

Raza Rumi

Pakistan's Sindh province – the fulcrum of the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) –, also known as the land of the Sufis, has retained its centuries old beliefs and worship practices. Since the advent of Islam in the 8th century, the emergence of an Islamicate, the ancient and well-grounded beliefs and deities, acquired a new dimension representing themselves

in the mystical poetry and folktales associated with the major Sufis. The tumultuous events of 1947, and the gradual but massive exodus of the Sindhi Hindus and the Sikhs from the province have not affected the historical patterns of cult-worship in this region.

Interestingly, the ascendancy of the feminine is also reflected in the Sufi poetry of the medieval era,



Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, traveled throughout Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan and the Thar Desert

especially in the works of Shah Abdul Latif Bhatai, whose mystical thought represents a culmination of Sufism in Sindh. This discussion will review these trends and identify more recent feminine cults that start with Marvi of Malir to the struggles of the peasantry represented by Mai Bakhtwar in the early twentieth century. More recently, the start of the twenty-first century presents us with yet another invocation of the representation of the feminine as the quintessential figure of resistance and strength in Sindhi culture, with the "martyrdom" and "sacrifice" of Pakistan's twice-elected Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. This is seen as the continuation of the way feminine legends are constructed and worshipped.

History of Sindh

The name Sindh is derived from 'Sindhu', an archaic title for the River Indus. Sindh has been the home of many ancient civilizations, and recent findings in archaeology have furnished a corpus of information about the ways and lifestyle of the Indus civilization. Neatly constructed pavements, intricate drainage systems and splendid handicrafts point to the adroit craftsmanship of the people living in that era. There exists evidence that Indus cotton was being converted into cloth with excess cotton being exported to ancient Egypt through shipping lanes, at a time when many other civilizations across the globe were beginning to explore, and learn about the benefits of applying such sophistication in fabric production.

Sindh became a part of the Persian Achaemenid Empire in 6th century BCE. After a gap of almost 200 years, an army led by Alexander the Great invaded Sindh in the 4th century BCE. The Greco-Bactrian era followed in which different Greek rulers ruled over the region with rarely any interruptions. It was also the time when many living in the Indo-Greek kingdom converted to Buddhism. Later on, Scythian tribes invaded India through this area in the late 100s BCE, with Sindh also made part of the Tocharian Khushan and the Gupta Empires at one time or another.¹

Sindh gained independent status under the Rai Dynasty in 478 AD. The Rais were replaced by the

Chach, the founder of the Brahman Dynasty around 632 CE. During the reigns of Caliphs Umar and Uthman, Muslim armies and expeditions are said to have reached the western bank of River Indus approaching from Makran, though never having crossed the mighty river due to geographical conditions on the other side which were determined to be strategically unfavourable. Ultimately, it was in 712 AD, when Muhammad bin Qasim conquered Sindh, leading a Syrian Arab army. This conquest converted Sindh (Al-Sindh) into the eastern-most province of Umayyad Caliphate.

During the three centuries that the Arabs ruled this region, the fusion of different cultures went a long way in defining the core values of the modern Sindhi society. Furthermore, Turk invasions of Sindh also established the IVC's affiliation with the Ghaznavid Empire. More importantly, it was during the Mughal era when Sindh was a part of the flourishing kingdom, and during the reigns of Sammas (1350-1524) and Kalhoras (1700-1783), that Sindhi Sufis played a crucial role in converting a large segment of the native population to Islam.

Following the British annexation of Sindh, the region was amalgamated with Bombay, a move which generated much resentment amongst Sindhis. The locals felt that with their distinct culture value system had nothing in common with Bombay. Eventually therefore, Sindh was awarded the status of a separate province under the auspices of the British reforms introduced in 1935.

The demographics of Sindh underwent a conspicuous alteration after the Indo-Pak partition of 1947. At the time of partition, many Hindus – who comprised 25 percent of the total population of Sindh – fled the area. However, Sindh as a province still holds the largest number of Hindus living in Pakistan, as compared to other provinces of the country. According to the Census of 1998, almost 2,280,000 Hindus were residing in Sindh.²

As an epiphenomenon to the exodus of Hindus, Sindh received many immigrants from not only other



Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai



Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai mentions his travels in the Risalo

provinces of the country, but also from other regional countries in the following years. The Afghan wars and the secession of East Pakistan accelerated this influx, which has fueled Sindhi grievances, founded in expropriation and marginalization.

Worship of the Feminine in Indus Valley Civilization

Fertility cults were a very important part of the religion of the Indus people. A majority of these rituals involved terracotta figurines of the mother goddess. These mother goddesses were in the form of heavily adorned females, mostly in the standing position. The figurines were produced in large numbers and in different shapes and sizes.

These figurines may have served as votive objects meant to express gratitude on the occasion of the birth of a child, or to pray for his long life and happiness. They may also have been used in ceremonies in which a couple prayed for the birth of a child. Some

figurines of nude males have also been found from various sites which have been a part of the rituals where the central theme was procreation. However the female figurines far outnumber the male ones.

'One piece of the artistic flavour is the figurine of the famous dancing girl from Mohen-Jo-Daro. The little figurine is shown resting her right hand on the hip, left arm fully covered with bracelets and bangles hanging closely downwards over the bent left leg, a necklace with three pearls hanging on the breasts. She has a braided coiffure and the head is tilted back in a rhythmic pose.³ There is also an interesting image of a dancing girl engraved on a rock at Sado Mazo in Johi tehsil in the Khirthar mountain range.⁴ Apart from this image of the dancing girl, there are many engravings which show women dancing before their dwellings, which is testimony to the fact that dancing has been practised since ancient times. Tombs of the Kalhora period also depict scenes of dancing. Women are also shown dancing with males.⁵

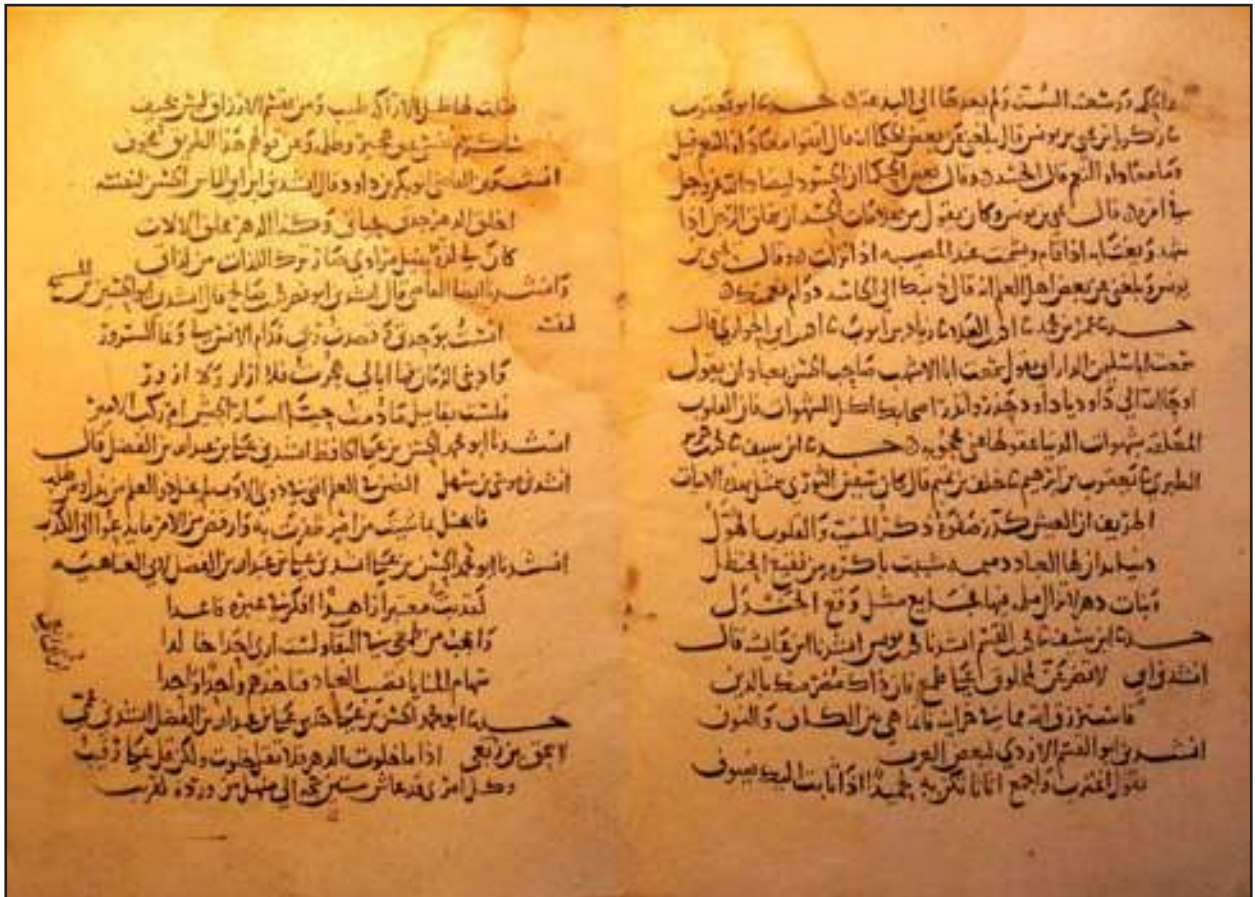
Ever since the Vedic period, dancing has been an expression of joy of everyday life in Sindh. Dancing supposedly transposes the overall effect of music on mind, manifesting itself in the visible motion of the body. In Sindh, dancing, like music, was associated with religious rites during pre-Islamic times, when the emotional effect of the movement, the rhythm and music, heightened religious excitement and enriched associated rituals. Evidence found in the tombs of Larkana, Thatta and Mithi districts lays credence to this theory and reflects the secular attitude of the people of this region towards the religion, not only among the artists who created these images, but also among the rulers of the area who made no concrete effort to purge their dominions of this form of representation from funerary architecture, even though Islam prohibits the production of figurative images. Except for a few images in Chandia tombs, these figural paintings have not been defaced and

remain intact to this day, reflecting the liberal views of the local people regarding their religion. Such a pluralistic and inclusive approach to heritage was influenced by the mystic traditions, which have historically remained pervasive in Sindhi society.⁶

'...The importance of mother-worship in religion, the abundance of female figurines, rich ornaments, the comparatively lesser importance given to males, would all indicate that society in the ancient Indus valley was more favorable to women than to men.'⁷

As Dr. Fahmida Hussain conjectures:

'This land of peace, harmony and love had a matriarchal society, where because of her powers of procreation the woman held a high position and status. She not only gave birth but also brought up future generations. She was the cultivator too. She enjoyed a status of a goddess because of these qualities.'⁸



The archaeological evidence uncovered from the Indus Valley suggests that the valley's mythology tapped heavily into the formation of Goddess cults. At the ruins of Mehrgarh, the katcha plains of Balochistan on the western bank of the Indus, goddess figurines belonging to the 6000-2500 BCE period have been discovered. At Harappa, figures of gods and goddesses have also been unearthed. Numerous terracotta statues of the Mother Goddess have been dug up which suggests that she was popularly worshipped. Other popular sculptures have not however, survived.

The cult of the mother goddess continued to exist even after the gradual demise of the Indus civilization, subsequently becoming part of the Hindu religion. Some scholars believe that the Sakta sect of Hinduism, which is devoted to the worship of female deities only, may have come into existence as a result of the persistent worship of the mother goddess."⁹

The problem with relating the Indus civilization with ancient Hinduism is that the distinct symbols found on pieces of artifacts and other scriptures have not been deciphered yet, thus injecting doubts into research with regards to the exact origins of the civilization. Currently, there are three widely held views about the civilization and its relation with Hinduism. The first theorizes that it was an Aryan Civilization and its script is an early form of Sanskrit. Others believe in the proto-Dravidian theory, which considers the discovered culture as an indigenous part of the subcontinent. There is a third view however, which speculates that the Indus civilization had no relation whatsoever with the Aryans or the Dravidians.

In any case, what we know is that in later eras, the widespread cult of Kali and its various manifestations acquired a major position in the popular imagination and spiritual practices of the area occupied by the IVC.

Origin of Cults – Myths and Legends

Kali is the Hindu goddess of time and change, or also known as the lord of death. She is presented

as a violent, dark-skinned and fearful deity and is often shown wearing a necklace of severed heads and earrings made of children's corpses. Her sharp fangs and long nails on claw-shaped hands add to her frightening and violent disposition¹⁰. According to David Kinsley, Kali was first mentioned in Hinduism as a distinct goddess around 600 CE, and these texts "usually place her on the periphery of Hindu society or on the battlefield."¹¹

In Hindu scripture, Kali became more popular and powerful with the composition of *Devi Mahatmya* in 5th-6th century AD. According to *Devi Mahatmya*, she was born in a battle against forces of evil, from the brow of Goddess Durga. She immediately went on a rampage destroying all that lay in her sight. It is stated that eventually, Lord Shiva – also depicted as the consort of Kali – had to throw himself at her feet to make her stop. The image of Kali with Lord Shiva under her feet bears testimony to this legend.

Conceived on the periphery of Hindu society, her recognition grew over time. Her most fervent supporters exist in Bengal, and are not hesitant to offer blood sacrifices for her. Kali has been presented with different names and forms. Shyama, Adya Ma, Tara Ma, Dakshina Kalika and Chamundi, all refer to the Goddess Kali. Then there is Bhadra Kali, who is considered gentle, and Shyamashana Kali, who lives only in the cremation ground.

Kali Temples in Sindh

There are three main temples of Kali in Sindh:

- 1) At Aror which is popularly known as the temple of Kalka;
- 2) The temple of Kali is also situated on the Ganjo Takar, a hill in Hyderabad;
- 3) Another temple of Kali was situated in Laki (Sehwan) in a cave where visitors had to crawl in to worship the goddess. A visit to this was essential before a pilgrimage to Hinglaj.

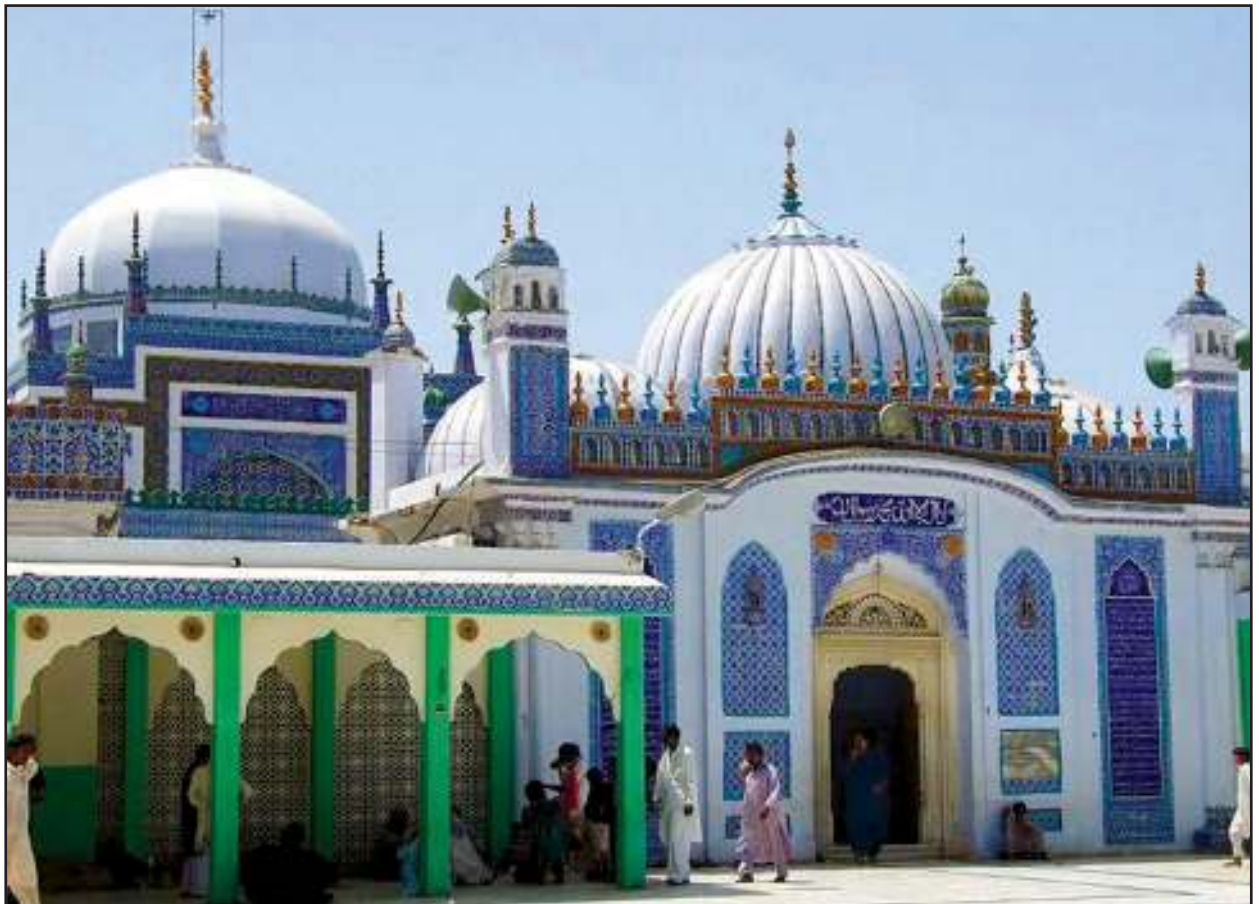
There are three temples of Kali Mata and Durga near Sukkur. Only 9 kilometers from Sukkur, there is another Kali temple at Arore. This is also the place where Mohammad bin Qasim built the famous mosque in 726 AD. Close to here in Balochistan, we have the Nani Mandir near Hinglaj on the bank of the Hingol River in Lasbela district, where Hindus come for pilgrimage and for the performance of various rituals. Another Kali Mata temple exists in Larkana.

Allusions in Sufi Poetry

Interestingly, the ascendancy of the feminine is also reflected in Sufi poetry of the medieval era, especially in the works of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, whose mystical thoughts represent a culmination of Sufism in Sindh. He positions feminine figures as cultural indicators of Sufi Sindh, with the female protagonists of his poetry portraying the quintessential qualities of the

region's spirit: love and tolerance, striving in the way of spiritual objectives, love for the land, pluralism, moderation, resistance to tyranny and a delicate nationalism.

Mentions of many notable Sindhi women are found in local folktales and in the verses written by Sindhi poets. These women are known for their compassion, courage, bravery, and often for devotion to their lovers and ancestral lands. Bhitai fashions his *heroines* in the same vein, and these include Marvi, Moomal, Lila, Baghul, Sasui, Sohni and Mokhi. 'Portrayal of the female characters throws light on the characterization of Shah Latif in his Risalo. He has presented the character of an ideal woman with all its beauty and sincerity. The heroines of his stories present the true and real image of the woman he had visualized in the society of Sindh.'¹²



Moreover, 'searching and struggling is the main idea in the poetry of Shah Latif. Sasui is in search of Punhoon, Moomal desires Rano, Marvi is desperate to get home, Sohni desperately wants to meet Mehar (Mahiwal). For Shah Latif a woman is the most beautiful symbol of love. Love is her habit and she is the greatest creative power of the world.'¹³ In true Sufi fashion, Bhitai places the greatest emphasis on love and the will to struggle as the foundational attributes of a spiritually mature individual.

Consider the following excerpt from Bhitai's Sur Sasui Aabri:

*'I do not know the place, nor have I taken water,
Mountains try to scare me, the sun tries to burn
Hot winds try to weaken my will
O beloved; come to me, I am alone to face them.'*¹⁴

In this Sur, despite projecting the image of Sasui as a delicate and weak woman with tender, soft hands and feet, Shah Latif has attributed to her character the capacity for constant struggle and willpower to achieve her goal. Therefore Sasui appears to be a strong-willed and courageous character. Through her character Shah sends a message to the common people that if the will is strong, achieving any goal or target is not as difficult as it may appear at first sight. A tenacious struggle is a prerequisite for achieving one's own as well as collective objectives; success is the fate of the people who strive for it.¹⁵

Beyond the poems and the prose, one finds that certain Sindhi women were truly famous for their welfare work and generosity – likes of whom include the royal women of the Kalhora (1700-1783) and Talpur (1783-1843) periods such as Mai Safi, a sister of Mian Shah Muhammad Kalhoro (1625-1657), Bibi Khadeja, a sister of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro (1657-1692), Bibi Jado and Bibi Baiti, wives of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro, and Mai Chagli. Mai Jaman and Mai Kheri were famous for building mosques, wells and madrassahs. Mai Chagli ruled over Lasbella and was loved for her sense of philanthropy, selflessness and her substantive welfare work. Mai Saffi has her

own shrine in Larkana in a village named after her, also known as Safi.

The three female devotees of saintly Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro namely Mai Shamal, Mai Garhi Panhwar and Mai Hawa Khoso have also been famous. While Mai Garhi had allocated all of her land to her mentor, Mai Shamal – as a sign of her devotion – composed memorable poetry which was called *Samri Mianwal faqirs* (the followers of Mian Nasir Muhammad still sing the poetry of Mai Shamal at his shrine) Mai Hawa was popular for her recitation of *Azi* (invocation), which was the prevalent ritual among the disciples of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro.

Mokhi and the Mataras [16]

The tale of Mokhi is another popular fable in Sindhi culture, which has been quoted over the years by many villagers and Sufi poets¹⁷, alike. Mokhi was a woman in the 14th century during the reign of Soomra dynasty (1058 AD - 1349 AD). She sold wine in a public liquor house near Gadap tehsil in Karachi. Mokhi had learned the trade from her mother Natar, who was a famous barmaid in the palace of Princess Moomal of Kak near Umarkot.

Soon the reputation of Mokhi's inn spread far and wide. Many travelers took a hiatus at the inn on their way to Gadap. The legend has it that eight Mataras (stoutmen/drunks) belonging to upper Sindh were her regular customers. This group of men is said to have been great admirers of the wine served by her. A local versifier describes this in the following words:

*'Eight Mataras frequented Mokhi's bar
Two each from the Samma, Soomra, Channa and
Chauhan Clans'*

Once when the Mataras were visiting her inn, Mokhi ran out of wine. She did not want to disappoint them, so she poured them the only wine left in a pot, which also contained a dead snake in it. They came to know about the venomous wine only when they had drunk it. Upon hearing this, they are said to have died of

shock. Mokhi never forgave herself for their deaths, and passed away herself after sometime. The Mataras and Mokhi were buried near the bar which now exists at the foothill of Narathar.

Mokhi finds her mention in the poetry of poets like Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, Shah Abdul Karim of Bulri, Shah Inayat and Shah Lutfullah Qadri. In the verses of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, the character of Mokhi represents sincerity, love and longing. Today, Mokhi's tomb is located near Shah Mureed's shrine in Gadap and attracts many devotees from distant lands. The modern cement structure of the shrine was built by the Khaskheli clan.

Kasu Ma sati in Sindh's Mithi district

As the tale has it, Kasu Ma sacrificed herself and became a sati when her son, Harnath Dohat Rathore, was killed in battle. According to tradition, Harnath's wife was supposed to become a sati upon his death, but refused to do so. It was then, that Kasu Ma came forward and presented herself, as the refusal of the wife was considered to be a bad sign. She subsequently sacrificed her life and became a Maha (great) sati.

Sati worship is still prevalent in Tharparkar, a district in Sindh. Many men and women from the community pay regular visits to the shrine of Kasu Ma hoping to find escape, solace and the alleviation of their worries. The annual mela at the shrine attracts a large crowd of Hindus from every caste, who pack the shrine, singing *bhajan* (devotional songs) and reciting *chhands* (folk poetry).

The devotees visiting her shrine seek her benediction at every important juncture of their lives. The memorial stone locally called Lorti and Paryio, depict Kasu Ma holding her deceased son in her lap or arms.¹⁸

Mai Bakhtwar of Sindh

Mai Bakhtwar is considered as a true representative of the women's struggle against feudalism in Sindh. She refused to accept the laws dictated by her landlord. As a result, she was murdered by the landlord when

she resisted his attempts at snatching the produce of her family.

The tale of Mai Bakhtwar is treated as a folklore legend of women resistance in Sindh and is considered as an inspiration for several movements for land rights, which came later.¹⁹ For example, her story inspired a massive revolt among the Haris who were led by Haider Bux Jatui, and who protested against feudal laws which were seen to be oppressive. The movement was called the 'Sindh Hari Committee Movement' for land rights, popularly known as the Hari movement.

Marvi, Sindh

Marvi, another Sindhi heroine, is revered by many for putting up a sturdy, strong-hearted resistance against the cruel ruler of Umerkot. Marvi belonged to a village named Malir in Tharparkar. An orphan boy named Phog, who lived and grew up in Marvi's family, wanted to marry the beautiful Marvi. However, Marvi fell in love with her cousin Khet, who lived in a neighboring village. Phog went to Umer's palace for employment, who was the ruler of Umerkot, a man of the world who preferred the company of beautiful women. Phog informed him of Marvi and claimed that she was the most beautiful woman in Sindh. Subsequently, Umer sent a proposal of marriage to Marvi but she refused, as she was loyal to Khet and loved her native land.

Umer did not take the refusal well. He abducted Marvi and kept her in his mansion, imprisoned for a whole year, but failed to break her will. Eventually, seeing Marvi's unconditional dedication and commitment for her people, Umer was impressed and permitted her to return to her homeland. Shah Latif elucidates Marvi's thoughts in his poetry:

*'I feel proud of my folks in the desert
They have wild vegetation as their food
Leaves of trees as their dress and cover
Wilderness is all they have to live with
My folks have given me nothingness in dowry.'* [20]

Or,

*'Only the shameless can forget
The beloved and homeland,
Condemned are those who forget the motherland.'*²¹

And again:

*'The mud of my land is like musk to me.'*²²

The character of Marvi was also recreated in modern Pakistan in a television series. Further, Marvi mela is celebrated in many villages of Sindh to pay homage to her resolution and fortitude, and her refusal to bow down to a wicked and cruel ruler.²³

*"I raise both my hands
And ask my children
To raise their little hands*

*Marvi, of Maru and Malir, In the mists of time
She raised her hands
While the world slept
To God
Full of hope
Praying to see her homeland
Marvi, We raise our hands
As you raised yours
To God
In hope
For the homeland
I was born in
Buried my Father
Buried my brother
Married
Had my children
Served a Nation*



Shrine of Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai

*Helped a people
Without telephone or electricity
Computers or emails
Polio drops or iodine*

*Hear the wind
It carries the sound
Of horses that galloped
Of caravans that came
Of tanks that rumbled
Of planes that flew
Before the torch of time*

*Was passed
As history's pendulum swung
The desert wind calls
Marvi calls
A timeless call
A call
The desert wind carries.
Children: Hear the desert wind
Hear it whisper
Have faith
We will win."*[1][1]

¹ International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences University of Karachi <http://www.iccs.edu/HEJ/History%20of%20Sindh.html>

² Pakistan Hindu Council <<http://www.pakistanhinducouncil.org/hindupopulation.asp>>

³ Shaikh Ayaz, Shah Abdul Latif, 228th Anniversary memorial pp 24-25

⁴ Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro, 2009. Rock Carvings and Inscriptions of Sado Mazo in Johi, dadu, Sindh, Pakistan, Journal of Asian Civilizations Vol.32. No.2 PP-94-125

⁵ Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro, 2010. "Representations of Music and Dance in Islamic Tombs of Sindh, Pakistan. Music in Art-International Journal for Music Iconography Vol. XXXV, No.1-2. pp-201-217

⁶ Kalhoro, Zulfiqar A., 2010. "Representations of Music and Dance in Islamic Tombs of Sindh, Pakistan. Music in Art-International Journal for Music Iconography Vol. XXXV, No.1-2. pp-201-217

⁷ Agha Wazir. Tanqueed O Adab Aur Majlisi Tanquid, Ainae Adab, Lahore 1981 pp 43

⁸ Hussain, Dr. Fahmida. *Image of 'Woman' in The Poetry of Shah Abdul Latif*. 1st ed. Karachi: Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai - University of Karachi, 2001. 46. Print.

⁹ *Ancient Indus Civilization* by Rafi U. Samad p128

¹⁰ David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddess: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Tradition*. (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 116.

¹¹ (David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 70)

¹² Hussain, Dr. Fahmida. *Image of 'Woman' in The Poetry of Shah Abdul Latif*. 1st ed. Karachi: Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai - University of Karachi, 2001. 430. Print.

¹³ Sibte Hasan, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (Essay) Research Forum, Publications, Syed Sibte Hasan Number 1987 p27

¹⁴ Hussain, Dr. Fahmida. *Image of 'Woman' in The Poetry of Shah Abdul Latif*. 1st ed. Karachi: Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai - University of Karachi, 2001. 227. Print.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Drink deep indeed* by Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro – Published in The Friday Times

¹⁷ Hide not your Wine from those who Drink: Folktales and Tombs of Bar woman and Drunkards in Gadap, Karachi (Forthcoming 2011) Journal of Pakistan Historical Society

¹⁸ *Kasu Ma* by Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro in *The Friday Times*, published in 2009

¹⁹ *Tales of women's resistance in Pakistan* by Ammar Ali Jan in *News on Sunday*, published on 10th September, 2008.

²⁰ Hussain, Dr. Fahmida. *Image of 'Woman' in The Poetry of Shah Abdul Latif*. 1st ed. Karachi: Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai - University of Karachi, 2001. 195. Print.

²¹ Ibid. 206

²² Ibid. 215

²³ *Benazir termed new age's Marvi* by Dawn correspondent <http://www.dawn.com/2008/05/03/nat5.html>



Art Reviews: Azad Bhavan Gallery

When art tiptoes between many worlds, when it moves beyond the realm of sheer artistic principles and wraps its mantle around other concerns, the nitty gritty of lines, rhythm, space division, symmetry, so integral to art concerns per se, takes a back step. Yet the overall effect of the parts adds up to more than the whole for the blues, the browns, the greens and the reds on the canvas splash not just artistic expertise but also a soul searching message directed to the viewer. Nowhere has this point been brought home more integrally than in the exhibits at the Azad Bhavan Gallery during the quarter under review. Thus viewers who came to the gallery were struck by the all-encompassing nature of the art on the walls. Each of them fielded a concern, ranging from artistic interpretations of the topmost social issues plaguing our society today, to that of exhibitions of children's art, vibrant in their freshness of approach and in the uninhibited interpretation of issues that make proper sense to their childish rationality. By this selection the curators of these shows have identified

and defined the limitless possibilities of 'spaciology' as applied to the contours of the canvas. Within the framed space, while one artist reflects on the plight of the modern-day woman, another practitioner uses its dimensions to interpret individual thoughts through abstract variations and yet all these diversities connect with the individual viewer who is hungry for variety and who creates an individual ambience through the elements in these paintings.





Raamji Shrama, I wanted to live mom-papa

Having interwoven various issues as themes for their art, the artists have also proved the efficacy of bonding together around a common idea that lends itself to various interpretations. Outwardly the form may be distinctively a feminine one, but in the artist's hands it is not the femininity of the woman that is important. The likeness to the form or its camera likeness holds little or no merit. In these works the brush cradles a harvest of thoughts that are depicted through the language of a feminine form as that is the ideal medium to express the concerns that affect the woman of today. Besides providing food for thought, such joint ventures of several artistic minds make for an esoteric collection of art for regular visitors to the gallery have been known to remark that several of the exhibitions have that lingering quality intrinsic to them as the exhibits refuse to be forgotten or blurred. Alongside these fine specimens of interpretative works, have also been exhibitions of individual artists that are no less inferior in content to their more imperious bunch of group shows, and certainly made viewers stop by for a lingering look.

One of the exhibitions that drew much interest this quarter was a group show of works based on real-life stories of social injustice as reported by the Nijh

World Society. Curated by the Delhi based artist Ms Harinansa Bharadwaj, this show was a handpicked selection from among the works of 300 creators around the country who had interpreted the 'social role of art that forms the core and guiding principle for the exhibition.' Thus the works have a hard hitting underbelly, for unlike making art for its own satisfaction, the contributors to this cause state: 'Art needs to get off the high pedestal, elitist standing that it is turning out to be and address the issues concerning our daily well being, not just of a few but to encompass all.' With this broad-based criteria, the show managed to weave together the works of artists of various categories of expertise, ranging from the amateur dabbler in paints to the committed professional, and yet all of them were stirred with the burning feminine issues of female foeticide, the curse of dowry, the cruelty of occult practices, the rising crime rate and insensitivity towards women and much more.

Reviewing the works from a purely artistic point of view, too, the show provided much satisfaction. The womanly form is given a centric positioning in all of them, stating thereby the centrality of the issue. Also, the facial expressions are representative of the basic human emotions such as sorrows, introspection, helplessness, inner determination, distraughtness, abuse, and so on. Also, the eye is drawn towards the backdrop of these works where the treatment though varied is united in its focus on the women. Few have chosen to leave a clear backdrop and emphasise the stark feeling of the situation. Taken as a whole the many fragmented visions of the one sore subject, the plight of women, bring out the seriousness of the issue and the artist conglomerate joining together to voice this common concern through the sensitivity of their art creations, is indeed a praiseworthy gesture that needs to be viewed, mulled over and also enjoyed for its artistic strengths.



Artist Athira Vishwanathan

Another exhibition by a group of four aspiring young artists needs mention at this point. The Young Artists, exhibition features artists of the nineties decade, who have pursued the profession with dedication and despite their young years have managed to bag prestigious awards from several platforms. The works of artist Athira Viswanathan of the foursome deserves mention for their graphic simplicity and true-to-life colourations. Her command over the factor of light in her works is noteworthy, as is seen in her self-portrait which was on exhibit on this show. A charming simplicity marks her landscapes where, with minimal

inclusions, she has managed to create a substantial structural vision. The skyline, being elongated to cover most of the canvas space is the telling point of her work as a landscapist as the azure spread across the space conceptualises an image of vastness and draws viewers to realise the stunning simplicity of her compositional calibre.

Her brother, Arjun Viswanathan prefers the conventional approach and though his canvases are comparatively fuller in terms of detailing, they too, have a clarity and finish that reveal the depths of his artistry. The senior most artist of the group, Saurabh



Artist Saurabh Mohan

Mohan, is a colourist par excellence. Intermingled with a plethora of textures, each of his works vibrate with a joy and rhythm that is difficult to overlook. Whether the forms are integrated into a series of cottony rainbow coloured roundels or streaked into shards of colour flowing down the space, the depictions unfold and enrapture right to the depths of one's being as one is bound to remain rooted before his creations right away. The characteristic play of light and the depths of the surrounding darkness light up the art of Aakash Suri, who uses the feminine form to full advantage. Dressed in a sombre and sober palette, the works do not exude a dullness but embody a deep seriousness.



Artist Arjun Vishwanathan



Artist Arjun Vishwanathan



Artist Arjun Vishwanathan



Shiva dancing on elephant head



Mandapa under repair

It is no majestic tryst with the viewer that these artists wish to achieve. The very spontaneous impression that comes to mind when viewing the works of artist Tarun Vijay, who incidentally is a sitting Member of Parliament is their rarity. Instead of doing a project based on own shores, he has gone off the tourist track and brought back for viewing shots that few even know about, let alone have seen. Being a superb amateur photographer as well, he has given free vent to his expertise by capturing the sights of the World Heritage Temple of Preah Vihear in Angkor. Located at the top of the hill in the Dangrek Range, a site revered as a veritable Himalaya by the ancient carvers at Angkor, the temple is locally known as Shikhareshwar, or the lord of the peak. Naturally it is a reference to Mt Kailas and the Shiva legend. What gives the temple a further edge is that the gopurams, five in number, are not on a common plinth but follow the curve of the hillside and are located on

the slope of the hill. This adds a unique accent to the whole complex. Cementing the idea of a pilgrimage being taken to reach the peak; the temple too is a linear construct so the visitor and the pilgrim of yore simulated the journey of the pilgrimage as he made his way to the temple. In true Cambodian style the central mandapa depicts a dancing Shiva atop an elephant demon exquisitely chiseled into the stone platform, with stylistic touches. Legends and images of idols abound all around the surroundings making a perfect composition for Vijay's close-ups and wide-angled views.

Drawing attention to its photographic potential, this lensman has taken attractive panoramic views of the settings. The emerald swards of grass that surround the aging stone create an abstracted idiom thereby presenting antiquity in a novel format. Elsewhere the views are densely concentrated, showing the finesse



Preah Vihear - A general view. Gopura III



Rama, Sita and Lakshman



Gopura

of the carvings as a languorous blend of human, animal and demoniac forms, juxtaposed within the space of a pillar or temple frontage or a graded gopuram, open up to the skies. In the depiction of the legend of the Sagar Manthan for instance, one is struck by the background of pigmentation in an auspicious orange-red hue, that highlights the stone friezes in their majestic detail. The camera has rightly focused on the lower panel of the carvings highlighting the energy and concentration that each of these figures seem to exude, despite the passage of the centuries, for these temples were made during the time of King Yashovarman, in the 9th century, A. D. A further advantage that this display offered was its unique capturing of the weathering effect of the stone. The mottled surface of the stone, though it has taken a toll of the handiwork of the carvers, has added a painterly quality to the image and has

combined a perfect blend of art photography into a real-life image. Also, the near shots of the details of the carvings give viewers an insight into the forms and styles of illustration that is part of Cambodian tradition and compare it with our indigenous heritage to find commonalities and discrepancies.



Like a poetry on the stone, a beautiful art work



Tushar Joshi, Age 14



Aishwarya, Age 13

The therapeutic advantages of colours and their use have been a tool to interpret the world's greatest works. For the majority of us, colour has a strong impact on emotions and when these are harnessed to express a creation such as a painting, the visage that emerges is a joy to the viewer as well as a cathartic outlet to its maker. Thus the exhibition featuring

young talents from an art school for youngsters in the capital's northernmost residential area, is a refreshing look at the future ahead. Ranging from an age range between eight and twenty-four, this group has shown their expertise in using colour, creating form, playing with the space available and emerging with a work that is original to the last drop of paint. Yes, there is a marked love for a colourful palette and recognizable forms, but the freshness with which these tools have been used have given the works a sense of throbbing realism. Also, many of the works show a remarkable wisdom in their choice of forms making one speculate how these chosen visages would take a more mature shape in the years ahead. Being tutored in the basic techniques of art making, the images are spared the 'faultiness' that marks the experiments of self-made artists who have not had the chance to hone their basic skills before venturing to express their emotions in paint and canvas.

Seeing these works in a joint display on the walls, holds a strange allure as they reflect vibrant still



Aparna Chatterjee, Age 16



Tanvi Takkar, Age 20



Rishav Juneja, Age 16

lives, brilliant compositions and simple strokes that go to prove that the tools of art making need not be elaborate or distinct in order to impress. The catalogue too, is a well-thought-out production with the postage size prints of the child artists along with their chosen works so that viewers were immediately able to connect with them at the exhibition. The exhibition also belies the fact that tutored art is stunted of growth for every work on the wall showed an epicurean eye of easy growth assimilating the contributions of colour in a composition so that when one stood before each of these works, one was lost in childhood memories as they tugged and one's own childhood memories and created little islands of familiarity, that were long forgotten, but which surfaced when facing these artworks.



Jayanto Mitra, Age 8



Shivangi Chakraborty, Age 24



Gentle gesture, flowing lines, Silken movement. 24"x72", 2010, acrylic on canvas

On the other hand, the exhibition titled 'Lines of Light' by artist Sangeeta Gupta spoke of an artistic sojourn across the years, where images have been fine-tuned to perfection through both technique and a sharpened and sensitive thought process. In a round-up of her approach to her art, critics have remarked: 'Sangeeta

wields the brush with finesse suggesting the viscosity of ink, the glossiness of lacquer, the mist of heights, the glow of the sun and the inherent of rocks when wet. The canvases bespeak surfaces akin to skin, bark and the earth.' In fact when viewing the works for the first time, the textural richness of these works bring



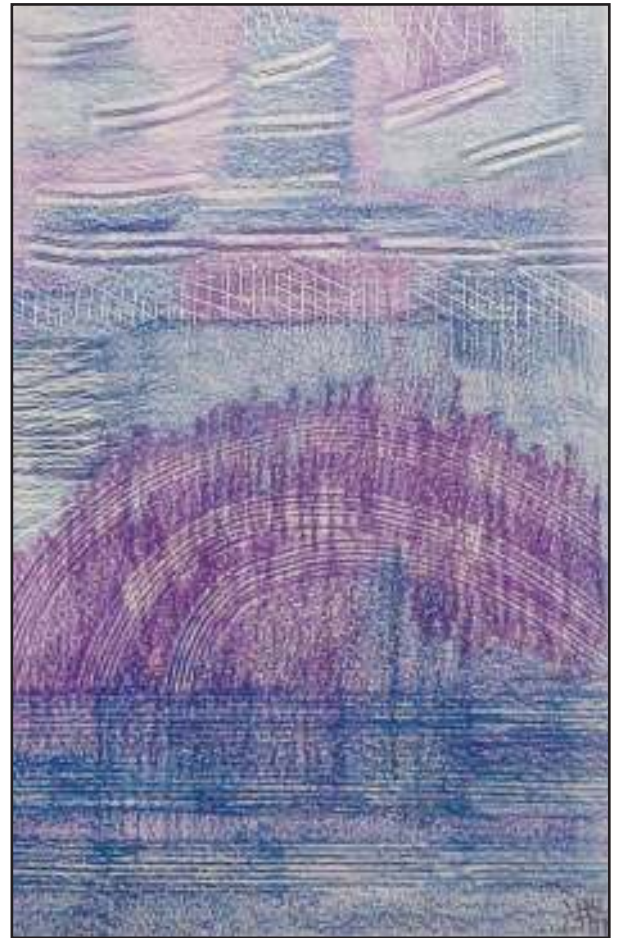
Gentle gesture, flowing lines, Silken movement. 24"x72", 2010, acrylic on canvas

just these very thoughts to mind, creating a strange tactile sensation when face-to-face with her works. The large format of the canvases, with these many layered suggestiveness in them, allow viewers to soak in the sensations of her art expertise with complete satisfaction.

According to the artist herself, the multi-layered meditative quality of her art was not a matter of recent making. The abstractions in fact are her compendium of several memories garnered from her Himalayan journeys, the inspirations born of these experiences, the silent ruminations of her mind in the midst of such travels, and of course the reflections that have layered her thoughts over the years. The



Point Counter Point. 32x24 cm, 2003, pastel on paper



Point Counter Point. 32x24 cm, 2003, pastel on paper

defining moment has come when, instead of random dabbles of paint and strokes to express this vast storehouse of information, she has painstakingly and meticulously knitted together these powerful simulations into a cohesive and intense imagery that exudes a strange rhythm of eternal vibes coming forth through her art. Outwardly, a close look defines the canvas into a conglomerate of fine lines, minute colour dabs, and 'silken movements' playing between light and dense, to create a balance of regularity that is brilliantly suited to her thought process. The artist's gaze inwards has created an unpretentious and yet deeply expressive character, true to her theme of self-expression.

Perhaps the most popular form for artists to express their creativity is the tree form. From time immemorial, artists have been interpreting the concept of the tree of life, through their personal takes. The joint exhibition by the artist couple Kirti and Prashant Sarkar is one more attempt by Kirti to interpret the subject of the legendary tree with her personal take on it. The backdrop of bluish tints in this work, which drew a lot of attention at the gallery, gave the viewer an ethereal suggestiveness to mull over, while viewing this work. The single and prominent silhouette of the mythical tree is created with wavy and sharp-angled fine lines, giving the image a surreal tint. The technique of repetitive line work even recalls faintly the craft creations of Mithila



Tree of Life-13. 24"x36", acrylic on canvas



Tree of Life-16. 24"x48", acrylic on canvas



Tree of Life-3. 24"x24", acrylic on canvas



Moonlit Night. 18"x36", oil on canvas

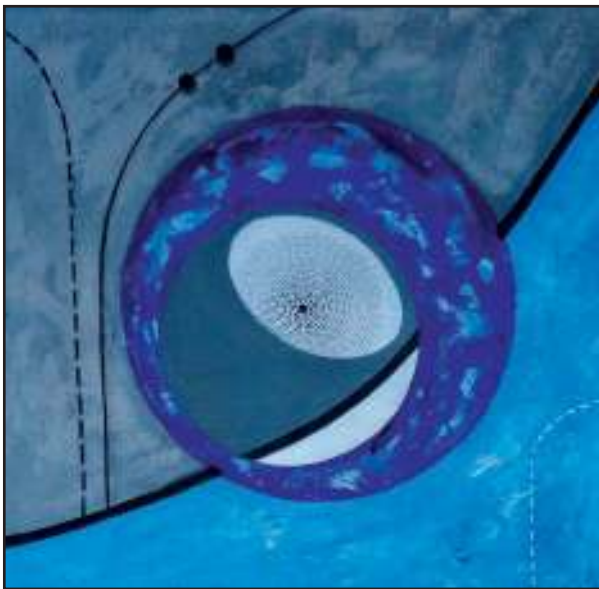
and Warli as the ridged countryside, the details of the bird shapes in the foreground and the ground, form an effective contrast to the free flowing wash of bluish tints in the backdrop. The overall finesse of the work draws viewers to peer closer and follow the zig-zag contours perhaps a little closer.

The languorous feminine forms of the co-artist, on the other hand draw attention to their graphic outlines that rein in the many shades of pigment marking the use of the palette in these voluptuous figures. Light from the moon and from the brightness of day is aptly conveyed with realistic distinction in these works. The free flow of the brush across the canvas create a languid feel to the mood and emerge as a symbol of womanhood – soft and suggestive and yet firm and determined at the same time. The treatment of the canvas surface also merits a mention for it has given the works a fine-grained quality that aptly creates a rhythm of resonance balancing the chosen theme of the artist. Colours too, have a way of mixing as if being washed down in a quiet flow, giving viewers the urge to touch, feel and imbibe of the sensation of cool depth immersing the mind.



Tree of Life-17. 24"x36", acrylic on canvas

For Bharti Dixit of Indore, the thrill of exploring her concept of abstraction has given her viewers several fronts on which to view her works. On the one hand, there is the point of colour usage, which in this case has veered from the predictable blues, yellow and greens and colours in-between to cerise, and moss-green, grey to khaki sea-blue to plantain green, all of them delightfully juxtaposed into blends defining objects that defy a concrete definition. This



12"x12", mixed media on canvas



14"x14", acrylic on canvas



36"x36", mixed media on canvas

air of mystique, though easily achieved through free-flowing brush strokes or hazy imagery, is a challenging task when the form is both angular and circular, a hint at an engine part and yet expressive of the power of a whirlwind. There is also a noticeable strand of solitude in the works for each of these forms is treated in complete isolation. The abstract mould is thus given a new makeover in the works of this artist.

The concentric outlines of her central figure awakes a sense of movement that is fast-paced and sometimes hurtling into a dizzying force that is uncontrolled by external forces. It is the geometry of these lines that are the primary principle distinguishing their appeal. The backdrop, left unadorned and smooth by and large, enhance the intensity of the primary figure. And finally as if to tone down the energy exuded by this creation, there is the restricting principle of a controlled palette thereby achieving a rare balance of artistic principles in the works. The final effect is one of quietening the mind after an episode of dizzying proportions, a playing down of a revved-up engine heading towards closure; a quietude that besets the mind at the hour of dusk before the light has completely faded and the daily chores have been completed.



36"x36", mixed media on canvas

On closer examination, these works have also a central focus, an inner eye, emphasising the searching quality of the paintings. They help to give the forms a definitive focus integrating the work into a humanized format, for the eye means many things to many people, ranging from the factual to the spiritual. The artist, as usual leaves the circular framework of a suggestive eye in opaque colours so they are not contained in any physical form. They become tools

of textured nuances, making the ordinary appear beautiful, a quality that Cezanne had perfected and which this artist has recalled through her art. The outer dimensions of her forms wear a concentric exactitude, as if drawn with compass and scale but which break loose from their restrictive materiality and become hermetically sealed containers filled to the brim with thoughts that are unique to the artist herself.



Devalya. 50x50 cm, acrylic on canvas

Indulging in the joy of colour, the artist Archana Gupta gives her works titled 'Heritage 'n' Colours' a rainbow-edged variety. This is not to say that there is no substance behind the colour game on the canvas. A closer look, which these works call for, reveals that they are in fact deep-rooted spiritual studies, using familiar forms such as the swastika, the earthen lamp, symbols of a woman's married state such as the nose ring, which are fundamentally reshaped through her colour choices to reach another level of sophistication. The works also depict the artist's proficiency in space manipulation for each corner, angle and side of the works has been made a snug receptacle to house some personal thought within that space. Also, while some of these images are more clearly etched through the use of light play, on the work, in other images the opposite effect is achieved through the dark grooves specially recessed



Mohini. 75x75 cm, acrylic on canvas



Shringaar. 50x50 cm, acrylic on canvas



Shakti. 75x100 cm, acrylic on canvas

to contrast with the lighted portions of the canvas. As none of the figures have been truncated or lopped to accommodate their proportions, there is a holistic air, despite their part image being shown on the canvas.

The artist's innate strength in depicting iconic images, front face, instead of side-angled or in silhouette, is another noticeable ability to be mentioned. In these images, one can feel the solidity of the granite carving through her dexterous reflective patches on the polished stone. Elsewhere the bleached out patches of white acrylic strokes makes the central image as if coming out of a tissue paper wrapping. Others are nayikas, languorously sandwiched between pillars and walls, adding to the decorative quality of the work. The drapery and embellishment, highlighted with stark white, give a photographic element to the work and remind the viewer of stone friezes in the numerous temples of the country. The controlled use of vermilion and its many shades, in the works, shows the artist's academic strength where every colour application has been applied according to age-old principles instead of random and immature exuberance. The artist's mastery with the depicting of celestials hands, has a charming curvaceous quality that appear in patches, requiring the viewer to search for them within this merger of form and colour.



Silent Sky

Another colourist who has moulded the medium on her own terms is the artist Sarojini Sinha, whose exhibition 'Different Strokes' drew attention because of the fine display of what is light and lissome against what is dark and dense. Her exhibition, comprising a medley of landscapes, human figures, abstracts and tribal art featuring the art of Jharkhand, the artist's

home state, makes for an interesting study of styles and themes. Being much influenced by the works of great masters, particularly those of Picasso, her works are a conscious acknowledgement of his genius, through her works. Hence the works make an interesting take on how even present-day artists have found their feet in art through a study of this



Colourful Life





Picasso Inspired (1)

great master. In this matter, Sarojini has not stooped to a plagiaristic approach because her subjects are far removed for the classic 'Guernica' or self-images of the genius, but concentrate on his style and technique which she has deftly adapted to her own artistic needs . Thus her art becomes, a medium to define happiness as she perceives especially through her rendition of natural landscapes.

Even the colour choice and the subjects are unique. The silent sky is not a dusky shade but has violet shadows and white spaces that integrate the theme



Spring Season

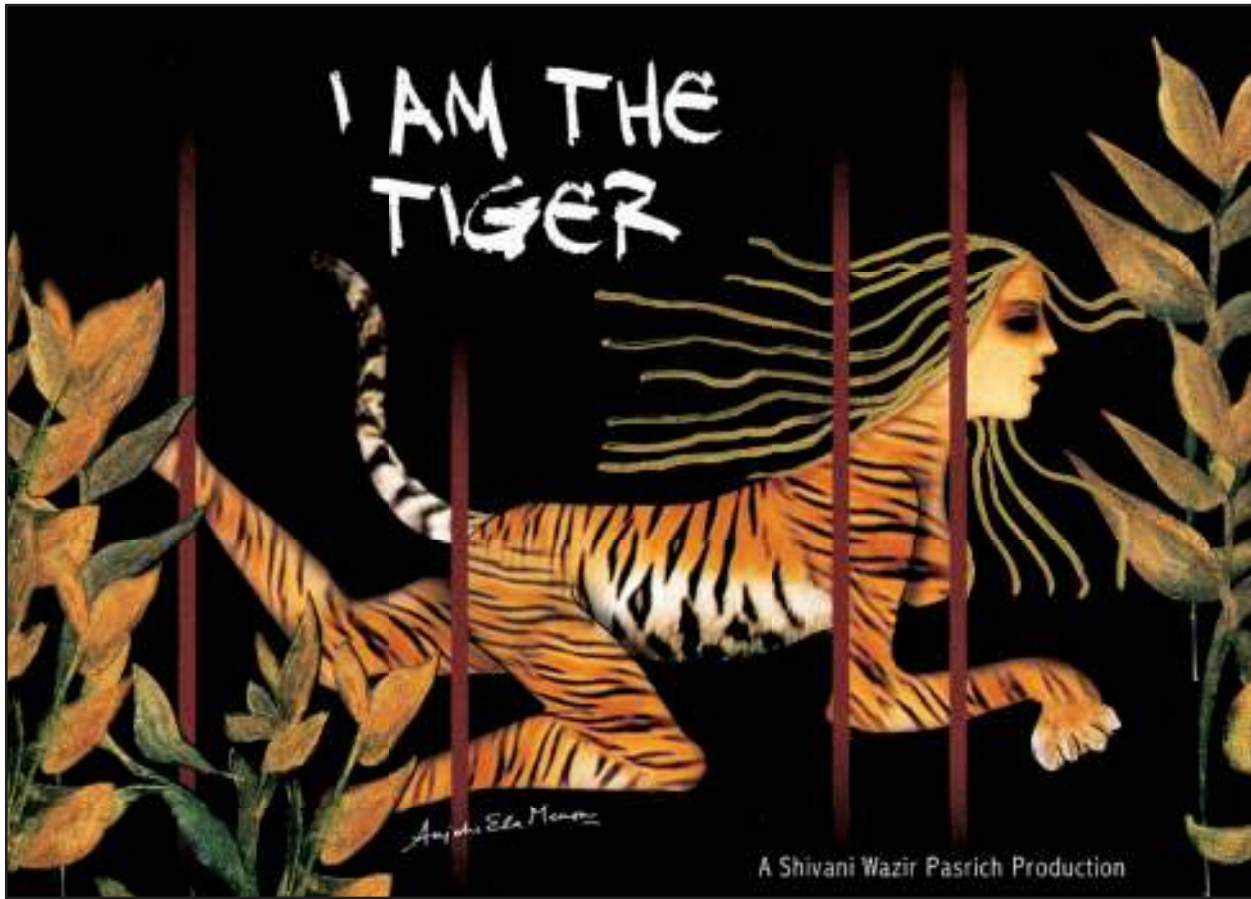
into a vision rather than a photographic facsimile. The classic theme of the nayika waiting for the return of her lover on a moonless night, is established through a silhouette of the definitive form against a crimson backdrop where the void of silence and palpating air of expectation throbs through her brush. Her study of the seasons too, proffers an image of spring without the use of mustard yellow and fresh green but takes into account the rustling feel of falling leaves just before the fresh forliage takes over. Elsewhere, the beach scene with her form dancing in gay abandon, merits a mention because of the power of its promise to forge an identity. Even an attempt to depict the abstract has enhanced her art potential. The elongated structure of her principal setting has a unique distinction and has a delightful supportive rhythm through the creation of tiny flecks create a spectrum of many ideas as one gazes at the works for a second and a third time.



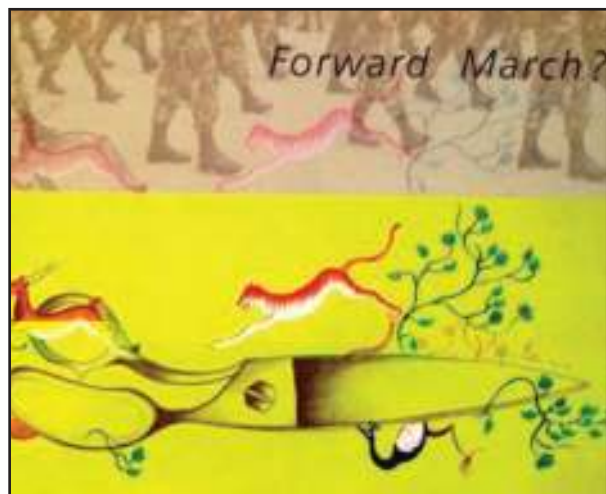
Joy of Heart



Picasso Inspired (2)



Performance art in the form of paints and colour is a difficult theme to re-invent as the stage has been the forte of dance, theatre and music but seldom a platform for contemporary art. Yet the Shivani Wazir Pasrich Productions, has managed to do just that. Their show, 'I am the Tiger' a project that began two and a half years ago, is the story of Taqdeer, a tiger living in the forest of Sarhi. Ultimately, the poor creature, after undergoing a slurry of ups and downs ends up as a tiger in a zoo where his life is marred by barren captivity, inhumane conditions and loneliness, forcing him to the brink of existence and madness. While the story has an overall appeal it is the art initiative linked with it that merited its inclusion at the Gallery. An art initiative spearheaded by the noted painter Anjolie Ela Menon, these were a collection of works by various artists celebrating and presenting the many ways in which the tiger theme has been presented through artistic understanding. The works



Arpana Caur, Mentor of the I AM THE TIGER Art initiative in Delhi

therefore ranged from a mythical take of the theme to the more contemporary ones, but overall, they expressed the multitude of feelings that tigers excite among humans the world over.



Establishing its supportive strength was the fact that the works even included a section of child art on the theme, where besides the tawny faces of the animal lording over the entire sheet of paper, there were also representations where the tiger was seen emerging through the thicket represented through a series of strokes creating a map of India. Other works were enhanced by slogans along the art, messaging the thoughts of the artists through their immediate concern about the animals. Most of the works had interesting backdrops but the show stealer in all of them was the venerable beast. In the more professional segment of the exhibition, it was the



Ashok Hazare, Mentor of the I AM THE TIGER Art initiative in Ajmer

works of the Singh sisters that had viewers coming back for a second look. Composed into a page of miniature illustration, the work showed the decorative strengths of the theme when it is coordinated with the pictorial richness of the miniature. On the other hand the relatively sparse take on them by artist Ashok Hazra, expressed the deteriorating societal fabric that has failed to protect one of mankind's most valued species.



Patachitra - Maha Laxmi



Madhubani - Kali & Shiva



Madhubani - Village Scene

Patachitra is a unique folk art tradition of Bengal where stories about gods and goddesses are painted on long scrolls using natural colours. The word 'patachitra' comes from the word 'patta' derived from



Patachitra - Durga



Madhubani - Social issue

the Sanskrit word meaning a piece of cloth. 'Chitra' refers to painting. The painters, known as patuas, or chitrakars, sing the stories from mythological sources, as they unfurl the scrolls. The distinguishing feature of the 'patachitra' is that the works, done on cloth, are made using bold colours, definite lines and strokes framed to create a compositional effect.

In the old times it was customary for patuas to travel from village to village singing and displaying the scrolls. The traveling party was confined to men only. The idea of women painting and selling scrolls or appearing at public forums singing and presenting the stories was neither appreciated nor supported. But that is long forgotten and today, women painters have made their foray into the field. Thus



Patachitra - Chandimangal



Patachitra - Durga

the heritage tradition has empowered these women. They are now leading their grassroot enterprise and are the torchbearers of the tradition and have been showcasing their art form to audiences around the globe. The striking works of Mamoni Chitrakar and Rupshona are clearcut evidence of this strong feminine movement that was brought on exhibition in association by banglanatak dot com.

On show too, was contemporary issues portrayed in traditional Madhubani style by Khushbu Kumari and Anita Devi. These artists had used the traditional idiom of Madhubani to depict an anti-smoking campaign in clear-cut terms. In contrast their depiction of the kohbar was a perfect charmer, while the village scene in colourful touches was an idyllic portrayal. All these works have not just exhibited a series of works but also advocated and shown what a handful of women who are empowered are capable of doing in bringing about change among their folk.

Jashn-e-Khusrau

A Collection



Publishers: Roli Books and Aga Khan Trust for Culture
 Pages: 220
 Hardbound

Review by Debjani Chatterjee

Being a part of the very fabric of our aesthete, we have tended to overlook an appraisal of his individual identity or his vast musical contribution. Amir Khusrau, the scholar, musician, poet and one of

the most venerated followers of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, is the symbolic cornerstone of the pluralistic and shared tradition of this subcontinent, 'straddling, Persian, Arabic, Hindavi and Sanskrit.' In keeping with the legend of this master, the current volume *Jashn-e-Khusrau* is an ideal compilation of his legacy in a 221 page coffee table presentation, that even includes three CDs of live music that were presented alongside its release. The project is also the outcome of a public-private partnership set up between the Archeological Survey of India the Municipal Corporation of Delhi the Central Public Works Department and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture among others, who jointly had entered into a year-long partnership of renovation, regeneration, monument conservation to bring about a cultural revival of the art-related character of the disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti. While the various symposiums, qawali sessions, poetry readings and performances linger on as memories, the current volume is the most concrete evidence of that momentous reliving of the significance of the legacy of Amir Khusrau.



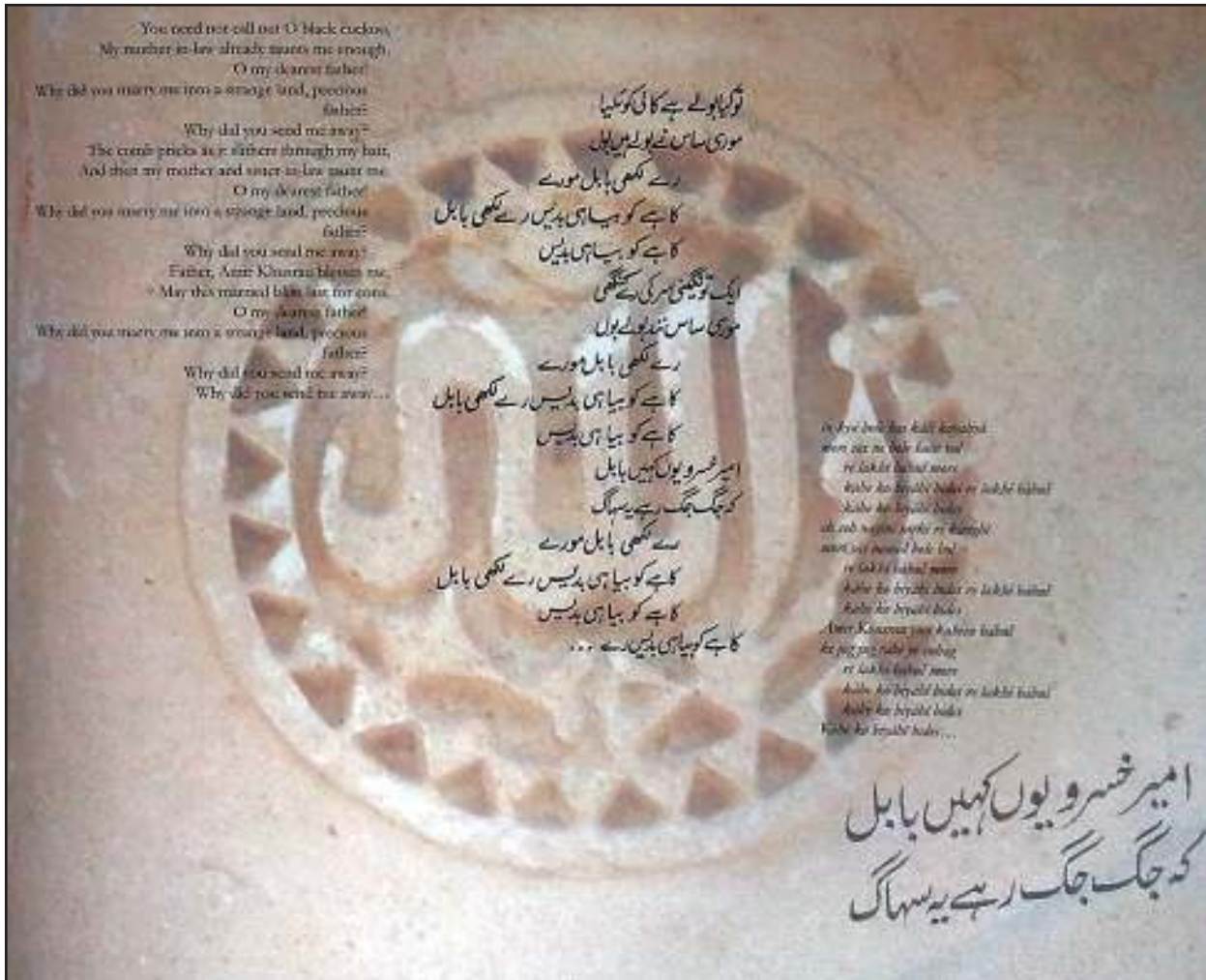


Panoramic view of Dargah Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya compound. (SA)

As is wont with a coffee table volume, the work has called for smart designing and thankfully, the pictorial content, which is the backbone of its stylisation, has drawn succour from images of lesser known monuments of the space, such as the embellishments on the tomb of Isa Khan the intricacy of the jali work on marble, the on-stage vibrancy of qawali, as also wide angled views of the skyline of the Basti. Thus a casual reader, flipping through the pages is likely

to get a whiff of the Khusrau heritage through this succinct introduction to the tradition.

In a more in depth look at the personality, the book contains an exhaustive essay on the literary aspects of Khusrau, bringing to the forefront a rounded assessment of the greatness of his poetic genius. Also, the underlying philosophy of Sufism is also conveyed through the writing. The delineation of

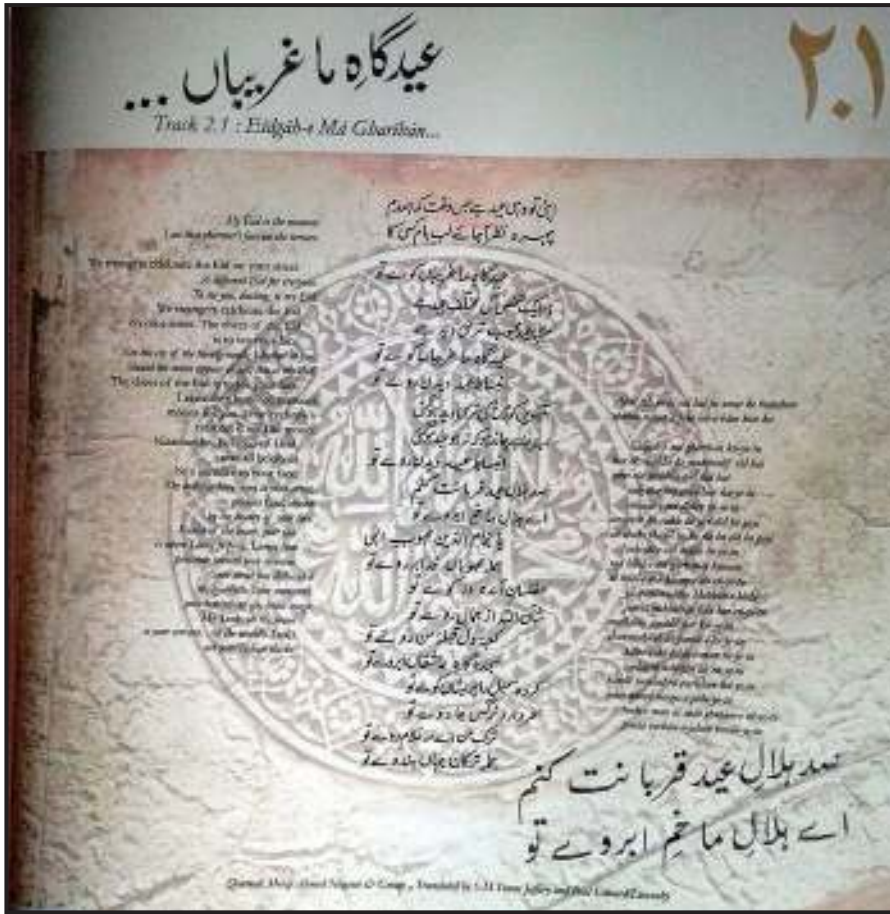


the Hindavi the oral vernacular of the time, that the poet had adopted for his writings, through Khusrau's personal take on it, gives it authority in the reader's eyes. Without resorting to mushy sentimentality, the duality of concepts, the temporal and the spiritual, are laid out clearly and candidly through exhaustive quotes from Khusrau's writings that pepper the essay all through. The choice of miniature illustrations, though unexplained as to their makers or their provenance or periodicity, nevertheless add pictorial enhancement to the chapter.

The chapter on Qawali by Regula Qureshi has a more personalized and explanatory flavour. As earlier in the volume one has been explained the significance of the 'sama' to qawali, the contents of this essay

further compliment the spirit of this music as one goes along with the read. The chronological nature of the presentation, is a good guideline for introducing the genre to readers. The 'action' photographs in this segment bring along the vibrancy of this music and its all-encompassing mesmerism on audiences who care to listen to the spiritual aspects of this strident musical style. An interesting inclusion in this largely academic content is the queries the author fields about the 'portability' of this genre from the khanqah of yore to the wedding hall of today.

On the art, artists and patronage of the qawali this is a knowledgeable attempt at codification much needed for this form, where virtually nothing has been done in this respect. It brings home the fact that just



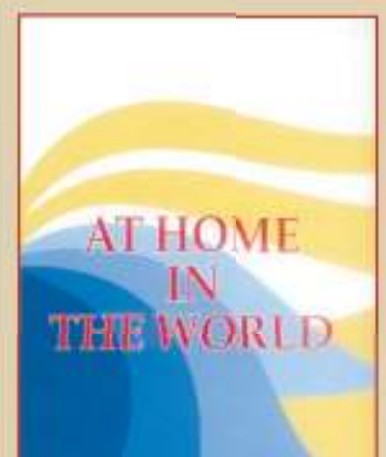
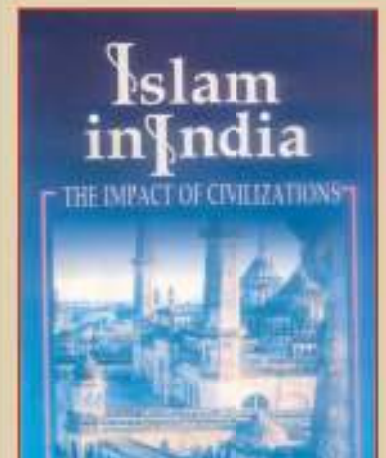
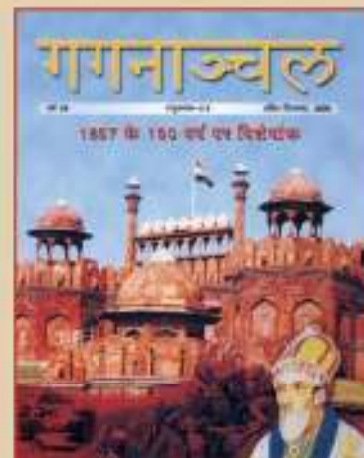
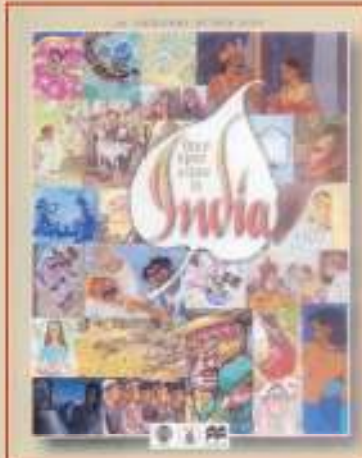
but the most colourful and complete one of them is penned by the *Jashn-e-Khusrau* collection.

The final chapter, entitled 'Kalam' is an endearing keepsake of the Khusrau treasury as it contains the original kalams penned by the legendary poet. The designing of the pages to create an aura of its literal meaning, makes this section the most read and handled part of the selection. For the present generation of readers who have heard snippets of these lines sung at soiries in miscellaneous gatherings, there is a sense of discovery at handling the complete versification. Together with the CDs included in the front side of its dust cover, the work

because it is not in the general limelight of musical circles, it does not command an audience. Such an essay is sure to bring about a closer understanding among the various parameters of our music and the parameters of qawalis.

Together with numbers that have been sung, the book becomes more than its printed word. It transcends the centuries, binds together cultures and brings to rest the fact that cultures is a rainbow of many strains

is a modern day familiarization of a time and era that was gingerly dismissed as too intellectual for common gentry. Today, Khusrau is bound to become a household word, a man in flesh and blood who lived and walked the capital's streets and who, like the listener and reader of today, soaked in the import and atmosphere of the qawali with as much relish in the khanqahi version as in the courtly counterpart, and which this volume has made ordinary readers privy to, through this much needed compilation.



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