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NEW WINE FROM MEDINA: AESTHETICS OF POPULAR QAWWALI LYRICS

Mikko Viitamäki

ABSTRACT

Wine and intoxication are among the motifs that suffuse the poetry traditionally performed in qawwali music.¹ Qawwali is a musical genre that has developed in the context of *samāʿ*, listening as meditation. This practice, much favoured by South Asian Sufis belonging to various orders, utilizes music and poetry as a potent means of directing the attention of devotees towards the divine reality. In this process, the metaphorical language of poetry plays a significant role as it is conceived as a bridge connecting the visible, human reality with the hidden and divine.

Although qawwali performances outside the *samāʿ* context were not unheard of prior to the twentieth century, it was only then that a large scale venture of qawwals to new stages of performance begun in earnest. They started to perform in concerts – both live and radio – and films and their music became widely disseminated through recordings. The shift from the privacy of Sufi hospices and shrines to the public sphere led to the emergence of popular qawwali style characterized by distinct conventions relating to music and lyrical content. Popular qawwali has lost its function as a transformative meditative technique and acquired characteristics of entertainment even while retaining religious orientation.

The paper explores the impact of these developments on qawwali lyrics by analysing the transformation wine imagery has undergone. In the poetry performed in *samāʿ* assemblies, the metaphorical dimensions of wine are not explicated and the task of understanding inebriation as a result of divine love rather than of wine the drink, for example, is left to individual listeners. Popular qawwali lyrics, by contrast, avoid religiously dubious motifs like wine. When wine in rare occasions is mentioned, the lyricists or performers take care to explain its metaphorical meaning in explicitly religious context. I suggest that

¹ The first version of this paper was presented at the symposium Islamic aesthetics, organized jointly by The Finnish Society for Aesthetics and The Finnish Oriental Society 27–28 Oct. 2008.

this tendency arises from the rhetoric that emphasizes doctrinal orthodoxy and meticulous fulfilment of religious obligations as the sole building blocks of Islam. Anything appearing even remotely irreligious is deemed avoidable. This rhetoric has dominated the discourses concerning South Asian Islam since the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, the denigration of Persian poetics and, by extension, culture by modern thinkers like Iqbal has contributed to the avoidance of conventional poetic motifs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Qawwali, a genre of North Indian music that is commonly classified as “light classical music”,² was initially developed for the musical assemblies (*mahfil-i samāʿ*) of the Chishti Sufi order. In the twentieth century, several performers of this genre, qawwals, have ventured onto new stages. They sing in concerts in South Asia and abroad, and occasionally these events are broadcast on radio or television. However, they reach the widest audiences through inexpensive recordings. Today, in approaching any major Sufi shrine (*dargāh*) in South Asia, one cannot help noting the numerous music shops that advertise their merchandise with the help of blaring loudspeakers, silenced only during the five daily prayers. The affordability of the recordings – one video CD or MP3 disc costs rarely more than 50 rupees – makes them popular souvenirs among the pilgrims who flow constantly into the shrines.³ The qawwali of these recordings differs radically from the qawwali connected to formal *samāʿ* assemblies and in order to distinguish the two, I shall call the former style “popular qawwali” in this article.⁴

Popular qawwali does not only differ from the traditional qawwali of the *samāʿ* assemblies in respect to the stages of performance and the media of dissemination, but also in respect to the musical conventions and the content of poems chosen for performance. This article aims to examine the poetic content of popular qawwali. I have chosen to limit the discussion to wine imagery, which, I believe, will reveal the fundamental trends guiding the development of popular qawwali poetry.⁵ I will begin by briefly noting some of the various usages of wine imagery

2 See, e.g. Qureshi 1986: 46–47.

3 As the computers have become common, the manufacturing of video CDs and MP3 discs has become easier and, consequently, these formats seem to have gained ground from cassettes. Audio CDs, on the other hand, are slightly more expensive, their price ranging from 100 to 150 rupees.

4 In common Urdu parlance the recorded qawwali is usually called *filmī* or *bāzārī qawwālī*, ‘film qawwali’ or ‘qawwali of marketplace’. Both expressions bear derogatory connotations.

5 The material analysed for this article consists of 109 recorded popular qawwali songs: 40 by the Sabri Brothers, 22 by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and the rest by various performers from India and Pakistan.

as they appear in the poetic repertoire that is specific to the *maḥfil-i samāʿ*. I shall then continue with a closer scrutiny of the changes that took place in respect to these poetic images when qawwali entered the new stages mentioned above and suggest some possible reasons for these changes.

2. WINE POETRY IN MAḤFIL-I SAMĀʿ

The origins of qawwali are commonly connected to the founder of the Chishti order in India, *Khvāja Muʿīn al-Dīn Cishtī* (d. 1236). He is accredited with the implementation of *samāʿ* as a central ritual of his Sufi order because he deemed it a useful method of enticing music loving Hindus into the fold of Islam.⁶ In the thirteenth century, however, *samāʿ* had already become an established part of life in Sufi hospices (*khānqāh*) due to the advocacy of the practice by the Khurasanian Sufi master, *Abū Saʿīd ibn Abī'l-Khair* (d. 1049; Graham 1999: 117). No doubt, the Indian environment may have affected the predilection of *Khvāja Muʿīn al-Dīn* for *samāʿ* and it certainly did affect the musical idiom and poetic content of qawwali during the following centuries. Nevertheless, in the early phase of the Indian Chishtiyya, engagement in *samāʿ* probably owed more to the example of Central Asian Sufis than to distinctively Indian developments.

The emergence of qawwali as a distinct genre of music is commonly traced to the *khānqāh* of the eminent Chishti shaikh, *Khvāja Nizām al-Dīn Auliyaʿ* (d. 1325), where his poet-musician-disciple *Amīr Khusrāu* (d. 1325) prepared qawwals to perform in the assemblies of his master. Despite this hallowed origin, the present idiom of qawwali music developed much later, under the influence of *Tānras Khān* (d. 1872). He was a court musician of the last Mughal emperor, *Bahādur Shāh Zafar*, but unlike his patron, he survived the aftermath of the 1857 uprising and continued his career in the court of the Nizam of Hyderabad. *Tānras Khān*'s importance in the history of qawwali also derives from the fact that most of the present-day hereditary performers trace their lineage through him to a certain disciple of *Amīr Khusrāu* named *Miyān Šāmat*. These hereditary performers transmit a teaching of qawwali that is closely tied to the conventions of North Indian classical music.⁷ Their poetical repertoire consists of poems in three languages, namely Persian, Urdu, and North Indian vernaculars often combined

6 See, e.g. Abbas 2002: 136–137 for the idea of Sufis as preachers of simplified Islam to the masses. This view concerning the origins of qawwali has been repeated to me on several occasions during my fieldwork in India as well.

7 For more information on the hereditary performers, the musical idiom of traditional qawwali and the actual performance occasion, see the classic study of the subject, Regula Burckhardt Qureshi's *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan. Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali* (1986).

under the umbrella term of Hindavi.⁸ The poets, whose works are included in the repertoire, range from the classics of Persian literature, such as Rūmī (d. 1273), Ḥāfiẓ (d. 1390), and Amīr Khūsrau, and the classics of Urdu literature, like Ghālīb (d. 1869) and Dāgh (d. 1905) to the more contemporary Sufi poets like Bedam Shāh Vāriṣī (d. 1936) and Kāmil Shaṭṭārī Ḥaidarābādī (d. 1976).

Among the central metaphors of the poems performed by the qawwals in *maḥfil-i samāʿ* is wine. The wine poems are usually ghazals and they are performed at the end of a *samāʿ* assembly after the poems that praise God, the Prophet Muhammad and Sufi saints. The poems of Ḥāfiẓ, whom the Sufis count among themselves, are frequently performed and abound with wine imagery. Saqī, the cupbearer who offers to the mystic the wine of love, represents the Sufi master or God himself:

Saqī, inflame my goblet with the light of wine!
Songster, sing! The affairs of the world now agree with my pursuit!⁹

The wine of the poems is old vintage wine as it was put into storage at the beginning of creation, when God posed the question to the souls “Am I not your Lord?” (Qur. 7:172) and the souls answered in the affirmative. The memory of this day of joyous union with the beloved reverberates to the present and the wine of love poured on that day continues to flow into the goblets of the mystics as in the verse ascribed to Khvāja Muʿīn al-Dīn:

From the day of “Am I not” I have arrived, the intoxicated lover
I deem reason and sobriety impossible for myself.¹⁰

At times, the wine oozes from the eyes of the cupbearer, as in the lines by Shāh Niyāz Aḥmad Barelvī (d. 1831), a prominent Chishti master of the nineteenth century. Characteristically, he becomes dissolute in his drunkenness:

I became intoxicated from the eyes of the drunkard saqī
Goodbye, honour and reputation! Farewell, intellect and understanding!¹¹

A poetic motif often connected with intoxication is infidelity, *kufṛ*. As the corollary of intoxication, the mystic forgets himself and rejects all the religious

8 In Pakistani Punjab, Punjabi poems by Bullhe Shāh (d. 1757) and Khvāja Ghulām Farīd (d. 1901), among others, form a significant and popular part of the qawwali repertoires.

9 *Divān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 35.

10 *Kalām-i ʿIrfān Ṭarāz*, 206.

11 Niyāz 1875: 17.

virtues. Niyāz continues to describe his state, how he became a disbeliever in anything other than the beloved and his love:

I threw continence and piety under the feet of that idol
My religion is love and revelry, my sect is agitation and sighing.¹²

Although the position of Persian as the primary language of literature in Islamic South Asia has steadily diminished since the eighteenth century, the imagery of Persian poetry has carried on to the present day under the Urdu poets. Sufis have continued to write mystical wine poetry for the performance in *samā'* assemblies. Ḥasrat Ḥaidarābādī (d. 1962) glorifies drinking at the expense of religion and pairs it with the daily prayer ritual of Islam. The declaration “God is greatest” begins the prayer in the mosque and similarly, the gurgle of the flagon is the beginning for the mystic’s drinking that ultimately leads to forgetting one’s self.

Wine drinkers! Perform the prayer of self-forgetfulness!
The gurgle of flagon became the declaration of God’s greatness in the wine house.¹³

The verse introduces an important metaphoric dimension of wine imagery: the mention of self-forgetfulness refers to *fanā'*, the annihilation of the mystic’s ego in front of God. This state features among the central issues in a number of Sufi treatises although the writers seem to disagree on the precise nature of it. *Fanā'* is also the state during which the Sufis may utter ecstatic proclamations such as al-Ḥallāj’s “I am the Truth!” or behave in some eccentric way that contradicts the norms of religion.

What is noteworthy about the above verses is that the poems themselves do not present any single interpretation of the metaphors (*majāz*). During the performance in a *maḥfil-i samā'*, the responsibility of interpreting the metaphors in a mystical context is left entirely to the listeners. Some treatises have been written on the interpretation of the poetic images of Sufi poetry – perhaps the most eloquent being *Mir'āt al-Ma'ānī* (The Mirror of Meanings; Jamālī 2002) by the Indian Suhrawardī Jamālī Dihlavī (d. 1543) – but more often the Sufis encourage individual interpretation by the listeners.¹⁴ This leaves the field open for the metaphor, the key rhetorical device of Sufi poetry, to affect the listeners.¹⁵

12 Niyāz 1875: 17.

13 Ḥasrat 2002: 96.

14 See, e.g. *Favā'id al-Fu'ād*, fascicle III, *majlis* 8 (Sijzī 2007: 173–174), on the importance of finding personal connotations in poetic metaphors.

15 The metaphor is central to non-mystical poetry as well and the use of similar poetic images

The listeners would refer the metaphors to the divine reality instead of the visible reality through the process called *taḥmīl*: the wine is no longer the drink but the divine love. The *taḥmīl*, along with the effect of the music, is the central means of the participants of *samāʿ* assemblies to delve into the mystical experience.¹⁶

3. WINE IMAGERY IN POPULAR QAWWALI

Qawwali entered upon new stages of performance outside its traditional ritual context in the beginning of the twentieth century. In the early 1920s, it became an integral part of the record industry when the leading companies, HMV and the British Gramophone Company, incorporated it under the category of “Muslim devotional” in their catalogues. In order to adjust to the limitations of the recording technology and simultaneously appeal to the taste of potential consumers belonging to the emerging Muslim middle class, the musical idiom of qawwali was remoulded to some extent. Most importantly, new instruments were added to the rather austere sound world of traditional qawwali. The most important of these was the *bulbultarang*, a simple board zither with typewriter-like keys originating in Japan in the Meiji era (1868–1912). The crooning voice ideal of film music was also quickly adopted in the 1930s. Moreover, the qawwals who recorded hailed largely from the classes of urban entertainers (*mīrāsī*) who had not acquired a thorough training in classical Indian music. As a result, recorded qawwali grew apart from the traditional qawwali and, simultaneously, from North Indian classical music. (Qureshi 1992: 112–113; 1999: 73, 79)

In the 1960s, the spread of long-playing technology in South Asia made longer recordings possible. This was crucial to the development of a new style of qawwali that Qureshi (1992: 118) calls “serious popular religious qawwali” and the development of which she links with the Pakistani qawwals Ghulam Farid Sabri (d. 1994), his brother Maqbool Ahmed Sabri and their accompanists. The new style is serious because it introduces purely musical features from North Indian classical music to qawwali that are alien to both recorded and traditional qawwali. This development was taken furthest by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (d. 1997), whose performances at times bear a striking resemblance to the *khayāl* genre of classical music. Nevertheless, this style is also popular because it is meant for wide dissemination through the media of recordings and concerts, and

makes it in fact impossible to draw a line between mystical and non-mystical poems. For this reason, poems of, for example, Ghālib and Jigar Murādābādī (d. 1961), who were neither mystics nor paragons of piety, are often performed in *samāʿ* assemblies.

¹⁶ On *taḥmīl* in the writings of Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥusainī Gesudarāz (d. 1422), see Hussaini (1983: 137–138).

finally, it is religious because the lyrics are strictly Islamic, unlike, for example, in the earlier recorded qawwali that occasionally featured romantic lyrics or general humanism encompassing various religions. (Qureshi 1992: 118–119) It should be noted that the differences among the different styles of qawwali and their respective performers are not clear-cut. Several qawwals hailing from the hereditary performing lineages (e.g. Aziz Ahmad Khan Warsi) have performed in concerts and made popular recordings while keeping the *mabfil-i samā'* as the primary focus of their musical activities. Similarly, the Sabri Brothers have made their appearance in *samā'* assemblies as well as in concerts.

Although concert qawwali aims at cultivating a refined aesthetic taste through assimilation of the conventions of classical music and recorded qawwali draws its inspiration from the more popular sources, there is a notable similarity in respect to the textual content of the two. Even though Urdu and Hindi poems from the traditional qawwali repertoire occasionally find their way to the concerts, the majority of the poems performed are similar to the popular poems of recordings written in simple Urdu. These poems concentrate almost exclusively on the praise of God, the Prophet, and other saintly figures. Consequently, it is not surprising that the wine imagery belonging to the domain of lyrical poetry is encountered only rarely and that when this poetic image is used, its treatment differs from the conventions of earlier Sufi poetry.

It seems that only one theme connected to wine has persisted, namely the wine oozing from someone's eyes. The Sabri Brothers perform the following verse in introducing the listeners to one of their most popular songs, *Ajmer Ko Jānā Hai*, 'One Should Go to Ajmer':

No need to worry about wine, to be anxious for a goblet
Your glance keeps the business [of wine house] going.¹⁷

In the above verse, the content of the goblet is made explicitly clear: it is the glance of the beloved. Similarly, the next lines leave no doubts as to the fact that the wine is the Islamic doctrine of God's oneness:

The glow of light spread everywhere
Every alley of India is the envy of paradise
You have made everyone drink the goblet of oneness
Master of masters, hundreds of thousands of greetings to you!¹⁸

¹⁷ Sabri Brothers 2005, track 1.

¹⁸ Iqbal-Afzal Sabri Brothers n.d., track 2.

The song by an Indian qawwali group, the Iqbal-Afzal Sabri Brothers, is written by one of the leading vocalists, Iqbal Sabri. The verse casts *Khvāja Muʿīn al-Dīn*, also known as the ‘Master of Masters’ (*Khvāja-yi Khvājagān*), as a great missionary who spread the light of Islam in India, thus elevating the region to a rank rivalling paradise. The verse exemplifies the usage of classical poetic imagery in a contemporary context. In some poems specific to the *samāʿ* context, a saintly personage has his followers drink the cup of mystical knowledge. However, giving the goblet of Islam to drink from derives only from the nineteenth century when religions in India were affected by the activities of European missionaries and the Sufi saints acquired the qualities of successful proselytizers. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that one of the best ways to glorify a Sufi saint is to praise his ability to win hearts for Islam, a theme repeatedly exploited in popular qawwali.

The final example is taken from perhaps the most famous number of the Sabri Brothers entitled *Sāqiyā Aur Pilā*, ‘Saqi! Give more to Drink’:

I have not yet received a goblet full to the brim
Saqi! Give more, give more, give more.¹⁹

The beginning of the performance revolves around the second line of the verse. The singers elaborate on the mystic’s desire to drink more by interweaving verses from other sources into the main poem and always returning to the above line which serves as a refrain. Half way through the performance, a surprising change takes place. Thus far the wine has merely been the object of the drunkard’s desire without further explanations, but then the qawwals set to explain the different aspects of wine imagery in minute detail:

Let me receive the cup of “but God”
And let my saqi be “in the name of God”.
I will drink with gusto
If the flow [of wine] comes from Medina.
Let the eyes of the King of Medina be the goblet
And let the flagon be “bless him”.
Let there be the scent of mercy in the wine
Let there be the headiness of love’s passion.
Let the secrets of delirium be revealed to me
Let my breath repeat “O Prophet, O Prophet”.²⁰

19 Sabri Brothers 1990, track 1.

20 Sabri Brothers 1990, track 1.

In the above lines, the cup is the latter part of the Islamic creed “There is no god but God” and the formula “in the name of God” is the wine-pouring saqi. The wine is consumed only if it comes from Medina and the drunkard drinks it from the eyes of the Prophet Muhammad while the flagon for pouring the wine is the blessing formula of the Prophet. The wine has the scent of the Prophet’s mercy, not that of musk or amber, and even when the wine-bibber finally gets drunk, his tongue still calls for the Prophet. The verse efficiently denudes the metaphor of the various meanings that could be attached to it by individual listeners and makes sure that no one is tempted to misinterpret the wine of the verses.

4. SOME REASONS BEHIND THE NEW USES OF WINE IMAGERY

On the whole, the popular qawwali poetry has become extremely chaste and it has been cleansed of dubious images like wine, infidelity, and descriptions of the beloved. The main reason for this marked change is the new audience who is the target of the commercial recordings and concerts. The *mahfil-i samā’* took place in the closed circle of the Sufi shrine or *khānqāh* whereas the popular qawwali has entered the public sphere away from this relatively private reality. The new audience includes the growing middle class and, due to the availability of inexpensive recordings, also the less privileged. In this process, the popular qawwali has acquired an entirely new character. First, it has lost its connection with the Sufi ritual. Although popular qawwali is associated with Sufism and sold around the Sufi shrines, it is never used in actual *samā’* assemblies. Qawwals have adopted some popular poems for the repertoire they perform in the shrines and they have been affected by the musical style of the superstar qawwals. In the *mahfil-i samā’*, however, the choice of poetry and musical setting follow the traditional precedents. Secondly, popular qawwali has acquired the qualities of entertainment, albeit religious in nature. As entertainers, the qawwals have to take the tastes of their audiences into consideration and mould their performance to accord with them. Because of this, the poetical content of popular qawwali closely mirrors the developments that have moulded Islamic thinking in South Asia during the past century. This is not to say that contemporary Sufi poets have been immune to these changes, but in the limits of this article, it is possible to discuss only the case of popular qawwali.

The intellectual scene of South Asian Islam has seen several new developments since the late eighteenth century. Many of them are closely connected to the loss of Muslim power in India and the substitution of this power with the British colonial regime. Francis Robinson (2007: 170) has noted that the lack of stately authority shifted the emphasis from the ruler to “the caliphate of a man”

among the Muslims. In Muslim piety, this manifested as increased concentration on the individual responsibility to create an Islamic society on earth instead of contemplating the divine mysteries. In practice, this meant the emergence of several institutions dedicated to reviving the religious practice revealed in the life of the Prophet Muhammad but lost due to the absorption of local customs into Islam. The theological school of Deoband, founded in 1866, has issued fatwas demanding the rejection of these customs and Tablighi Jama'at, founded sixty years later, is dedicated to propagating this form of pure Islam to every Muslim. Representatives of both the institutions object to what they see as the excesses of Sufism, for example, the veneration of saints and the celebration of the anniversaries of their deaths, in which qawwali often has a visible role. (Metcalf 2005: xvii, xx, 157) Although the advocates of these views are unlikely consumers of popular qawwali, their emphasis on correct Islamic practice has influenced South Asian Muslims in general and this influence can be also detected in qawwali lyrics that urge the listeners to perform their daily prayers and fast during Ramadan.²¹ I believe the reluctance to use seemingly irreligious metaphors like wine or the inclination to explain the metaphor's religious significance to the listeners also stems from this attitude. Moreover, in contrast to wine imagery that every now and then comes up in popular qawwali, the motif of infidelity is entirely absent because it is even more irreconcilable with being a good Muslim than drinking wine.

A movement that has no doubt had a greater impact on the popular qawwali lyrics is *Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at* founded by Aḥmad Riḏā Khān Barelvī (d. 1921). Although the scholars sometimes view this movement as a reaction against the strict rejection of local customs by, for example, the school of Deoband, Usha Shanyal (1999: 328–329) points out that due to its systematic advocacy of Islam laden with local customs, *Ahl-e Sunnat* should be counted among the reformist movements as well. Like his counterparts in Deoband, Aḥmad Riḏā busied himself with issuing fatwas on correct religious performance. However, the content of his fatwas was rather different from theirs. He advocated the veneration of the saints and taking refuge in their capacity to act as mediators between God and human beings. His interest in the Prophet was not limited to the study of his life in order to determine the correct religious practice. Aḥmad Riḏā's vision of the Prophet was inspired by the Sufi concepts concerning his position as the first created being through whose light the rest of creation was brought into

21 It is noteworthy that many aspects of popular qawwali – e.g. stress on instrumental accompaniment, men and women sitting together at concerts, audience dancing, etc. – have given the writers affected by the Deoband school and Tablighi Jama'at enough reasons to condemn all qawwali. See, e.g. Ḥusain 1990.

existence. The Prophet was also the intercessor for the most sinful on the Day of Judgement and Muslims should cultivate a love towards him. (Shanyal 2006: 91–92) The emphasis given to the love and intercessory power of the Prophet and other saintly figures is not limited to the followers of the Ahl-e Sunnat and thus there is a wide audience for popular qawwali recordings that feature these themes.²²

The stress laid on the figure of the Prophet Muhammad – whether as the perfect example for the Muslims or an object of love endowed with the power of intercession – is an expression of the changed perception of Islamic history by the South Asian Muslims. Since the late eighteenth century, the influence of Persian culture on South Asian Islam has been downplayed in favour of the idea of Hijaz as the source of Islamic civilization. The emphasis on the life of the Prophet has been noted above. In the curricula of Islamic educational institutions, this has meant emphasizing the study of Arabic and religion and largely ignoring the rational sciences associated with Persia.²³ In the case of poetry, some authors have disparaged Persian poetry and its poetic imagery. Perhaps the sharpest critic was Muḥammad Iqbāl (d. 1938), who branded the influence of Persian culture on Islam as a major cause for the weakness of Muslims. He aimed the spear of his criticism at Ḥāfīz, arguing that his poetry only lulls the people into useless reveries and thus hinders the development of a strong Muslim society. It is interesting to note that his views on this matter were fiercely opposed by the Sufi literati and Iqbāl finally decided to drop the mention of the poet from the subsequent editions of his work *Asrār-i Kḥudī*. (Majeed 2009: 64–66; Rizvi 2002 II: 464)

Both Iqbāl and writers of popular qawwali poetry seem to distance themselves from the aesthetics of Persian poetry. However, there are discernible differences between them. Iqbāl wrote in both Persian and Urdu and was, despite his criticism, deeply affected by Persian poetry and its conventions. He used the classical images of Persian poetry, often in a way that supported his theory of selfhood. In many of his poems, Iqbāl rejects a goblet of wine instead of gulping it. This unconventional act does not stem from the poet's desire to render his poetry religiously acceptable but, as Majeed (2009: 33–34) notes, from the desire to advocate strong selfhood. This idea of Iqbāl is in stark contrast to the annihilation of the self symbolized by the wine in Sufi poetry. In popular qawwali, the eradication of wine from the lyrics stems from the desire to make these poems acceptable to the often conservative audience.

22 Although Aḥmad Rizā did not listen to qawwali, some groups influenced by Ahl-e Sunnat have embraced music as a part of their practice. Among these is the Pakistani group Minhaj-ul-Quran that organizes flamboyant qawwali events featuring the superstar qawwals. For a succinct introduction to Minhaj-ul-Quran, see Philippon 2006.

23 On the system of instruction in Deoband and associated madrasas, see Metcalf 2005: 100–110.

The change in the poetic content of a musical genre is by no means unique to qawwali. In examining the *ṭhumrī* genre in the twentieth century, Lalita Du Perron (2002: 191) notes that the intimate musical gatherings using courts and salons of courtesans as stages of performance have changed into public concerts which are largely sponsored by the middle-classes. According to Du Perron, this has also affected the lyrical content of *ṭhumrī* along with the musical idiom. The erotic lyrics have been sanitized and given expressly devotional interpretation in the Krishnaite context. A similar development is discernible in popular qawwali as the avoidance of seemingly irreligious metaphors and erotic images in favour of overtly religious and devotional motifs. Thus, the development does not seem to be connected solely to factors internal to Islamic culture but also to the wider questions concerning the sponsorship and the consumption of the musical products by the South Asian middle classes, their values and tastes.

5. CONCLUSION

In the beginning of the twenty-first century, qawwali continues to be an integral part of the Sufi gatherings in South Asia and mystical poetry is still written for these occasions in accordance with the conventions of classical Sufi poetry. In popular qawwali, however, a new set of aesthetics stemming from the tastes of the potential audiences has affected the usage of poetic images. This development is closely tied to the commercial distribution of this form of music.

The poems of popular qawwali concentrate on devotional themes exhorting people to be good Muslims, on the one hand, and praising the exemplary lives of the Prophet Muhammad and Sufi saints, on the other. The intercession and miracles of the saintly figures feature frequently in these poems, as well. When this emphasis on the Prophet of Hijaz is combined with the condemnation of Persian poetic images by the modernist poets like Iqbāl, it is not surprising that the religiously suspect motifs of lyrical Persian poems have had to give way to religiously correct themes. As I have argued above, the wine poems have disappeared from popular qawwali and when the wine imagery is utilized on rare occasions, it is explained in minute detail, as in the example from the Sabri Brothers' famous *Sāqiyā Aur Pilā* discussed above.

This tendency to explain the poems fetters the metaphor and deprives the audience of finding individual connotations in the poetry. As noted earlier, in the mystical poetry, the metaphor taken from the visible reality is meant to be referred to the spiritual reality by the listeners through the process of *taḥmīl*. Thus, the metaphor becomes a bridge between the visible and the spiritual realities and the human lover has a chance to meet the divine beloved. In popular

qawwali poetry, however, the metaphor is no longer functional and the listeners remain what they are: Muslims aspiring to become better Muslims, destitute or lost ones or sinners dependent on the transcendent creator or saintly intercession. Similarly, the transcendent God remains transcendent and the Prophet and saints remain remote ideals. In such situation, there is little possibility for the human and divine to meet and interact. The poetry loses its mystical potential and becomes strictly religious Islamic poetry.

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