WHERE LOVERS PROSTRATE: POETRY IN THE MUSICAL ASSEMBLIES OF CHISHTI SUFIS

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ABSTRACT

Affecting the listeners through a combination of poetry and music is the heart of qawwali, the genre of mystical music performed in the ritual assemblies (*maḥfil-i samāʿ*) of the Chishti Sufi order that thrives in South Asia. Mastering a wide range of poems is essential to a skilled qawwal and it is likewise important in the transmission of musical knowledge among them. On the other hand, the poems are succinct presentations of Sufi thought and have the ability to describe phenomena that fall outside the reach of the more factual prose treatises.

The poetic repertoire in qawwali accommodates a wide array of poetry. There are local variations, but there is also a core corpus of poems familiar to most qawwals and listeners. The oldest poems in the core repertoire were written in the 12th century while new ones are constantly being added. Poems by non-Sufi authors can be included as well, since a skilful qawwal has the ability to colour ambiguous poetic imagery with mystical meaning. Although most contemporary poems are written in Urdu, poetry in Persian and literary dialects of classical Hindi still retains the highest prestige. The knowledge of music and poetry is transmitted among the performing lineages orally and as a result the poems have acquired a character between the written and oral traditions.

In the *maḥfil-i samāʿ*, the performance revolves around individual poems. The thematic ordering of items from poems of praise to lyrical poems is an often voiced but seldom followed ideal. Instead, the qawwals concentrate on performing an individual poem so as to maximize its effect on the listeners. The means to achieve this aim vary according to the constitution of the audience. This article studies two representative performances of an individual poem in *maḥfil-i samāʿ*. The first one is an example of very obvious audience response that affects the shape of performance. The second example presents an intricate cluster of introductory and inserted verses used in elaborating the mystical metaphor of poverty. Later in the same performance, the qawwals rely on repeating the saint’s name as long as

it stirs the audience and makes them contribute towards the remuneration of the performers.

1. INTRODUCTION

A musical assembly of the Chishti order, *maḥfil-i samāʿ* or *majlis-i samāʿ*, provides a platform for the religiously motivated quest for divine reality and closeness with God. Several writers, scholars and Sufis alike, have chosen to belittle the importance of music in this quest and attribute to it mere instrumental value. Nevertheless, the participants are hardly immune to the aesthetic pleasure created by a combination of fine music and well-selected poems. In the context of *maḥfil-i samāʿ,* the science of music (*ʿilm-i mūsīqī*) is the domain of the qawwals, professional performers of mystical music, whereas the knowledge of Sufi tenets is prevalent among the listeners. A certain amount of acquaintance with Sufi thought and practice is required from the qawwals as well so as to successfully cater for the needs of the listeners. The listeners, by contrast, may well be ignorant of the finer points of musical theory yet still benefit from the performance of the qawwals. Pervasive familiarity with poetry, however, characterizes both the performers and listeners. For the former it is a component of their artistic skills and for the latter a medium of expressing and experiencing the divine truth they conceive to lie beyond the logical use of language.

The present article sets out to examine this particular aspect of the musical assemblies of the Chishti Sufis. I will discuss the characteristics of the poetic repertoire shared by most qawwals in South Asia. These poems, the oldest ones dating back to the 12th century, are written in Persian, Urdu and the literary dialects of archaic Hindi. Most importantly, the poems are situated between the written and oral traditions and they are recreated anew in every performance by means of introductory and inserted verses as well as prolonged repetitions. After noting the ideal of thematic ordering of poems in performance, I will devote the latter part of the article to examining two representative examples of poetry in actual *maḥfil-i samāʿ*. First, however, the role of poetry and music in the Chishti order as well as previous scholarship on the topic should be briefly considered.

2. POETRY AND MUSIC IN THE CHISHTI ORDER

The Chishti order of Sufis has a very positive attitude towards listening to music as a part of ritual practice. The order originates in the town of Chisht situated in present day Afghanistan but it has thrived in South Asia since the 13th century. The beginnings of *samāʿ* in India are popularly attributed to the desire of the order's founder in India, Khvāja Muʿīn al-Dīn (d. 1236), to preach simplified Islam to music

loving Hindus of his day.[1] It ought to be remembered, however, that already in the 11th century Abū Saʿīd ibn Abīʾl-Khair had institutionalized *samāʿ* as a part of the *khānqāh* life in Khurasan. Development of *samāʿ* from an idiosyncratic practice to a prevalent custom among Sufis can be largely attributed to his influence.[2] Since their advent from the 12th century onwards, the various Sufi orders have adapted differing stances on music in ritual practice. Some orders, like the Naqshbandiyya,[3] have rejected *samāʿ*, while the Suhrawardiyya has generally remained ambivalent. Among the orders that have embraced this practice are the Mevlevis and Chishtis.

A fourth generation shaikh of the Indian Chishtiyya, Khvāja Niẕām al-Dīn Auliyāʾ (d. 1325), and his disciples played a significant part in establishing the role of *samāʿ* in the order. Bruce B. Lawrence (1983: 83–90) notes that notable theoretical development took place among the shaikh's followers with the outcome of attributing *samāʿ* benefits that far exceed its potential dangers. Thus the practice became strongly recommended for both beginners and adepts of the Sufi way. More significant than the theoretical development was the naissance of qawwali music and flourishing of Sufi poetry, both of which intertwine in the persona of Amīr Khusro (d. 1325), a poet-musician of the sultans of Delhi and Sufi disciple of Khvāja Niẕām al-Dīn. Qawwals view Khusro as the original developer of qawwali, and performers hailing from the traditional lineages (*qavvāl bacce*) envisage themselves as heirs of Miyān Ṣāmat, a disciple of Khusro in music and the leading qawwal in the *khānqāh* of Khvāja Niẕām al-Dīn. The qawwals trace this lineage to the present through Tānras Khān (d. 1872), the court musician of the last Mughal emperor and the present musical form of qawwali owes much to Tānras Khān.[4] The musical idiom of qawwali is based on the musical conventions of North Indian classical music but it subjugates them to delivering the textual message. This textual orientation stems from the Islamic concept of the word as the primary means of religious communication (Qureshi 1972: 16). This attitude seems to combine with the more personal predilection of the early Chishtis for words over pure music. An early text produced by the order, *Favāʾid al-Fuʾād* (Sijzī 2007), the discourses (*malfūẕāt*) of Khvāja Niẕām al-Dīn, contains various passages that attribute the mystical state

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1 This explanation for the beginnings of *samāʿ* and qawwali came up repeatedly in the interviews I conducted with Sufis and qawwals during a fieldwork period in Delhi and Ajmer during the winter 2006–2007. The idea of Sufis as preachers of simplified Islam appears in the scholarly literature as well. See, e.g. Abbas 2002 and 2007.

2 On Abū Saʿīd, see Graham 1999.

3 It should be noted that while the predominant Naqshbandi sub-branch, the Mujaddidiyya, rejects *samāʿ*, another sub-branch, the Abū ʾl- ʿŪlāʾiyya accepts both dance and music. The order has a wide following in South Asia and its members, easily recognizable from their dress, are regular participants in the *ʿurs* festivities of the Chishti *dargāhs*.

4 Interviews with Muḥammad Ḥayāt (13 November 2006, Delhi) and Miʿrāj Aḥmad Niẕāmī Qavvāl (20 January 2007, Delhi).

to the power of poetry.[5] Moreover, in analysing Amīr Khusro's own writings on music, Shahab Sarmadee (1975: 263–264) notes that he laid more stress on voice and singing poetry than on pure instrumental music. Whatever the reason, qawwali stresses words over pure music. The conventions of classical North Indian music are modified so as to make clear textual delivery possible and the entire musical jargon of qawwali utilizes terms derived from poetry even when the qawwals are familiar with the musical terms.[6]

Today qawwali is heard much more than ever before. Radio broadcasts, inexpensive recordings sold around the Sufi shrines and concert performances have brought this music within the reach of a considerably wide audience. A separate style with popular devotional lyrics devoid of un-Islamic themes such as wine and infidelity has developed in recorded qawwali. In addition, the recording qawwals have adopted the crooning voice ideal and added purely musical allurements to their music. The qawwals performing on concert stages have fashioned their style to accord with the conventions of classical North Indian music.[7] This is discernible in the prevalence of lengthy improvisatory passages that in *samāʿ* assemblies are avoided in order to maintain the concentration on the text. This article focuses on the qawwali heard in the traditional setting of *maḥfil-i samāʿ* that still prevails in the context of ritual practice of the Sufi shrine (*dargāh*). Qawwali is performed daily in the courtyard of many a shrine but generally more intimate assemblies take place during the death anniversaries celebrating the 'marriage' (*ʿurs*; hence the name for the occasion) of the saint with God. At the time, musical assemblies are organized in closed locations with a limited audience. This facilitates performing a wide array of poetry without consideration for the popular taste or desire to censor the metaphors devoid of explicitly Islamic themes.

Notwithstanding the importance of *samāʿ* for the Chishti order, little has been written on the subject. Theoretical aspects of *samāʿ* in the 13th and 14th century Chishti texts have been studied by Bruce B. Lawrence in his article "The Early Chishti Approach to Samāʿ" (1983).[8] A detailed examination of the rules concerning musical assemblies and philosophy of music in the writings of Khvāja Bandanavāz Gesūdarāz (d. 1422), the great Chishti master of the Deccan, is found

5 e.g. *Favāʾid al-Fuʾād* (fascicle IV, *majlis* 20; Sijzī 2007: 246–247) expressly attributes the death of the second master of Indian Chishtiyya, Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī (d. 1235) to a verse the qawwals were singing. Fascicle IV, *majlis* 22 (Sijzī 2007: 254–255) recounts the desire of Bābā Farīd al-Dīn to listen to *samāʿ*. No qawwal was present, however, and he had to content himself with reading from a letter sent to him by another Sufi. The very first words of the letter describing the author as dust on the feet of the dervishes cause a mystical state in the shaikh. In the absence of a qawwal, mere reading of a letter with poetical images was enough to instigate a mystical state.

6 See Qureshi 1986: 61–63.

7 On the developments of qawwali in the 20th century, see Qureshi 1992 and 1999.

8 The article forms a basis for the discussion of Chishti *samāʿ* in Ernst & Lawrence 2002: 34–46.

in the monograph of Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini titled *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni-i Gisudiraz: On Sufism* (1983). Due to their historical approach neither writer discusses the execution of ritual concerts in practice.

As far as the ethnographical and ethnomusicological approach is concerned, Regula Burckhardt Qureshi's *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan. Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali* (1986) remains the classic in studying the phenomenon. The work offers a detailed analysis of the musical idiom of qawwali in the actual performance from the point of view of ethnomusicology. The writer, however, pays only scant attention to the theoretical background of *samāʿ* or to the textual content of qawwali. Robert Rozehnal's *Islamic Sufism Unbound. Politics and Piety in Twenty-First Century Pakistan* (2007a) studies the Sufi tradition stemming from Ẕauqī Shāh, a Chishti Sabiri master of the late colonial and early post-colonial period. The work offers an interesting glimpse into the practice of *samāʿ* among the disciples of this particular tradition. The picture that emerges is that of *samāʿ* as a highly systematized Sufi practice. This fits well with the shaikh's desire to defend Sufism from the attacks launched by some Muslim scholars, modernists and orientalists. The only work to specifically study poetry in the *samāʿ* context is Scott Kugle's "*Qawwali* between written poem and sung lyric, or … how a *g͟hazal* lives" (2007). The article analyses the moulding of a single poem in qawwali performance. Analysis is based on a recording and consequently it has been impossible to relate the choice of verses to the reactions of the audience. The importance of the article lies in the emphasis it lays on the separate lives of the poem in literary sources on the one hand, and in the performance on the other.

3. QAWWALI REPERTOIRE

3.1 Classifying the poems

Regula Qureshi (1986: 19–20) divides the repertoire of qawwals at the Niẕām al-Dīn shrine into four groups: first, songs specifically associated with Niẕām al-Dīn Auliyāʾ; second, Sufi classics known to Sufis and qawwals all over India; third, songs that form part of the performers' personal repertoire and fourth, songs with popular success. Categorizing the poems of the qawwali repertoire is, however, problematic because of the extreme fluidity of the repertoire.

The classification above is concerned with the repertoire of qawwals of a single shrine, but even so it does present certain problems. Categories one and two overlap. K͟hvāja Niẕām al-Dīn is one of the most famous saints in South Asia and poems linked with him and his poet-disciple Amīr K͟husro are consequently known to, and frequently performed by, most qawwals in South Asia.[9] The division

[9] On building the fame of Khvāja Niẕām al-Dīn, see Digby 2004.

is helpful, though, in discussing smaller shrines that attract limited local following. In such shrines the poems connected to and written by the saint and his followers are performed by local qawwals but are rarely heard outside the shrines. In order to avoid painting a static picture of these poems, it should be noted that sometimes poems of local renown enter the generally shared repertoire. The division into classics and personal songs can be contested as well. Most qawwals are credited with singing certain poems particularly well and performance of these items is expected from them by the audience. However, many such poems are also classics in their own right and thus commonly known among the qawwals.[10]

The fourth category, popular songs, is perhaps the most elusive. At present, popular poems are often adopted from qawwali recordings to the performances that take place in the shrine compounds. During normal days, the audience consists predominantly of regular pilgrims with little interest in or aptitude for listening to difficult poems loaded with mystical metaphors. Performing poems with popular appeal is a way to ensure a flow of monetary gifts (*naẕr*) on such occasions. The success of these poems is short-lived and new poems are adopted frequently. In case of sustained success, however, a popular poem may become a classic in its own right. The younger generation hereditary qawwals tend to perform popular songs more readily than their elders. At the Niẓ̤ām al-Dīn shrine, the younger qawwals prefer the version of *Allāh hū* made popular by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan to the more traditional *Allāh hū* by Ẓāmin ʿAlī (d. 1855). The latter version features in the repertoire of the senior members of the family. The process of adopting popular poems to qawwali performance has in all probability been the normal procedure as long as *samāʿ* has been practised in the Chishti order. Amīr Khusro was a popular poet during his life and his poems were readily accepted by qawwals. Naturally his connection with Khvāja Niẓ̤ām al-Dīn furthered his fame among the Chishtis. Popular poems also played an important part in the early 18th century when Urdu poems were added to the repertoire. Poems by two pioneers of nascent Urdu poetry, Valī Dakkanī and Sirāj Aurangābādī, were performed by qawwals already during the poets' lifetimes.[11] During the following centuries some popular poems became classics while others ceased to feature in performances. Thus, the category of popular poems is the entrance point of a poem into the commonly shared qawwali repertoire. At present, the impoverished literary standard of popular poems has rendered their entrance to the *samāʿ* proper more difficult.

The fact that qawwali poems elude classification is in itself a tangible demonstration of the extreme fluidity of the repertoire. Poems enter the repertoire and fall out of use constantly. Every qawwal has his own repertoire that depends on

[10] For an example of appropriation of a personal poem by another qawwali group, see section 4.1 below.

[11] On performing poetry in the eighteen-century Delhi, see Ziad 2007: 558–560. On Sirāj and music, see Kugle 2007: 599–600.

his education, location and mobility between shrines. The repertoire of a qawwal who hails from a traditional performing lineage and performs in major *ʿurs* festivities of the Subcontinent is considerably wider than that of a non-professional qawwal who remains attached to a local shrine. In the case of an individual qawwal, the selection of poetry varies from one *maḥfil-i samāʿ* to another in accordance with the constitution of the audience. In the core of qawwali repertoire, however, there is a group of poems that feature repeatedly in the performances of most qawwali groups on the Indian Subcontinent.[12] These poems have acquired a canonized character and they feature in the context of *maḥfil-i samāʿ*. For the purposes of the present article, division of the poems into the core repertoire and the poems of limited local fame is sufficient. In the next section I will discuss some central characteristics of this core repertoire.

3.2 Characteristics of poems in the qawwali repertoire

The core qawwali repertoire is characterized by the use of poems written in several languages as well as by mixing the poetic imageries of the poetic traditions of the respective languages. The repertoire accommodates poems by both Sufi and non-Sufi writers and most of the poems appear in the literary collections (*dīvāns*). However, once they are adopted to the qawwali repertoire and mediated orally among the performers they become situated somewhere between written and oral traditions. And, most importantly, the poems are continuously recreated through interweaving them with verses from other poems.

The core repertoire of qawwali includes poems in three languages, Persian, Hindi and Urdu.[13] Furthermore, verses in all three languages are in performance frequently mixed with each other. Among the languages Persian and Hindi hold the highest rank. This is due to their connection with the early saints of the Chishti order. *Dīvāns* are ascribed to some early Chishti shaikhs and at least one Persian poem is preserved from even those who do not have a complete *dīvān* to their name.[14] In addition, Persian classics like Rūmī, Saʿdī and Ḥāfiẓ are prominent among the poets. Until fairly recently their writings were included in the regular curriculum of the Islamic educational institutions and educated classes were intimately acquainted

12 In South Asia qawwali is heard mainly in the areas surrounding the axis Lahore-Delhi-Hyderabad (Deccan). Bengal in east and Sindh in west have their respective traditions of Sufi poetry and distinctive genres of music for performing these poems.

13 When distinguishing Hindi and Urdu as different languages in this context, I am speaking of literary dialects of classical Hindi as encountered in Hindi poetry.

14 *Dīvāns* are attributed to K͟hvājas Muʿīn al-Dīn and Quṭb al-Dīn as well as to Bū ʿAlī Shāh Qalandar. The *dīvān* of the former, *Kalām-i ʿIrfān Ṭāraz* (1992) and the latter, *Dīvān-i Bū ʿAlī Qalandar* (2005) respectively, are readily available as editions with the original Persian text and Urdu translation. In addition, the qawwali repertoire features individual poems by Bābā Farīd al-Dīn, Ṣābir ʿAlā al-Dīn and K͟hvājas Niẓām al-Dīn, Naṣīr al-Dīn Cirāg͟h Dihlī and Bandanavāz Gesūdarāz.

with them. From the point of view of qawwali, however, the most important Persian poet is Amīr Khusro, already noted above as the originator of qawwali. Although he was a court poet, his discipleship under Khvāja Niẓām al-Dīn has endeared his poems to the Chishtis and guaranteed them an uncontested place in the musical assemblies of the order.[15] Although Persian continues to be important for the Sufis, its position in Indo-Islamic culture and education has declined steadily since the 19th century. This is mirrored in less frequent poetic activity in this language. Regarding *samā'*, a major Sufi poet writing in Persian in the eve of modern period was Shāh Niyāz Aḥmad Barelvī (d. 1831). He has written some of the most famous poems in praise of the Muslim saints as well as lyrical poems celebrating the unity of existence (*vaḥdat al-vujūd*). The canon of Persian poems in qawwali repertoire has been closed apart from inclusion of individual poems written by Sufis as a token and demonstration of their learning. Despite the decrease in Persian skills, the stamp of sophistication sticks fast to the language and the more sophisticated the *maḥfil-i samā'* the higher is the proportion of Persian poems. It is noteworthy that in the present day South Asia qawwali is the sole musical form that systematically employs Persian lyrics.

The form of Hindi used in qawwali poetry is variously called *Hindavī*, *Purabī* or *Bhāshā* and it holds a rank on a par with Persian. Although the different names of the language refer to different geographical locations, the linguistic features of qawwali poems do not purely conform with any one local variant of Hindi. The linguistic model for the language of these poems appears to be the corpus of Hindi poems of Amīr Khusro. Some poems written in emulation of Khusro's model have actually become popularly attributed to the poet as recently as during the latter half of the 20th century.[16] Although the debate over the authorship of Khusro's Hindi poems continues,[17] it bears very little relevance to the discussion about the qawwali repertoire beyond the fact that Hindi poems have the ability to evoke an atmosphere consecrated by the connection with the legendary poet and his Sufi shaikh. Sufis of the Chishti order have continued to write poetry using the archaic or dialectical forms of Hindi. In addition to Khusro, Shāh Niyāz Aḥmad and Ḥasrat Ḥaidarābādī (d. 1962) occupy a central position in the qawwali repertoire. The Hindi poems connect the repertoire closely with the literary tradition of South Asia. When writing in Hindi, the poets systematically turn to using indigenous Indian poetic forms and images instead of the Persian ones. As such, the Hindi poems bear

[15] On Khusro's roles in court and *khānqāh*, see Sharma 2006: 13–36.

[16] Devos (1995: 77–80) notes that Khusro's Hindi poems *Mose naināṅ mat moṛnā maiṅ tore caran lāgī re* and *Āj badhāvā sājan ghar e maiṅ vārī re* were in reality written by Navāb Luqmān al-Daula Bahādur and Amjad Ḥaidarābādī (d. 1961), respectively. The work of Devos is a supplement to a CD by the leading qawwal of the Niẓām al-Dīn shrine, Mi'rāj Aḥmad and contains valuable information on the repertoire of a senior qawwal hailing from the lineage of Tanrās Khān.

[17] See, e.g. Nārang 1998.

great resemblance to the poems originating in the Sant and Bhakti movements as well as to the folk genres such as *bārahmāsā*. A few poems by the Sant poet Kabīr and the Krishna *bhakta* Mīrābāī are performed by the qawwals. In addition, Sufi poets have also dwelled on Krishnaite themes in their poems.

It should be noted that in the Chishti circles of Pakistan the languages Punjabi and Siraiki hold a rank similar to that of Hindi. The connection with the 19th- and 20th-century Chishti mystics, Khvāja Ghulām Farīd (d. 1901) and Mihr ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1937), has hallowed these languages. Poems by the earlier mystics Sulṭān Bāhū (d. 1691) and Bullhe Shāh (d. 1757), both popularly connected with the Qadiriyya, have become a popular standard in the performances given by Pakistani qawwals. The need to strengthen the cultural identity of post-partition Pakistan has contributed significantly to the popularity of these writers.[18] Poems in Punjabi and Siraiki are, however, confined to the repertoires of qawwali groups based in Karachi and Pakistani Punjab. In contrast, they are rarely heard in the Indian shrines.

Urdu, the lingua franca of the present day South Asian Muslims, is the most recent entrant to the qawwali repertoire. As a medium of poety, Urdu gained momentum at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries in the imperial cities of Aurangabad and Delhi. As was noted above, Urdu poems were performed by qawwals already in the early 18th century. Hindi written in Perso-Arabic characters had by then become a standardized expression of mystical poetry and an elemental constituent of qawwali repertoire. Urdu would have been a natural part in the continuum towards a more Persianized version of the language. It was the eclipse of Persian in the 19th century that made Urdu the preferred language of Sufi poets. The most important among them are Niyāz, who has written in all three languages of the qawwali repertoire, Bedam Shāh Vāriṣī (d. 1936) and Kāmil Ḥaidarābādī (d. 1976).

Although it appears that Urdu poems were adapted to the qawwali repertoire fairly early, a certain uneasiness still lingers around the language. Urdu has not achieved a status that would equal that of Persian and Hindi in the *samāʿ* assemblies of the Chishti order. Rozehnal (2007a: 221) notes that Urdu poems are not allowed in the musical assemblies of Zauqī Shāh and his *khalīfas*. Furthermore, as recently as in the early 1970s a group attempting to sing Urdu verses was made to leave the principal *samāʿ* assembly of the *ʿurs* festivities in Ajmer. (Vāriṣ Ḥusain Muʿīnī, 11 February 2007, Ajmer) As Qureshi (1986: 188) notes, the incident was partly due to the newly invested *dīvān's* desire to demonstrate his power over his predecessor who had allowed singing in Urdu. Nevertheless, the incident also reveals the ease with which Urdu verses can be dismissed in favour of Persian and Hindi. The position of Urdu is discernible also in a collection of poems that was published in 1935 to cater for the needs of participants of Chishti *samāʿ*. The collection is titled *Naghmāt-i Samāʿ* (Nūr al-Ḥasan 1935) and it was compiled by a certain Sufi

[18] On Khvāja Ghulām Farīd in post-partition Pakistan, see Shackle 2006.

from Sahaswan (Uttar Pradesh) called Nūr al-Ḥasan on the instigation of "lords of the prayer mat".[19] The work presents a wide array of possible texts for qawwali performance, all of them in Persian.[20] However, this does not indicate the prevalence of Persian poems in *samā ʿ* assemblies; on the contrary, the compiler states that his object is to preserve Persian poetry from oblivion among both the qawwals and listeners. (Nūr al-Ḥasan 1935: iii–iv) The reason for the inferior position of Urdu does not, however, lie in the language itself or the poetical style of Urdu poems, but in the lack of connection with saintly writers. Urdu is a language of poets while Persian and Hindi are languages of saints.

This much said, it should be noted that the qawwali repertoire is remarkable in its readiness to accommodate poems of non-Sufi as well as Sufi poets.[21] In *Naghmāt-i Samā ʿ* about one-fourth of the poems are written by persons not primarily known as Sufis. Among them are Persian poets (e.g. Ibn Yamīn, Fighānī), poets hailing from Mughal circles (e.g. Makhfī), and great masters of the so-called *sabk-i hindī,* 'Indian style' (e.g. Faiẓī, ʿUrfī). The proportion of non-mystics is even higher – roughly one third – in another collection of qawwali poetry, *Surūd-i Rūḥānī* (Mi ʿrāj 1998). The work is a collection of 252 poems in Persian, Urdu and Hindi and it has been compiled by a senior most *qavvāl bacce*, Mi ʿrāj Aḥmad Niẓāmī Qavvāl. The collection includes essentially the poems of his father's repertoire while Mi ʿrāj Aḥmad himself performs some additional poems (Françoise Delvoye, personal communication). The background of the family in Hyderabad before migration to Delhi in the 1960s is mirrored in the relatively high proportion of Hyderabadi poets in the collection. Otherwise, the majority of the poems feature in the core qawwali repertoire.

For the most part, the non-mystic writers in *Surūd-i Rūḥānī* are classics of Urdu poetry. This is hardly surprising since Urdu poetry has adapted much of its imagery from Persian poetry. In the twelfth century Sufis writing in Persian adapted the imagery of profane love poetry in describing divine love. Later, even non-Sufis embraced the conventions of mystical writers, which resulted in an amalgamation of the levels of metaphorical (*majāzī*) and real (*ḥaqīqī*) love. The imagery of Persian poetry was transported to Urdu and the mystical tinge of Urdu poetry was only accentuated through the connection of several 18th-century poets with Islamic mysticism. The Deccani poet who resided in Delhi, Valī Dakkanī (d. 1707) had close

[19] The only information on Nūr al-Ḥasan available to me is his residency in Sahaswan, *sayyid* status and initiation into the Chishtiyya-Sabiriyya and Naqshbandiyya-Fazl-i Rahmaniyya *silsilas*. Dedication of the book to ʿAlā ʾal-Dīn Ṣābir seems to indicate the compiler's preference for the former link.

[20] The collection includes 720 Persian ghazals and 43 quatrains.

[21] The division of poets into Sufis and non-Sufis is highly problematic and only tentative. I have used the formal ties with a Sufi order or a widespread reputation of being a mystic as the determining factor. Thus, for example Ghālib and Mīr are not reckoned mystical writers. Meanwhile, Ḥāfiẓ and Sa ʿdī are in South Asia generally considered Sufis and consequently I have counted them among mystical writers.

contacts with the Suhrawardis in Ahmedabad and Naqshbandis in Delhi (Schimmel 1975: 153). Sirāj Aurangābādī (d. 1763), also of Deccani origin, was a disciple of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Chishtī (Kugle 2007: 599). From among the Delhi poets, Khvāja Mīr Dard (d. 1785) was an heir to the mystical tradition of his father, the Naqshbandi master Muḥammad Nāṣir ʿAnbalīb (Schimmel 1975: 170). In the case of some major Urdu poets who themselves were not practising mystics the channel of acquiring knowledge of Sufism is well demonstrated. Mīr Taqī Mīr (d. 1810) was a son of a mystic and lived in a household frequented by his father's disciples. Mīr himself did not claim to be a Sufi but many of his poems bear a mystical tone. (Islam & Russell 2004: 207)[22] Among the closest friends of Mirzā Asad Allāh Khān Ghālib (d. 1869) and Jigar Murādābādī (d. 1961), neither of whom was celebrated for an exactly pious lifestyle, were Sufis Ghulām Naṣīr al-Dīn Kāle Miyāṅ (executed in the aftermath of the 1857–1858 uprising),[23] the grandson of Maulānā Fakhr al-Dīn, and the Sufi poet Aṣghar Gondavī (d. 1936) respectively. (Green 2006: 94–95; Matthews, Shackle & Husain 1985: 124) In the case of Jigar, his alleged repentance before passing away has sometimes been voiced as an argument for the mystical tone of his poetry. The inclusion of Jigar's Persian poems in *Naghmāt-i Samāʿ* almost thirty years prior to his demise, however, speaks against this argument. I believe Muḥammad Aḥmad Vāriṣī, a major exponent of traditional qawwali, points to the factual reason for the prevalence of mystical imagery in stating that the knowledge of ideas and practices of Sufism was not confided to closed circles of Muslim mystics. Instead, it was widespread among the educated classes, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. (Muḥammad Aḥmad, 13 November 2006, Delhi)

The Indian Sufi tradition has generated manuals on the interpretation of ambiguous poetic imagery.[24] In general, however, the responsibility of interpretation is left to the individual listeners.[25] In a *maḥfil-i samāʿ*, the context created by the musical genre and setting of the assembly play an important role in steering the understanding of ambiguous imagery from temporal to mystical. Qawwali is connected to Sufi aspirations of experiencing the divine reality and the entire *maḥfil-i samāʿ* is regulated by a strict behavioural code (*adab*) which aims at enabling the undisturbed listening of the audience. The importance of the

22 All the Urdu poets mentioned in this paragraph are performed in Chishti *samāʿ*, contrary to Kugle's (2007: 599) claim that Valī and Mīr are never performed in qawwali due to their devotion to outer forms of love without inner significance.

23 On Ghulām Naṣīr al-Dīn, see Khan 2001: 312–314.

24 The most eloquent of these is perhaps Jamālī's (d. 1542) *maṣnavī Mirʾāt al-Maʿānī* (Jamālī 2002). See also Orsini 2006 on *Ḥaqāʾiq-i Hindī*, a treatise on the imagery of Hindi poems, by ʿAbd al-Vāḥid Bilgramī (d. 1608).

25 The individual interpretation is encouraged, e.g. in *Favāʾid al-Fuʾād* (fascicle III, *majlis* 8; Sijzī 2007: 173–174), where Khvāja Niẓām al-Dīn declares that everyone has to find out the connotations of poetry for himself. He then describes the ecstatic states generated by poetry in Bābā Farīd al-Dīn and Bahāʾ al-Dīn Zakariyā and ends his account by stating that no one else knows what the verses denoted to the saints and what they obtained from these verses.

musical idiom becomes evident in comparing the performances of a single poem by qawwals, on the one hand, and ghazal singers, on the other. In the ghazal genre of singing, the primary objective is creation of an aesthetically refined atmosphere that projects a romantic and even sensuous mood onto the poems. In qawwali the musical genre's association with Sufism and profuse combining of verses from different poems colour even profane poems with a hue of Sufi themes.[26] In addition to ghazal singing, the lyrics of the *ṭhumrī* and *dādrā* genres are very similar to the Hindi poems of the qawwali repertoire.[27]

The majority of qawwali poems appear in the *dīvāns* of their respective authors. Nevertheless, upon their introduction into the qawwali repertoire the poems' character may transform radically. The two major collections of qawwali poetry mentioned above, *Naghmāt-i Samāʿ* and *Surūd-i Rūḥānī*, are extremely important in discussing this aspect of the qawwali repertoire, since they record the poems in the very form they are performed. These collections are at the intersection of oral and written traditions, representing an orally transmitted corpus of poems derived from written sources.

A conspicuous feature of the poems in both collections is that they are generally abridged. The qawwals rarely perform more than five or six verses out of a total number that may amount as many as twenty. This is reflected in both collections. For example, all the poems by Ḥāfiẓ include an average of four to six verses in the collections while in the *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ* (1972) the same ghazals generally consist of eight to twelve verses. It is tempting to think that the extracted verses would be those apparently directed to the poet's royal patron, praising him and hoping for his beneficence.[28] However, among the verses that are absent in the qawwali collections there are passages that could very well be read as haunting expressions of Sufi ideas. This seems to hold true in the case of all the poems of the qawwali collections I have managed to trace to the *dīvāns* of various poets. I believe this seemingly arbitrary selection of verses should be traced to actual *maḥfil-i samāʿ* during which qawwals have conceived of certain verses as suitable for the occasion or the *mīr-i maḥfil*, 'the head of the assembly', has directed them to omit some verses. Subsequently these verses have been passed orally on to the next generation of qawwals, which has then resulted in the generation of a standardized performance version. The role of oral transmission is indicated by the fact that the older the poem the greater the difference between the literary source and the qawwali version. Thus, the 20th-century Urdu poems in *Surūd-i Rūḥānī* contain all the verses even if they may be abridged in the performance. In analysing the differences between the literary and performed versions of the poems one should also bear in mind that, especially in

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26 See section 4.2 below for an example of turning a romantic poem into a mystical one.

27 For a selection of mystical *ṭhumrīs* and *dādrās*, see *Dīvān-i Bedam*: 129–147.

28 On the panegyrical element in Ḥāfiẓ' poems, see Meisami 2005: 335–342.

the case of Indian Sufi authors, the poems may have entered the qawwali repertoire before they were codified in the *dīvāns*.

The analysis of the qawwali repertoire should not be limited exclusively to the textual sources, however. In addition to different readings found in a *dīvān* and a collection of qawwali poetry, various qawwals perform mutually divergent versions of a single poem, employing different readings and verses not to be found in the *dīvāns*. Several Persian poems of Khusro differ radically in performance from the literary sources and versions of other qawwals.[29] Major distinctions are also apparent in the poems of Maulānā Rūmī, variously attributed to Rūmī himself or to Shams Tabrezī. Only a few of his poems performed by qawwals are found in the standard Iranian edition of his collected poems, *Dīvān-i Kulliyāt-i Shams Tabrezī*. More often a poem of the qawwali repertoire includes one to four verses that appear in the standard *dīvān* while the remaining verses are unique to the performed version. It is not unusual that the poem bears no resemblance, such as the common *radīf* and theme, to any ghazal in the Iranian collection. The traces of oral transmission are even stronger – and perhaps deliberately preserved – in the case of Hindi poems. The corpus of Hindi poems attributed to Khusro is extremely variegated and the various readings have been affected by the dialectal background of qawwals hailing from different locations in India and Pakistan. Research on the origins of qawwali poems and the circumstances of their entry into the repertoire would require extensive study of the literary sources and interviews of senior qawwals with a long experience of performing is *samā ʿ* assemblies. In addition, examination of the mechanics of adopting poems into the qawwali repertoire in the present day context would offer valuable insights into the topic. This enquiry is, however, outside the scope of the present study. Instead, I will now turn to the poetry as it is performed by qawwals in the actual *maḥfil-i samā ʿ*.

4. POETRY IN QAWWALI PERFORMANCE

4.1 Thematic ordering of the poems

In a *maḥfil-i samā ʿ*, ordering the poems thematically is a widely recognized principle. The qawwals ideally open the performance with a poem praising God (*ḥamd*) and poems in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (*na ʿt*), his family and Muslim saints (*manqabat*). The latter poems normally sing the virtues of ʿAlī, the first link after the Prophet in most Sufi *silsilas*, and saints of the Chishti order, ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī being a single exception. This order replicates the *silsila* transmitting knowledge and love from the divine source to the present day disciples. The *qaṣīda*-type poems of praise are followed by lyrical poems, mainly ghazals and *gīts*, on a wide range

[29] For an example of one of these poems, see section 4.3 below.

of themes. To intensify the effect of the poems on the audience, the qawwals would begin with poems describing the lover's desolation and separation from the beloved (*firāq*). Continuing with depictions of the beloved's cruelty towards the poor lover they would finally proceed to poems describing the joyous union with the beloved (*viṣāl*). Poems on unity of existence (*vaḥdat al-vujūd*) are often a corollary of the poems on union that describe the disappearance of the lover into the existence of the beloved.

Thematic order is a topic that keeps coming up in studying Chishti *samā ʿ* and qawwali. During my interviews, most Sufis and qawwals referred to the thematic order as the most important governing principle of the *samā ʿ* assembly. In addition, the poems in *Surūd-i Rūḥānī* are arranged according to their themes. *Naghmāt-i Samā ʿ* follows the traditional convention of alphabetical order by the *radīf*. Nonetheless, the essay attached to the collection, *Majlis-i Uns* ('An Assembly of Intimacy'), advises the performance of poems in thematic order. (Nūr al-Ḥasan 1935: 466)[30] In his study of the followers of Ẕauqi Shāh in modern Pakistan and Malaysia, Robert Rozehnal documents an approach to the Chishti *samā ʿ* that is very carefully construed so as to replicate different states and stations in the mystic's path. He specifically notes the importance of thematic ordering of the poems in this process and emphasizes the pronounced role of the shaikh supervising the assembly in directing the qawwals' poetic choices. (Rozehnal 2007a: 219–222)

The full range of the themes mentioned above is normally covered only in small *maḥfils* where only one qawwali group performs. However, most assemblies accommodate performances of more than one group and this poses a problem: should every qawwali group cover all the themes or should the group pick up from where the previous one had finished. Limitations in the allotted performing time make the first approach impossible while the qawwals' wish to perform their specialities anticipated by the audience thwarts adhering to the second. Furthermore, the strict observance of the thematic order is seldom in accord with the economic interests of the qawwals. A lyrical poem at the beginning of the *maḥfil* may evoke more enthusiasm among the listeners than a long series of poems of praise, and thus ensure the flow of *naẕr*, the small monetary gifts offered to the *mīr-i maḥfil* that provide for the qawwals.

Notwithstanding the ideal of the thematic ordering, only two poems have fixed places in the musical assemblies of the Chishtiyya. These are the *qaul*, *Man kuntu maulā*, and *rang*, *Āj rang hai rī māṅ*. The former is a hadith set to music by Amir K͟husro[31] and the latter is a Hindi *gīt* by K͟husro as well. It evokes the imagery of playing with coloured powders and water during the Holī festival. These poems

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[30] A partial English translation of *Majlis-i Uns* based on the 1972 Karachi edition of *Naghmāt-i Samā ʿ* is found in Ernst 1999: 105–117.

[31] The correct form of the hadith is *man kuntu maulāhu fa- ʿaliyyun maulāh*. The pronominal suffix is perhaps forgotten since it is normally pronounced only as *-h* in singing.

tend to be performed immediately before or after the *fātiḥa*[32] in assemblies attached to the *ʿurs* rituals of the saints. In the Niẓām al-Dīn shrine the *fātiḥa* normally precedes the *maḥfil* and the poems open the assembly. In Ajmer, for instance, the *fātiḥa* follows the assembly and the *rang* is performed in the last place. Moreover, the *rang* is sometimes coupled with a Hindi *gīt* praising ʿAlī instead of the more regular Arabic *qaul*. *Maḥfils* that lack the connection with the *fātiḥa* often omit both the poems and qawwals are fairly free to choose the poems they deem suitable for the occasion.

The following poems were performed in a *maḥfil* organized during the *ʿurs* of Amir Khusro at Khvāja Hall (9 November 2006, Delhi). The functions at Khvāja Hall are presided over by Khvāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī Ṣānī, the son of Khvāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī (d. 1955), a Sufi shaikh of the late colonial period who combined reformist thought and strong advocacy of traditional Chishti Sufism in his career.[33] The qawwals sit opposite the tomb of the latter while his son takes the central place in the audience, in the front row facing the Kaʿba. Although the tomb of Khvāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī occupies the place of the *mīr-i maḥfil* opposite the performers, the factual head of the assembly is very much his son. The front rows are crowded by the disciples in this particular *silsila*, among them classical musicians of the Delhi *gharānā*. The *maḥfils* at Khvāja Hall are frequented by literati and scholars as well and as a result, the audience can be very demanding and difficult to stir. Muḥammad Aḥmad Vāriṣī, as an heir to the court qawwals of Rampur and an expert in North Indian art music, was a natural choice for opening the *maḥfil* with a discerning audience.

I Muḥammad Aḥmad Vāriṣī and his party
(two and half hours)

1. *naghma* (an instrumental prelude)
2. *Ārzū dāram ki mihmān-at kunam* (a Persian ghazal by Rūmī)
3. *Ras būndān barse* (a Hindi *manqabat* by Khusro)
4. *Ba-sarad ki juz sar-i zulf-i to ba-sar-am sar-i digar-e na shud* (an anonymous Persian ghazal)
5. *Kis se pūcheṅ ham ne kahāṅ vuh cehra-yi roshan dekhā hai* (an Urdu ghazal by Taskīn)
6. *Na-mī-dānam ki ākhir cūn dam-i dīdār mī-raqṣam* (a Persian ghazal by Khvāja ʿUṣmān Hārūnī)
7. *Khabar-am rasīd im-shab ki nigār khvāhī āmad* (a Persian ghazal by Khusro)

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32 The ritual including the recitation of prescribed Qurʾanic passages, the *silsila* chart and a *duʿā* is, in the Indo-Muslim culture, commonly referred to by the name of the first sura of the Qurʾan.

33 On Khvāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī, see Hermansen 2001.

II Second group (forty minutes)	8. *Kaunsā ghar hai ki e jān nahīṅ kāshāna tirā* (an Urdu *ḥamd* by Bedam) 9. *Sadad barshān-i to ʿālam-panāhī* (an Urdu *manqabat* in praise of Khvāja Niẓām al-Dīn) 10. *E dil bi-gīr dāman-i sulṭān-i auliyā ʾ* (a Persian *manqabat* in praise of Husain by Niyāz) 11. *Al-salām e haẓrat-i makhdūm ṣābir al-salām* (a Persian *manqabat* in praise of ʿAlā ʾ al-Dīn Ṣābir by Niyāz)
III Third group (ten minutes)	12. *Zabān khāmosh hai allāh kī takvīn ke āge* (an Urdu *ḥamd*)

The function was opened with a short recitation from the Qurʾan.[34] It is important to note that the recitation of the Qurʾan or *fātiḥa* is not executed by the qawwals but by the *mīr-i maḥfil* or his assistant.[35] The preliminary rituals completed, it is the qawwals' turn to start their recital. The first item, as usual, is the *naghma*, an instrumental prelude played by the portable harmonium to the accompaniment of the percussion instruments, *ḍholak* and tabla. According to Qureshi, the *naghma* originates in the assemblies of a 16th century shaikh ʿAbd al-Quddūs Gangohī. Its rhythm and melody were originally derived from the *ẕikr* formula *allāh hū*.[36] Melodically the *naghma* either forms an independent whole or follows the melody of the song it precedes. *Naghmas* are extremely diverse and the sole overarching feature is the acceleration of the rhythm and rise of the pitch into the upper register towards the end. The *naghma* lasts only few minutes and ends abruptly. (Qureshi 1986: 45) The *naghma* of Muḥammad Aḥmad is an exemplar of *naghma-yi quddūsī* and the beats of the *ẕikr* are easily discernible. It should be stressed that the *naghma* is the only instrumental item in Chishti *samāʿ*. The rest of the performance consists exclusively of sung poetry. The unimportance of the prelude is discernible also in the fact that it precedes only the first item of the *maḥfil*. In the case of several groups performing consecutively, all may begin their turn with a *naghma*. This is, however, optional, as in the present assembly in which only Muḥammad Aḥmad performs the prelude.

The listeners have taken their places during the prelude and Muḥammad Aḥmad begins with two introductory verses. The requirement of starting with poems of praise is met with a single quatrain while the second introductory verse moves the focus to the theme of longing for the beloved, thus leading to the first item, a

[34] Avery (2004: 177) notes that framing the *samāʿ* with Qurʾanic recitation is already mentioned by Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 1126) as a way to emphasise the devotional atmosphere.

[35] On the role of qawwals in the shrine context and Sufi hierarchy, see Qureshi 1986: 96–98.

[36] The *ẕikr* beats in qawwali are rather indistinct when compared with the Mevlevi ritual music which derives its rhythm directly from *ẕikr*. In some compositions the voiced *ẕikr* is actually paired with the drumbeats.

poem by Maulānā Rūmī.[37] The second and sixth items are requested by the *mīr-i maḥfil*, while the rest are selected by the qawwals. All the poems are lyrical in nature, except the Hindi *manqabat* attributed to Khusro. It is difficult to detect any systematic development in the themes of the poems. Rūmī's poem describes longing, anonymous ghazal the wish to dedicate oneself to the beloved, poems by Khvāja ʿUs̱mān and Khusro anticipate the meeting of lovers while Taskīn's poem concentrates on the search for the beloved.

In contrast to Muḥammad Aḥmad, the second group performs exclusively poems of praise. Their musical skills and command over a wide repertoire of poems, especially in Persian, are considerably inferior when compared to the first group. This leads to a certain degree of insecurity and consequently to a very safe choice of poems. The first poem, a *ḥamd* by Bedam, is a speciality of Iftikhār Aḥmad Amrohavī and his party. They were not, however, yet present in Delhi during the *maḥfil* and another group took over the poem that is sure to cause a favourable response among the listeners. The remaining three poems are not novel choices either but altogether they are recognized as good poems. A *manqabat* for the eponymous Khvāja Niẓām al-Dīn is appropriate for an assembly of a prominent shaikh of the Chishtiyya-Nizamiyya *silsila*. The audience is also likely to appreciate the two Persian *manqabats* of Niyāz because of their language and Sufi author. When the qawwals asked for permission to perform a few poems of Shāh Niyāz, Khvāja Ḥasan S̱ānī even joked at their expense saying, what is the need to ask for permission when singing poems by such a notable mystic? Predictably the audience responds favourably to the performance. Their enthusiasm is, however, much milder than earlier. The third group is allotted time only for a single song with a very popular type of lyrics. The audience remains somewhat indifferent and it is not surprising that the *mīr-i maḥfil* chooses to close the assembly with a *duʿā* after their performance.

The arrangement of poems according to their themes seems to be an often voiced but seldom followed ideal. The pronounced emphasis on the thematic development in the Sufi lineage studied by Rozehnal may stem from the desire of the order's shaikhs to demonstrate both the orthodoxy and rationality of Sufism. Regulated performance and strict ritualistic order of poems both serve the purpose of separating *samāʿ* from musical entertainment, on the one hand, and presenting it as a sophisticated technique for religious self-development, on the other. However, in most of the assemblies I have observed, every sung poem is treated as an item of performance independent from the other items. The Chishti *samāʿ* appears much less structured than Rozehnal's (2007b: 657) characterization of it as "first and foremost a pedagogical tool" would imply. Studying the structure of an individual

[37] The poem is variously attributed to Shams Tabrez (*Naghmāt-i Samāʿ*) and Rūmī (*Surūd-i Rūḥānī*). Only one of its verses is found in *Kulliyāt-i Dīvān-i Shams*, as the *maqṯaʿ* verse of ghazal number 1665.

performance item thus becomes essential to understanding the dynamics of Chishti *samā ʿ*.

4.2 Giving mystical meaning to ambiguous images

The following example is taken from the *maḥfil* already studied above. The ghazal, written by Taskīn Quraishī, is not a typical choice for a mystical concert, which only contributes to the novelty of the selection. The poem revolves around the romantic theme of search for the beloved and self-abnegating fidelity of the lover. It was made famous in the 1960s by the exponent of ghazal singing, Begam Akhtār, but Muḥammad Aḥmad's performance results in a remarkably different version.[38] The role of introductory verses in colouring the interpretation of the poem is evident in the example.

The first *rubā ʿī* in Urdu	*ik din vuh mil gae the sar-i rah-guzar kahīṅ* One day I met him on the road somewhere
	phir dil ne baiṭhne na diyā ʿumr bhar kahīṅ Afterwards the heart did not let me nestle anywhere for the rest of my life
The second *rubā ʿī* in Persian	*hec cīz-e khvud ba-khvud cīz-e na shud* No thing became something by itself
	hec āhan khvud ba-khvud tegh-e na shud No iron became a sword by itself
	maulavī hargiz na shud maulā-yi rūm Maulā of Rūm did not become a master of knowledge
	tā ghulām-i shams tabrezī na shud Until he became a slave of Shams of Tabrez
Return to first *rubā ʿī*	*ik din vuh mil gae the sar-i rah-guzar kahīṅ* One day I met him on the road somewhere

[38] Begam Akhtār's version is found, for example, on Begum Akhtar: *A Journey. Her Greatest Collection Ever*, vol. I & II published by Saregama India in 2001 (vol. 1, track 9).

Khvāja Ḥasan Ṣānī's comment

There is a verse in the noble Qur ʾan which Maulānā Rūmī has read in this connection. It is said in the sacred Qur ʾan that God most high had created the souls before making the bodies, and He asked a question from all the souls: "*A lastu bi-rabbi-kum?* Am I not your Lord?" Then all the souls, every soul answered: "Without a doubt you are our Lord." Now they said "*Balā!*" Ḥaẓrat Niẓām al-Dīn used to say that the gratification (*luṭf*) we experience in music and the gratification we experience in raga, it is that voice of God. That voice the souls heard "*A lastu bi-rabbi-kum?*" was so harmonious voice that the souls experienced *vajd*. And also today, when one experiences *vajd*, he cherishes that memory, those words of God. Along with this notion, also this meaning came forth, that there are as many ragas as there are souls. He [Khvāja Niẓām al-Dīn] said that every soul heard that voice in a different raga, and about himself he said that he heard that voice in *pūrabī* raga. Along with this it is also said – Ḥaẓrat Maḥbūb-i Ilāhī did not say this, others said – that when one hears the voice, one also starts searching for a vision. And all quest for beauty, all search for attractiveness, is fundamentally search for that radiant beautiful face, God's face. In the search, one does not find full beauty, perfect beauty, if He does not manifest Himself. Now, let us hear.

Return to the first *rubā ʿī*

ik din vuh mil gae the sar-i rah-guzar kahīṅ
One day I met him somewhere on the road

phir dil ne baiṭhne na diyā ʿumr bhar kahīṅ
Afterwards the heart did not let me nestle anywhere for the rest of my life.

The third *rubā ʿī* in Urdu

azal meṅ jo ṣadā maiṅ ne sunī thī kaif o mastī meṅ
The voice I had heard in pre-eternity, intoxicated and elated

vahī āvāz ab tak sun rahā hūṅ sāz-i hastī meṅ
That same voice I am hearing even now in the lute of being.

The fourth *rubā ʿī* in Urdu

tumhāre hī karam se merī hastī ho gaī hastī
Due to your kindness, my being became being

yaqīnan maiṅ nahīṅ hūṅ tū hī tū hai merī hastī meṅ
Surely, I am not but only you are in my being.

The fifth *rubāʿī* in Urdu	*merā īmān ghārat kar diyā ek but kī naẕaroṅ ne* Glances of an idol spoiled my faith *usī kāfir kā jalva dekhtā hūṅ apnī hastī meṅ* Now I see the manifestation of that unbeliever in my own being.
The first verse of the Urdu ghazal	*kis se pūcheṅ ham ne kahāṅ vuh cihra-yi roshan dekhā hai* From whom should I ask where I have seen that luminous face *maḥfil maḥfil ḍhūṅḍh cuke haiṅ gulshan gulshan dekhā hai* I have already searched from soirée to soirée, seen many a rose garden.
The second verse of the Urdu ghazal	*kis ko dekheṅ kis ko na dekheṅ phūl bhī haiṅ kaliyāṅ bhī magar* Whom to see, whom not to see, there are flowers and buds; however *jis ne lagāī āṅkh usī ko dil kā dushman dekhā hai* Who has set his eyes only on him, has seen enemy of heart in them.
The third verse of the Urdu ghazal	*rang-i bahār-i ṣubaḥ-i gulistāṅ kyā dekhe vuh dīvāna* Would the frenzied one see the colour of spring in the rose garden's morning? *jis kī naẕar ne ek hī gul meṅ sārā gulshan dekhā hai* He, whose eyes have seen the entire rose bed in just one rose?
The fourth verse of the Urdu ghazal	*ahl-i vafā kī khūn kī chīṅṭeṅ dūr tak uṛ kar jātī haiṅ* Sprinkle of blood of the faithful reaches far *merā taṛapnā dekhne-vāle apnā hī dāman dekhā hai* Oh onlooker, seeing my agony, you have seen only your own hem.

Muḥammad Aḥmad begins with introductory verses. As the custom is, he performs the verses in recitative without rhythmical accompaniment. The introductory verses are indiscriminately called *rubāʿī*, quatrain, after the most common poetic form used in introducing a poem in qawwali performance. Other poetic forms are used as well, couplet being perhaps the most frequent one. In prefacing *gīts* and *kāfīs* the *dohās*, Hindi or Punjabi couplets, are often employed. *Rubāʿī* has a twofold

purpose. First, it prepares the ground for the main item and tunes the listeners to it. In *maḥfils* that feature several qawwali groups the requirement for the thematic sequence of poems can be met through the introductory verses. In this way, the qawwals can cover the praise of God, the Prophet and the saints within a few verses and then move on to the lyrical love poems.

Concerning the second function of *rubāʿī*, Qureshi (1986: 195–196) notes that introductory verses offer the qawwals an opportunity to test the listeners' reactions to different languages and themes. In an interview Muḥammad Aḥmad related (13 November 2006, Delhi) that with the more cultured Sufi listeners he usually begins with Persian verses, and if they are not received with enthusiasm he proceeds to performing verses in commonly understood Urdu and Hindi. In addition to the language, he is able to decide the most appropriate theme. This function of *rubāʿī* becomes evident in the case of *farmāyish*, a listener's request for a particular poem. In such a case, the qawwals seldom perform introductory verses, since the favourable reaction is guaranteed by fulfilling the request. Both functions of the *rubāʿī* are discernible in the present example.

Muḥammad Aḥmad repeats the lines of the Urdu couplet several times in leisurely pace and is joined in improvisations by the second leading vocalist. The entire qawwali group seldom participates in singing the *rubāʿī*s. The audience responds with appreciative gestures[39] but seems to be waiting for something more. In order to stir them, Muḥammad Aḥmad switches into Persian and performs a *rubāʿī* of Rūmī that belongs to his specialities.[40] The verse describes the need of a mystic for the spiritual guide and the latter's transformative power. In Rūmī's case the company of and eventual separation from Shams Tabrez kindled an inextinguishable flame in him and made him one of the most productive poets the Islamic culture has ever known. The Persian quatrain effectively colours the Urdu couplet, connecting the unsettling meeting with an anonymous person with the meeting of Rūmī and Shams Tabrez and, by extension, with the meeting of a disciple and shaikh. This experience was shared by most listeners who were disciples in the Chishtiyya-Nizamiyya *silsila*.

The audience is enthralled with the Persian verse. Upon completing the *rubāʿī* Muḥammad Aḥmad returns to the Urdu couplet. At this point, however, Khvāja Ḥasan Ṣānī interrupts commenting on the primordial covenant between the souls and God (*mīṣāq*). The idea is affected by Neo-Platonism and its Qurʾanic basis, mentioned by Khvāja Ḥasan Ṣānī, is found in the *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf* (7:172). According to a number of Sufi writers, the innermost secret in the human beings is the memory

[39] These include conventionally offering *nazr* to the *mīr-i maḥfil* and admiring exclamations such as *Vāh vāh!* ('Wow wow!'), *Kyā bāt!* ('What a thing!') and *Subḥāna 'llāh!* ('God be praised!').

[40] The verse does not appear in *Dīvān-i Kulliyāt-i Shams Tabrezī. Surūd-i Rūḥānī* (Miʿrāj 1998: 76) inserts an extra couplet between the two halves of the *rubāʿī* with the result of a miniature ghazal of three couplets.

of the covenant and souls' divine pre-existence.[41] This memory causes in human beings the longing for their divine origin. Rūmī's *Maṡnavī-yi Maʿnavī* opens with the famous lines that depict this longing as the longing of a sorrowful flute for the reedbed. The mention of Rūmī in the *rubāʿī* probably evoked the comments of the *mīr-i maḥfil*. The effect of the *miṡāq* is closely connected with *samāʿ*. The question posed by God "*A lastu bi-rabbikum?*" was a most beautiful sound and the human beings hear the echo of that question in all beautiful sounds and consequently experience *vajd*.[42] Khvāja Ḥasan Ṡānī connects the discussion of the pre-eternal question to the Indian music and its raga theory. The plurality of ragas results from the plurality of ways in which the individual souls heard God's question. Khvāja Niẓām al-Dīn, for instance, is said to have heard this question in the *pūrabī* raga.[43] He further comments that the aural experience is followed by the search for the source of the sound, God. The comment is received with enthusiasm among the audience. The lengthy interruption effectively emphasizes the role of the *mīr-i maḥfil* as the central figure of the assembly.

After the interruption, Muḥammad Aḥmad repeats the first Urdu couplet once more. Then he initiates a series of a further three Urdu couplets. The introductory section is seldom this elaborate and the qawwals confine themselves to performing one or two *rubāʿīs*. The three verses are taken from a ghazal written by the third head of the Gudṛī Shāhī order, Navāb Khādim Ḥasan Shāh (d. 1970).[44] The choice is clearly motivated by the preceding comments by Khvāja Ḥasan Ṡānī. The first verse

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[41] See Hussaini 1983: 117–118.

[42] *Vajd* is commonly translated as 'ecstasy', or even 'trance'. In discussing the approach of early Sufi writers to *vajd*, Avery (2004: 65) notes that in the descriptions of *vajd* the feelings of exhilaration indicated by the term ecstasy are absent. He suggests that the *vajd* should thus be a covering term for all the behaviours and physical signs induced by *samāʿ*. I believe, however, that the scope of *vajd* is even wider and not limited to physical actions. Sufi writers connecting the *vajd* to finding and existence (*vujūd*) usually acknowledge that the greater the listener's capacity, the less outer signs any divine inrush (*vārid*) causes in him. Thus, I would suggest that *vajd* is a term that denotes a cognitive or mystical experience that may or may not appear as outer behaviour or physical action. The exceedingly restrained physical expressions displayed by Sufi shaikhs in the Chishti *samāʿ*, which Qureshi (1986: 128–129) attributes solely to the desire to keep up social decorum, seems to support this. On *vajd*, *vujūd* and *vārid*, see, e.g. Chittick 1989: 212–213, 266–267 and Hussaini 1983: 118–120, 145–150.

[43] In his preface to *Muṣḥaf-i Bedam* (n.d. 3), Khvāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī interestingly explains *pūrabī* to refer to the *pūrabī bhāshā*, the eastern dialect of Hindi used by Bedam, instead of the raga of the same name.

[44] The ghazal performed in the programs of the Gudṛī Shāhī order in Ajmer differs from the version performed here in respect of the second and third verses. The present version clearly simplifies the original and the changes can probably be attributed to the oral transmission. The original reads (differing passages in bold):

tire hone hī se to *merī hastī ho gaī hastī*
yaqīnan maiṅ nahīṅ hūṅ tū hī tū hai merī hastī meṅ

mirā īmān ghārat kar diyā ***kis*** *but kī naẓaroṅ ne*
usī kāfir kā jalva dekhtā hūṅ ***ḥaqq-parastī meṅ***

takes up the theme of the pre-eternal voice of God still reverberating in the lute of existence. The second verse describing the kindness of the beloved in making the lover's existence real existence moves to the *vujūdī* thematics. According to Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240), God's motivation in giving existence to possible things that previously existed only in his knowledge is nothing else than mercy. (Chittick 1989: 130–131) The third verse employs imagery commonly found in the Persian love poetry: the beauty of the beloved spoils the religious observance of the lover. Significantly, the verse refers to seeing the beloved. As Khvāja Ḥasan Ṣānī had earlier pointed out that the search for vision follows hearing a voice, so accordingly Muḥammad Aḥmad moves from an aural experience to a visual one.

After the lengthy introduction, Muḥammad Aḥmad initiates the main item, a ghazal by Taskīn. The very first line of the ghazal includes the mention of the luminous face (*cihra-yi roshan*) mentioned earlier by Khvāja Ḥasan Ṣānī. After the introductory verses the main item acquires an explicitly mystical meaning: the search is for God. The romantic theme of being blinded by the beloved's beauty in the second and third verses transforms into a more mystical concept of God as the source of all beauty and consequently the mystic seeing His beauty in everything. The audience responds favourably to the three initial verses but when the qawwals perform the fourth verse the response grows milder. This verse focuses on the hardships endured by the lover and thus departs from the sustained theme of the search for the divine beauty. It is only natural that Muḥammad Aḥmad closes his performance with this couplet without performing even the *maqṭaʿ* verse of the ghazal.

In addition to the use of introductory verses, another feature of performing poetry in qawwali presents itself in the example. This is the repetition, *takrār*. Every line of poetry is repeated at least two times in qawwali; the simplest reason for this is to provide the listeners enough time to understand the verse. However, as the listeners are generally acquainted with the poems performed in Chishti *samāʿ*, the repetition also serves the purpose of facilitating the listeners to delve into the metaphoric meaning of poetic images. Similarly to *rubāʿīs*, the *takrār* allows the qawwals to observe the audience in order to reach the decision whether to continue repeating the verse, continue to the next verse or insert a verse. Time is also needed to decide which verses to insert.

In addition to the more practical functions, repetition is intimately related to the essential purpose of *samāʿ*, the generation of *vajd*. According to Muḥammad Aḥmad (13 November 2006, Delhi), *takrār* without musical embellishments is the soul of qawwali, because it increases the *vajd*. If a listener is affected by some part of the poem to the extent that he or she experiences *vajd*, the qawwals will continue repeating the textual unit in question for tens and hundreds of times. Neglecting the repetition is believed to put the life of a listener experiencing a mystical state in danger. An often cited incident in this connection is the death of Khvāja Quṭb

al-Dīn (d. 1235), who passed away after his *vajd* had continued for five consecutive days and the qawwals were finally commanded to stop repeating a verse by Aḥmad Jām.[45] In practice, any part of the text can arouse mystical experiences in the listeners according to their spiritual states and stations. Some verses, though, have gained so much weight during the centuries that they are always repeated several times. Also the mention of the saint's name in the poem or as the nom de plume (*ta<u>kh</u>alluṣ*) is sure to stir the listeners. The extensive *takrār* is absent from the recorded and concert versions of qawwali, since neither is connected to the ritual context of *samāʿ*.

The structure of a ghazal is especially well suited for enhancing the effect through repetition. The first line of a couplet lacking the *radīf* builds up the excitement through posing a question or presenting a situation that needs to be resolved while the second line offers the answer or solution. The musical conventions reflect the textual structure as well: the first line is sung in the higher register (*antarā*) suggesting incompleteness and excursions from the main theme. The second, rhyming line returns to the lower register (*asthāyī*) completing the statement presented in the verse.[46] Although much additional study is still required, it is safe enough to say that the qawwals prefer poems whose couplets divide neatly into four parts, both semantically and metrically. To take an example from the above ghazal in which both lines of the first verse divide into two roughly even halves:

kis se pūcheṅ ham ne kahāṅ vuh / cihra-yi roshan dekhā hai

From whom should I ask where that / luminous face I have seen

maḥfil maḥfil ḍhūṅḍh cuke haiṅ / gulshan gulshan dekhā hai

I have already searched from soirée to soirée / seen many a rose garden.

Muḥammad Aḥmad repeats only the first quarter of the verse to build up the excitement, as the object of the lover's enquiry is not yet disclosed. In the second quarter the audience is informed that the search is for the luminous face. The second line reveals the extent of the lover's despair: he has already searched soirées and rose gardens, both of which are places inhabited by beauties. Textually, the first verse of the ghazal presents an anomaly since both the lines feature the *radīf* but only the second one is a concluding statement. Qureshi (1986: 62) notes that this problem is solved musically by singing the first line in the lower and upper registers respectively. In the present performance, Muḥammad Aḥmad exploits the divisibility of the verses and uses considerable time in repeating every verse in units of differing length.

[45] The incident is recounted in *Favāʾid al-Fuʾād* (fascicle IV, *majlis* 20; Sijzī 2007: 246–247) and *Siyar al-Auliyāʾ* (Kirmānī 2002: 102–103).

[46] For more information on the interplay between text and music in qawwali, see Qureshi 1986: 61–75.

4.3 Elaborating a metaphor and inducing saintly presence

The following example demonstrates an extensive elaboration of a single line of a ghazal as well as prolonged *takrār*. The recording was made in a *maḥfil-i samāʿ* presided over by ʿĀrif ʿAlī Niẕāmī, a senior *kh̲ādim* of the Niẕām al-Dīn shrine. The assembly was organized during the *ʿurs* of Amīr Kh̲usro on 11 November 2006 (20th Shavvāl) and it took place directly in front of the tomb of Kh̲vāja Niẕām al-Dīn. Assemblies attracting a specifically Sufi audience are seldom organized in the courtyards of the shrines where the more popular type of qawwali is normally performed. This *maḥfil*, however, began only at 10:30 PM when the crowds had already dispersed. The junior *kh̲ādims*, who had earlier requested some fairly popular poems from qawwals, had left by the time Muḥammad Aḥmad came forward to perform. The audience consisted of occasional pilgrims, Sufi shaikhs with their disciples, and senior *kh̲ādims* of both the Niẕām al-Dīn shrine and the shrine of Kh̲vāja Muʿīn al-Dīn in Ajmer. In contrast to the previous example, the tomb itself was treated as the head of the assembly and the Sufi dignitaries in the audience often received the *naẕr* only after it had been presented on the threshold of the tomb. When the performance described below took place, the atmosphere was fairly heightened. Muḥammad Aḥmad had begun his turn with a Persian ghazal by Kh̲vāja Quṭ̤b al-Dīn. Reception was good and the choice to continue with another Persian poem came naturally.

The poem itself, *ʿĪd-gāh-i mā gh̲arībān kū-yi to*, is ascribed to Amīr Kh̲usro. It is in *Surūd-i Rūḥānī* (Miʿrāj 1998: 70) classified as a *mubārak*, a congratulatory poem that is often performed when a covering (*cādar*) is brought to the tomb during the *ʿurs* festivities. Qawwals also favour this poem when singing after the ʿĪd prayers. Thus, the poem is familiar to the audiences and its jubilant mood is fit for the festive occasion. Although the poem is at present among the most famous Persian poems of the qawwali repertoire, only its final verse is recorded in *Nagh̲māt-i Samāʿ* (Nūr al-Ḥasan 1935: 318) as a part of a completely different poem. In addition to the poem by Kh̲usro, *Nagh̲māt-i Samāʿ* features similar poems by Ẕāmin ʿAlī (313), Aḥmad Jām (314), Fak̲h̲r al-Dīn ʿIrāqī (316–317), Shāh Shujāʿ (318–319) and Vāqif Lahaurī (319) that all share the same theme, metre and rhyme.

ālāp	*ā...*
The first *rubāʿī* (in Persian)	*sar-farāz-am ki sar-e bar sar-i dār-e kardam* I am proud that I have bowed my head to the threshold
	fārigh az hastī-yi khvud raft ba-yār-e kardam Freed from my existence I have travelled to the friend
	jān o īmān o dil o ṣabr o qarār-i millat Life, faith, heart and tranquillity of the religion
	li ʾllāhi ʾl-ḥamd ki īn jumla niṣār-e kardam Praise to God, I have thrown all these away.
The second *rubāʿī* (in Urdu)	*ham raunaq-i hastī kā sāmān luṭā baiṭhe* I did waste the riches of the splendour of existence
	jānā terī āṅkhoṅ meṅ īmān luṭā baiṭhe Beloved, into your eyes I wasted my faith
	pahle to zamāne kī har cīz naẕr kar dī First I sacrificed everything in the world
	jab kuch na rahā bāqī tab jān luṭā baiṭhe When nothing was left, I did waste also my life.
The first line of the Persian ghazal; *takrār*	*ʿīd-gāh-i mā gharībān kū-yi to* ʿĪd-ground for us poor is your lane
First line of the first *girah* (in Persian)	*muflisān-em āmada dar kū-yi to* We destitute have come to your lane
The second *girah* (in Urdu)	*un ke kūce meṅ gayā aur dī ṣadā* I went to his alley and made a cry
	kāsa-yi dil hāth meṅ letā gayā I went the begging bowl of heart in hand
	cup ke cup ke maiṅ ne un se yih kahā Softly, softly I said to him:

Return to the first *girah*; *takrār*	*muflisān-em āmada dar kū-yi to* We destitute have come to your lane *shai ʾan li ʾllāh az jamāl-i rū-yi to* [To perceive] the affairs of God from the beauty of your face *ka ʿba-yi dil qibla-yi man rū-yi to* Ka ʿba of heart, qibla of mine is your face *sajda-gāh-i ʿāshiqān abrū-yi to* Place of prostration for lovers are your eyebrows.
Return to the first verse of the ghazal; *takrār*	*ʿīd-gāh-i mā gharībān kū-yi to* ʿĪd ground for us poor is your lane *inbisaṭ-i ʿīd dīdan rū-yi to* Seeing the [moon of] ʿĪd is your face.
The second verse of the ghazal	*karda sunbul rā pareshān mū-yi to* Your hair has made the hyacinth perplexed *siḥr dārad nargis-i jādū-yi to* Magic stays in your charming narcissus eyes.
The third verse of the ghazal; *takrār*	*ṣād hilāl-i ʿīd qurbān-at kunam* I offer you a hundred crescents of ʿĪd *e hilāl-i mā kham-i abrū-yi to* Oh crescent of ours, the arch of your eyebrows.
The fourth verse of the ghazal; prolonged *takrār*	*yā niẓām al-dīn maḥbūb-i ilāhī* Oh Niẓām al-Dīn, Divine Beloved *jumla maḥbūbān fidā bar rū-yi to* All the beloveds sacrifice themselves for your face.
The fifth verse of the ghazal	*cand mī-pursī ki khusro rā ki kusht* How long will you be asking what killed Khusro? *ghamza-yi to cashm-i to abrū-yi to* It was your coquettish glance, your eyes, your eyebrows.

The poem has two focal points in the performance. Elaborate introductory and inserted verses evolve around the first line of the ghazal, while extensive *takrār* is employed in the third verse. The first verse depicts the lovers as beggars in the

beloved's alley celebrating the seeing of the beloved. The beginning of the ghazal employs the rhetorical figure *tanāsub* in utilizing words from a single thematic cluster, in this case the ʿĪd festivities.[47] At the end of the month of Ramadan, beggars gather around the *ʿīd-gāhs* where Muslims distribute alms after finishing their prayers. Similarly, the lovers arrive at the street of the beloved in hope of receiving the alms of his vision. The second line assimilates this vision with the sighting of the crescent moon that announces the end of fasting. The rhyming words *ʿīd* and *dīd* (sight, eye, vision) have contributed greatly to the conventional image of 'festival of seeing'.

After a short vocal introduction, *ālāp*, the qawwals perform two *rubāʿīs* in Persian and Urdu respectively. The first one describes the lover priding himself on the loss of everything that is desirable in the eyes of society and religion due to a nobler cause, the travel to the beloved. The boastfulness is established in the opening words of the verse: *sar-farāz-am*, 'I am proud'. The Urdu *rubāʿī* adopts a rather different approach. The lover is not as bold as in the Persian verse. This is evident from the modifying verb *baiṭhnā*, which is repeated three times as the rhyming word. The verb, when used as a modifying auxiliary, describes an action that is not executed sensibly or with a fortunate outcome. The change in the mood is reflected also in the melancholic tone of the melody. The verse divests the lover of everything he used to have and leaves him devoid of even his soul. In such a situation the only hope of surviving is begging for alms. The stage thus set, the first line of the ghazal offers relief from the hopeless circumstances.

The first line of the famous poem stirs the audience immediately. After a short *takrār* Muḥammad Aḥmad inserts a Persian *girah*. Verses are not used merely to introduce the main item, but they are also inserted into it. This is called *girah lagānā*, 'to tie a knot'. The inserted verses can be *rubāʿīs*, *dohās* or individual couplets from ghazals, *qaṣīda*s or *maṣ̱navīs*. They are normally sung in recitative, since the melody of a song is tied to the metre of the main item and other metres can seldom be sung to the same melody. The pitch is in the *antarā* (upper register) to denote excursions from the main poem. Inserted verses are used to accentuate the thematic and associational framework of the poem. Offering the audience new ways to experience the poem, they also demonstrate the qawwals' expertise in combining poems from different sources into a coherent whole. Qureshi (1986: 202) has noted that the inserted verses should not be too long in order to avoid interrupting the concentration on the main poem.[48] In the present example, the insert is exceptionally

[47] For an exposition of rhetorical figures in Persian poetry, see Schimmel 2004: 38–52.

[48] In some instances, the song text itself is so short that inserting several *girah* verses is imperative in order to create an independent item. An example of such a poem is the *qaul, Man kuntu maulā*, the text of which consists only of the hadith and *tarāna* composed by K͟husro. In the *maḥfils* I observed, the *girah* verses sometimes numbered as many as ten. Moreover, a single performance would sometimes feature verses in Persian, Urdu and Hindi inserted into the Arabic main item.

long and, moreover, several of its lines are repeated extensively. The rupture is, however, prevented by the continuity in both the musical and poetic metre. Both the *girah* verses and the main item are set to *ramal musaddas* metre, also known as *maṣnavī* metre, and can consequently be sung to the same melody.

The Persian *girah* is written by Ẓāmin ʿAlī, a *sajjāda-nashīn* of the Niẓām al-Dīn shrine. The four lines performed by the qawwals are the opening verses of a longer ghazal. These verses are conventionally performed with *ʿĪd-gāh-i mā gharībān*, either as a *rubāʿī* or *girah*.[49] The *girah* focuses on the beloved whose face reflects the divine affairs and serves as the focus of the lovers' worship as the Kaʿba and *qibla* serve as the foci for Islamic religious observance. Qawwals elaborate the Persian *girah* even further by inserting an Urdu verse into it. Inserting a *girah* into another *girah* is highly unusual as it normally takes the performance too far from the main item. Urdu verse, however, shares the metre of the Persian *girah* and the main item. It depicts the beggar-lover arriving at the beloved's lane and announcing his arrival with a cry as is the normal practice among the beggars in South Asia. The verse thus becomes a kind of reporting clause for the Persian *girah* and adds to the effect of the Persian verse. The audience is enchanted and qawwals employ prolonged *takrār* in their performance, especially in singing the line '[*To perceive*] *the affairs of God from the beauty of your face*'. The thematic unity of the verses is notable and the cluster of two *rubāʿīs*, two *girahs* and the main item's first line offers the audience a chance to delve into the metaphor of poverty.

The most concrete meaning of poverty in relation to Sufi shrines is the wish to obtain blessings to overcome the worries of life, such as illness or infertility. This is probably the most common reason for pilgrims to visit the *dargāhs*. The *girah* verses make deriving this import from the poem highly challenging, since they advocate deliberate losing of even religious values, to say nothing of material comforts. Rather, the poverty mentioned in the verses is a requirement for throwing everything away in order to become dependent on the beloved.

Poverty, *faqr*, is a central term in the mystical philosophy derived from the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī. He means by *faqr* the dependence of every created thing on God in respect to its existence and attributes. Without God, who is rich and self sufficient (*ghanī*), nothing else exists in the universe. The term *muflis*, 'destitute', does appear in Ibn ʿArabī's writings in denoting the perfect man's (*insān-i kāmil*) dependence on God alone, not on alimentation or rain that ultimately also derive from Him. Being *muflis* is a way of the perfect man while *faqr* is, by its nature, the way of every creature. (Chittick 1989: 44–46, 378) Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī (d. 1289) was the first to mix the philosophical themes of Ibn ʿArabī with the ecstatic expression of love poetry. He considered poverty as the basic quality of the lover, who needs everything in order to witness the manifestation of the divine beauty. He

[49] See Qureshi 1986: 28–29, on the use of these verses as a *rubāʿī*.

is poor also in the sense that he has referred all his attributes back to the beloved. (ʿIraqi 1982: 112) Although the term *faqr* is not mentioned in any of the verses, the introductory and inserted verses clearly facilitate the interpretation of poverty in the light of the *vujūdī* ideas. The considerable impact of the mystical philosophy of Ibn ʿArabī and his followers on Indian Sufism make this interpretation highly plausible and it is in all probability shared by the listeners as well.[50]

After the *girah* verses the qawwals return to the first verse of the ghazal and repeat both lines several times. The second verse of the example is not usually included in this ghazal and it is passed by swiftly. In *Nag͟hmāt-i Samāʿ* (Nūr al-Ḥasan 1935: 318) it is an opening verse of another ghazal by K͟husro. In regard to the structure it could be the second verse as well since it is not uncommon for a ghazal to open with two verses that have the *radīf* in both lines. Semantically, the verse interrupts the smooth flow of images from seeing the crescent moon of ʿĪd to the crescent-like eyebrows of the beloved mentioned in the third verse. In fact, the third verse of the example follows the opening verse in most performances and is well received by the audience. The qawwals dwell on repeating it for a considerable time.

The fourth verse is the second focal point of the performance. In contrast to the nuanced elaborations of the poem's first line, Muḥammad Aḥmad relies exclusively on *takrār* in performing it. The verse blends the praise of K͟hvāja Niẓ̤ām al-Dīn, commonly known as *Maḥbūb-i Ilāhī*, 'The Divine Beloved', with amorous themes. The performance took place in the immediate vicinity of the saint's tomb and it is not surprising that such a verse helps in actualizing his presence. Most listeners stand up and offer *naẕr*. A dervish from Kaliyar raises an offering of a small note towards the shrine crying out "*Karam, navāzish*!"[51] and breaks into a delicate whirling dance. The power contained in the mention of the saint's name makes inserting verses unnecessary and pure *takrār* is enough to effect *vajd* in the listeners. The qawwals repeat the first line, '*Oh Niẓ̤ām al-Dīn, Divine Beloved*' altogether over fifty times. After the commotion in the audience has subsided, the qawwals perform the last verse of the poem, repeating both lines only a few times, and continue straight to the next poem.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The aim of the present article has been to examine the textual content of qawwali. As was pointed out, defining and classifying the qawwali poems is extremely difficult as the repertoire is constantly alive and varies from one qawwal to another. In addition, new poems are adapted for performance constantly while others fall out

50 On the impact of *vujūdī* thought in Indian Sufi texts, see Chittick 1992.
51 'Mercy, patronage!' Both are common expressions of gratitude.

of use. In practice almost any poem can be performed in *maḥfil-i samāʿ*. However, there is a group of poems that is known to performers and listeners of Chishti *samāʿ* everywhere in South Asia. The core repertoire includes poems in Persian, Urdu and Hindi, written by Sufi and non-Sufi authors. Perhaps surprisingly, there are no remarkable differences between the works of mystics and non-mystics in respect to the content and the performance context is essential in defining their meaning.

In this article it has been my intent to focus on performing these poems. Most qawwali poems are situated between the written and oral traditions and they live as written poems and performed lyrics. My assumption for different readings of a single poem is that the poems have been adapted for performance from written sources, but it is likely that some of them were performed by the qawwals already before being codified in the *dīvāns*. Whichever the case, the written and performed versions are frequently dissimilar and the importance of the latter should not be underrated in favour of the former. Further study of several readings of the poems can offer important information of the dynamics of the Sufi ritual music but it can also contribute to understanding performing poetry in general. One should bear in mind that most poetry in the Islamic cultures has been mediated to the audiences in musical performance.

Although the collections of qawwali poetry are important in tracing the historical developments of the repertoire, the lyrics gain their full character only in the *maḥfil-i samāʿ*. I argued above that the thematic ordering of the poems is an often voiced but seldom followed ideal and the qawwals focus on performance of a single poem. Performing a poem so as to make its effect felt by the listeners is in the interest of both the performers and listeners. For the qawwals a successful execution of a performance is a demonstration of their artistry that likely contributes towards a generous remuneration. For the audience, a skilfully performed poem is a source of aesthetic pleasure but also a means of immersing oneself in a mystical experience. The latter, of course, is the feature that most clearly sets *maḥfil-i samāʿ* apart from musical concerts devoid of religious motivation.

The two examples analysed in the article demonstrate the various ways in which the text is manipulated in order to enhance its effect. In the first example, Muḥammad Aḥmad coloured a romantic poem with mystical meaning by means of an elaborate sequence of introductory verses. The role of the audience response was discernible in the selection of the verses. The second example was an instance of elaborating the metaphor of poverty through an intricate set of introductory and inserted verses. Later in the same performance the qawwals relied solely on repeating the saint's name in creating the feeling of his presence. The intertwining of different motives behind affecting the audience were clearly detectable when a dervish made a monetary offering to the performers before breaking into a whirling dance as an expression of his mystical state.

What is striking in the examples is the nuanced elaboration of the text. Further study of qawwali poetry in performance will no doubt offer valuable knowledge on this particular aspect of Sufi ritual and the role of Sufism in the development of poetry and music in South Asia.

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