

Mysticism and Literature: A Study on the Aesthetics of Devotional Music and Poems

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, we examine the philosophical underpinnings of sufism, its historical development, and the aesthetics of sufi music. The works of Sufi poets like Rumi, Hafiz, Bulleh Shah, Amir Khusrow, and Khwaja Ghulam Farid served as inspiration for Sufi devotional music. The Whirling Dervishes' Sama ritual likewise emphasizes music heavily. According to the Sufi school of thought, this music is food for the soul. Typically, they take place in front of a head or other significant member of the Sufi hierarchy who is meant to have easy access to the performance that is being planned in a particular shrine of a well-known Sufi. In general, it may be said that the aesthetic quality of devotional music depends on its capacity to induce a state of altered awareness in both performers and listeners. Devotional music enables experience beyond the liminal border of the physical world within a freshly developed awareness. The spiritual aesthetic required to achieve the objectives of Sufi music is created by the interaction of symbols and metaphors from the genre, local religious belief and cosmology, as well as the natural and manmade settings.

Key Words: *Sufi Music, Alternative Aestheticism, Sama, Sufi Poets, Devotional Music*

I. INTRODUCTION

Sufism has always been a part of the socio cultural fabric of society and has drawn followers from all social classes and backgrounds, regardless of their gender or age. It has always been perceived as a representative of a tolerant Islam that fosters intercultural understanding, hence it has always opposed preaching from extreme Islamist groups. Hence, via its many rites and traditions, it contributed to the propagation of an image of Islam that is peaceful, and its teachings have aided in the emergence of a progressive conception of religion. "A profound legacy of Muslim knowledge and practice providing proximity to or meditation with God and believed to have been handed down from the prophet Muhammad through the holy successors who followed him," is how Nile Green defines sufism (Green: 2012, p. 08). Sufism currently draws a lot of young people, especially women, because of its importance and relevance. "Sufism comprised the religious path of both the mainstream Muslim masses and the smaller number of elevated mystics," according to AJ Arberry (Green: 2012, p. 01).

Sufism offers an alternate approach to therapy, psychology, and healing, all of which encourage people to try out other approaches to dealing with life's challenges. Regardless of their separate religious beliefs, people in the West are displaying a persistent interest in establishing various groups to support Sufi activities in their local communities. They are also drawn to the poetry, art, dancing, and music of the Sufis. They want to experience this new spirituality, which they believe connects individuals since it is syncretic or eclectic in nature, and they are eager to do so.

Sufism is a unique method of living in Islam that adheres to mysticism. Its foundation is the boundless adoration of Allah. Sufism's fundamental tenet is that there is only one God and that the soul develops from His substance. They also hold that although the soul temporarily separates from its divine essence, it will reunify with it once the soul has left this world and is in paradise. The greatest delight and redemption for the soul will come from that reunion with God. Individuals, especially those from the West, are drawn to sufism because of how it is seen and because they are looking for an alternative way of life. We consider Sufism as if it were a smaller version of Islam, says Alexander Knysh. In other words, even if on a much smaller scale, all the characteristics of the encompassing greater tradition (Islam) are represented in its ascetic-mystical stream

(Sufism). We assert that Sufism includes teachings, practices, a community of intellectual and spiritual dedication, an Islamic institution of the Sufi path, and leaders who can articulate Sufi values, much like Islam or any other religion for that matter. (Knysh, 2017, pp. 7-8).

The academic community does not pay much attention to sufism. Since the events of September 11, 2001, and the introduction of Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" theory, academics studying Islam have begun to concentrate on the problems posed by radical Islam. Sufism has to be promoted in this setting and explored thoroughly on an academic level rather than only as a religious subject. Without a doubt, it has gained support from the general public and is practiced by a large number of people from various social backgrounds all over the world; furthermore, Sufism did not spread due to media promotion but rather through individuals who placed a higher value on moral behavior and the development of the soul than political engagement. "An understanding of Sufism is one of the best available routes into an understanding of Islam itself," writes Mark J. Sedgwick. "Not of the political ramifications of Islam, but of Islam as a lived religion- of the reality that lies with the heart of Islamic societies past and present, and thus even (though arguably in dangerously distorted form) of the images of Islam that are so well known from our television screens" (Sedgwick: 2003, p. viii, ix).

II. SUFI MUSIC AESTHETICS: AN OVERVIEW

Sufi music is a form of Islamic art, and the term aestheticism itself is one of the issues we encounter when discussing the aesthetic qualities of Islamic art. There are some epistemological problems with the two concepts. In the words of Valerie Gonzalez, "Aesthetics, and notably aesthetic phenomenology, represents a specific and unique discipline, which is still not taken into consideration in the field of Islamic studies, all the while it is fully incorporated into contemporary analytical work on art and art theory. The epistemological order that underlies aesthetics as a science and a way of thinking, which appears to come from the modern western philosophical tradition, is the root of this problem. It is therefore seen to be more or less inextricably related to the laws, precepts, and logic of this tradition and, as a result, is not really adaptable to the thinking and the arts of other fields, particularly in the field of Islamic studies (Valerie: 2001, p. 02).

Sufi music is a synthesis of a variety of musical styles, including dance, folk, trance, healing, and other genres. It is generally accepted that looking at the Sufi impact of a given music genre can help one comprehend that genre in a particular location. Sufi music, for instance, has a significant influence on Hindustani music. Islam does not view music as a very acceptable form of expression, and it always sparks disagreement, controversy, and dispute within the faith. Islam contains some passages that harshly condemn the use of music in religious contexts. As a result, the legalists in Islam have always distinguished between music that is allowed and that which is not; they categorize music as either "chanting" or "ghina." Chanting is any religious music performed in accordance with accepted Islamic guidelines, such as Quran recitation, adhaan (the call to prayer), thakbeer, and thahleel (the praise of God). It's interesting that this shouting isn't considered music. Religious people believe that this shouting is not at all like music. So, reciting the Quran is not regarded as music but rather as simple chanting. There is no word in Arabic that can be used to refer to all types of music that are popular in the West. People employ specific terminology to refer to music in order to avoid any kind of similarities.

III. QAWWALI AND SAMA

The Sufi school of thought holds that music should be utilized to elevate the human soul, assist a person in approaching God, nurture spirituality, and awaken the emotions of listeners. Sufi views are based on this fundamental idea. Therefore people engage in chanting to remember or recite the existence of God. This chanting is often referred to as "dhikr." Sufi followers listen to music to keep their minds always focused on God. Often, this music is referred to as "sama." The most well-known type of music in Sufism is called "sama," which is typically referred to as a performance of "meditative listening." So, in Sama, much like in Sufi poetry, the group's vocalist or leader seeks to evoke the same emotion in the listeners' minds. In this way, it resembles a group performance. The message and emotions conveyed by the music are reflected in the listeners' silent reflections. Here, music is employed differently during Sufi rites than it is at other occasions. Sufis use it for more than simply sensuous pleasure; it also has deeper meanings. When chanting dhikr loudly and collectively, sufis employ music, including chanting and other musical instruments, to awaken their spiritual connection to God. According to Al Faruqi, Islamic civilizations have a hierarchy of musical performance. Islamic culture is more inclined to adopt genres that include a melody, text, or religious motivation similar to Quran recitation. The second element is how well the genre fits into the aesthetic of the society. The third factor is based on the Muslim community's strong regard for genres that uphold Islam's moral requirements. According to him, Islamic cultures have a hierarchy of sound impressions, with the contradistinction of not *mûsîqîng* the hierarchy's foundation. It has the effect of classifying particular forms and occasions of sound art as contentious or undesirable, as well as classifying the more well-liked genres into a separate class. (1985:13-14, 7-9; Al Faruqi).

A Sufi must therefore do a lot of meditations and certain methods to maintain a bond with God in order to reach these phases. Sama is one method for getting to God through getting through all of these stages. One such form of devotion, according to Rouget, was the traditional sama (listening, audition), a spiritual performance led by a master (sheikh), where enlightened Sufi devotees gathered to take in mystical poetry sung by a soloist (qawwal) or chorus with an instrumental element of varying significance. The emotional force of the music frequently caused a social trance that might be expressed through dance as the dervishes sat in great concentration" (Rouget 1985:265-66, 1985:285, 316).

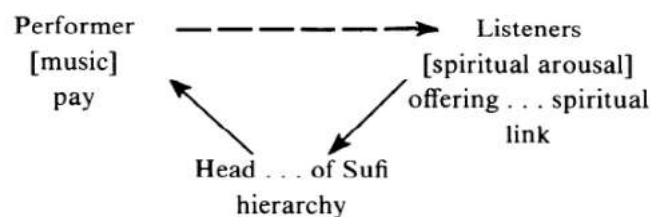
Another musical tradition used by the Sufi school of thinking is qawwali. As with other religious music, this also aims to engage our minds in God's memory and is not produced for the sake of the human soul's worldly pleasure. Nasser (Nassr 1972:66) notes that one of the goals of Sufism has been to lead man from the world of form to the world of the spirit, and ultimately to total union of the spirit with the divine. Accordingly, Qawwali is considered in the Sufi tradition as a method of worship, a way to reach to the ultimate spiritual elevation, and it's a celebration for our soul. Sufis use music as part of their practice to reach their ultimate goal of union with God. According to their tradition, in order to approach God, a Sufi must pass through a series of hierarchical points (maqamath) and attain spiritual status (ahwbl). After passing through these two stages, a Sufi arrives at the final stage of his mystical journey—annihilation—to God, the supreme being.

Sama of the Middle East and several African nations share significant similarities with qawwali, which is typically practiced on the Indian subcontinent, in terms of structure, context, and logic. A group of singers actively tries to evoke a sense of religious and spiritual awakening in the listeners' minds through qawwali. The group typically wears Sufi garb, maintains a spiritual attitude, and gradually transports the audience into a state of mystic intoxication using the musical idiom Qawwali form. The artists make their musical selections in accordance with the idiom of the situation as well as those that are strongly tied to Sufi doctrine, social conventions, and economic issues.

The main goal of qawwali is to lead the audience to the shore of the spiritual sea. The artists always reply promptly and successfully to the audience's various and shifting spiritual desires, which they express in various ways. The main performer is given additional responsibility for answering questions from the audience and strives to address both their spiritual and secular condition. Their prompt reactions guarantee that performance benefits from kind offers. Sama and Qawwali are both types of ecstatic music that are primarily practiced by Sufis around the world. This instrument-based religious music is distinctive to Islamic culture. According to several clerics, Islam often advocates the use of just vocal performance, which is typically used in Quran recitation and the call to prayer. But, to achieve ecstasy in Sama or Qawwali, rhythmic music, breath control, and—more importantly—physical activity must be coordinated. Sufis practice sama and qawwali in the hopes that by doing so, God's memory will be kept there forever.

IV. CONCLUSION

According to the Sufi school of thinking, music is nourishing for the soul. They are typically done in front of a head or other significant member of the Sufi hierarchy who is meant to have easy access to the performance that is being planned in a particular shrine of a well-known Sufi. It is commonly referred to as "the royal court of saints" and represents in miniature the greater Sufi movement and its revered figuresheads, with others serving as listeners. Members of that particular group may experience varied levels of euphoria as a result of this music, ranging from mild to intense arousal. Sufi music differs from other musical performances in a few key ways. Although there is a concentration on poetry, there are some simply melodic elements throughout the entire performance. Basic instrumental support is provided to hold up the vocalists' melody line and maintain the rhythm. Traditionally, only a brief introduction has been played on an instrument, with a group of vocalists performing the other portions of the Sufi music performance. The essence of this poetry, most crucially, is Sama. A fascinating aspect of the reward is that a performer is often compensated when the leader of the Sufi group is pleased with the performance and the level of pleasure that was attained by all participants. The prize is a symbolic representation of the spiritual connection between a Sufi [devotee] and his spiritual head, and it is thus an indirect material outcome of what is ultimately a non-material contract. Although though the backwards are supplied in reaction to the music's interaction, they serve simply as a reward for the singer. The following diagram illustrates the relationship between the performer and his reward.



(Image Courtesy of Burckhardt, 1986, Pages 137–138)

In order to get closer to God, Sufi practitioners frequently listen to sama music and Sufi poetry. The music is a tool for spiritual development since it stirs up in the listener a deep state of religious fervor and conviction through song. Similar to euphoric religious experiences, music can be both transcendent and fleeting, giving listeners a sense of spirituality. Yet, listening to music does not necessitate active engagement in a religious group, unlike ecstatic religious experiences. A study of the historical connections between religious-ecstatic musical genres and the religious traditions from which they emerged reveals that although music only offers a superficial connection to spiritual experience, for some people it is nonetheless profound, transcendent, and enduring. This makes music an important factor in religious development.

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