Sufi music of India and Pakistan

Sound, Context

and meaning in Qawwali

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This edition includes a compact disc
containing sixty minutes of Qawwali music

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The Chosen Repertoire

The choice and order of presentation of the following repertoire is based on a consensus of significance by Sufis at the Nizamuddin shrine. The songs are presented in notational outline, translated and annotated in chapter 1. The accompanying compact disc contains one or more Performances or Performance excerpts of each item. The repertoire also provides exemplification for the analysis and interpretation throughout the book, including the videograph and videochart transcriptions in chapter 6 (Performances 1 and 2).

		Text	CD	
The Songs		*page*	*item*	*length*
1(a)	***Qaul: Man kunto Maulā*** Meraj Ahmad Nizami and Panchayati Group. Chilla Mahfil, ʿUrs Nizamuddin Auliya, 18 Apr. 1976 (17th *rabi-us-sani*) (see also Perf. 1, pp. 148–52).	20	1	(1′39″)
1(b)	***Qaul: Man kunto Maulā*** Nasiruddin Khan Gore and Panchayati Group. Chilla Mahfil, ʿUrs Amir Khusrau, 23 Oct. 1975 (17th *shawal*)	20	2	(2′38″)
2(a)	***Chashm-e-maste ʿajabe*** Aziz Ahmad Khan Warsi and Party. Qawwali Hall, ʿUrs Amir Khusrau, 23 Oct. 1975 (18th *shawal*)	22	3	(5′37″)
2(b)	***Chashm-e-maste ʿajabe*** Meraj Ahmad Nizami and Party. Hujra Mahfil, ʿUrs Nizamuddin Auliya, 19 Apr. 1976 (18th *rabi-us-sani*)	22	4	(4′38″)
3	***Tōrī sūrat ke balhārī*** Meraj Ahmad Nizami and Party. Chilla Mahfil, ʿUrs Nizamuddin Auliya, 18 Apr. 1976 (17th *rabi-us-sani*) (see also Perf. 1, pp. 164–74)	25	5	(8′40″)
4	***Masnavī: Muflisānem*** Meraj Ahmad Nizami and Party. Chilla Mahfil, ʿUrs Nizamuddin Auliya, 18 Apr. 1976 (17th *rabi-us-sani*) (see also Perf. 1, pp. 153–63)	27	6	(9′26″)
5	***Kachh jagmag*** Meraj Ahmad Nizami and Party. Hujra Mahfil, ʿUrs Nizamuddin Auliya, 19 Apr. 1976 (18th *rabi-us-sani*) (see also Perf. 2, pp. 177–86)	30	7	(8′32″)
6	***Batufail-e-dāman-e-Murtazā*** Meraj Ahmad Nizami and Panchayati Group. Taq-e-Buzurg, ʿUrs Amir Khusrau, 26 Oct. 1975 (21st *shawal*)	32	8	(3′52″)
7(a)	***Kisī ko kuchh nahīn miltā*** (Panjabi version) Panjabi Qawwal and Party. Qawwali Hall, ʿUrs Nizamuddin Auliya, 18 Apr. 1976 (17th *rabi-us-sani*)	36	9	(3′02″)
7(b)	***Kisī ko kuchh nahīn miltā*** (Iftekhar version) Iftekhar Amrohvi and Party. Qawwali Hall, ʿUrs Amir Khusrau, 23 Oct. 1975 (18th *shawal*)	36	10	(4′34″)
The adjunct items				
8(a)	***Ruba'ī: Shud dilam shefta*** (Introductory verse-minimal version) Meraj Ahmad Nizami and Panchayati Group. Dargah Nizamuddin Auliya, Hazrat Ali Commemoration, 27 Sept. 1975 (21st *ramadan*)	38	11	(0′37″)
8(b)	***Ruba'ī: Shud dilam shefta*** (Introductory verse-extended version) Meraj Ahmad Nizami and Party. Sama'khana Gulbarga, ʿUrs Syed Muhammad, Gesudaraz, 21 Nov. 1975 (17th *zi-ul-qad*)	38	12	(1′38″)
9	***Girah: Sansār har ko puje*** (Inserted verse) Aziz Ahmad Khan Warsi and Party. (Continuation from selection 2)	41	13	(2′18″)
10	***Girah***(Insertedvse.)***:ManTurā*** Meraj Ahmad Nizami and Party (Excerpt from selection 3, Perf. 1)	43	14	(0′45″)
11	***Naghmā***(InstrumentalPrelude) (Standard version) Meraj Ahmad and Panchayati Group. Nizamuddin Auliya, Thursday Qawwali, 24 Sept. 1975 (18th *ramadan*)	44	15	(0′53″)

Preface

Qawwali is a recognized musical genre in the Indian subcontinent. It shares general traits with the light classical music of North India and Pakistan, but has unique characteristics related to its religious function. The term Qawwali itself applies both to the musical genre and to the occasion of its performance, the devotional assembly of Islamic mysticism – or Sufism – in India and Pakistan. The practice of Qawwali extends throughout Muslim centres of the Indian subcontinent, but its roots are North Indian.

Qawwali considered as music is a group song performed by *qawwals*, professional musicians who perform in groups led by one or two solo singers. Qawwals present mystical poetry in Farsi, Hindi and Urdu in a fluid style of alternating solo and group passages characterized by repetition and improvisation. The vigorous drum accompaniment on the barrel-shaped *ḍholak* is reinforced by handclapping while the small portable harmonium, usually in the hands of the lead singer, underscores the song melody. A Qawwali song normally begins with an Instrumental Prelude on the harmonium; then an Introductory Verse is sung as a solo recitative without drums, leading directly into the song proper: a mystical poem set to a strophic tune and performed by the entire group of Qawwals.

Qawwali considered as an occasion is a gathering for the purpose of realizing ideals of Islamic mysticism through the ritual of 'listening to music', or *samaʿ*. By enhancing the message of mystical poetry, and by providing a powerful rhythm suggesting the ceaseless repetition of God's name (*zikr*), the music of Qawwali has a religious function: to arouse mystical love, even divine ecstasy, the core experience of Sufism. The Qawwali assembly is held under the guidance of a spiritual leader, and is attended by Sufi devotees though it is usually open to all comers. In listening to the songs, devotees respond individually and spontaneously, but in accordance with social and religious convention, expressing states of mystical love. The musicians, for their part, structure their performance to activate and reinforce these emotions, adapting it to the changing needs of their listeners.

To the Sufi participant, Qawwali is 'a method of worship' and 'a means of spiritual advancement'; it is also 'a feast for the soul'. To the performer it is mainly a musical genre 'with its distinct character for worship'. To the observer, finally, Qawwali is above all music performed very obviously with continual reference to its context; it is 'music in context' *par excellence*.

Introduction: The Qawwali experience and ethnomusicological questions

A What is Qawwali?

All over South Asia there is Qawwali, for all over South Asia there are Muslims; where there are Muslims, there are Sufis; and where there are Sufis, there is Qawwali – not the popular version of Qawwali adapted for entertainment in clubs and on the screen, but the authentic spiritual song that transports the mystic toward union with God. For centuries the Sufi communities of the Indian subcontinent have sustained this musical tradition in the *mahfil-e-sama'*, the 'Assembly for Listening', and it remains the central ritual of Sufism to this day.

Under the guidance of a spiritual leader or *sheikh*, groups of trained musicians present in song a vast treasure of poems which articulate and evoke the gamut of mystical experience for the spiritual benefit of their audience. Through the act of listening – *sama'* – the Sufi seeks to activate his link with his living spiritual guide, with saints departed, and ultimately with God. At the same time, in opening himself to the powerful message of Qawwali, he hopes for a spiritual experience of intensity and immediacy that transcends his conscious striving. The music serves to kindle the flame of his mystical love, to intensify his longing for mystical union, and even to transport him to a state of ecstasy and to sustain him there to the limit of his spiritual capacity.

To partake of the 'spiritual nourishment' of Qawwali, men – and, rarely, women – from all walks of life, and seekers of any spiritual station and persuasion, are drawn toward the *sama'* ritual where it is most splendidly and abundantly practised: at the shrines of the great Sufi saints of the past. For these shrines continue to be centres of mystical teaching and tradition. There is no Qawwali experience more vivid and profound than the *'urs* of such a saint, the commemoration of his own final union with God on the anniversary of his death. And there is no *'urs* more resplendent with Qawwali than that of the great Saint Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi and of his favourite disciple Amir Khusrau, the founding father of Qawwali whose verses and tunes form the core of the *sama'* ritual to this day.

Already on the eve of the anniversary the pulsing drum rhythm of Qawwali draws the pilgrim toward the white marble dome where a group of singers sit on the pavement, facing the entrance of the tomb (see Plates 1 and 2). The single voice of their leader rises from the chorus as he begins a new verse from a famous Khusrau song, raising his arm in an evocative gesture. As he sings, he continues to play the song melody on the small reed organ in front of him while behind him one accompanist incessantly beats out a stirring pattern on the double-headed drum in his lap. All the other singers keep punctuating the rhythm with forceful clapping. The entire group now repeats the verse a few times when once again the leader cuts in with a new phrase and another responsorial exchange begins. But the song is soon brought to an end as the singers must make way for another performing group. Their leader advances to the tomb threshold to pay his respect to the saint and also to pick up the monetary offerings several listeners have placed there during the singing. Others join in the

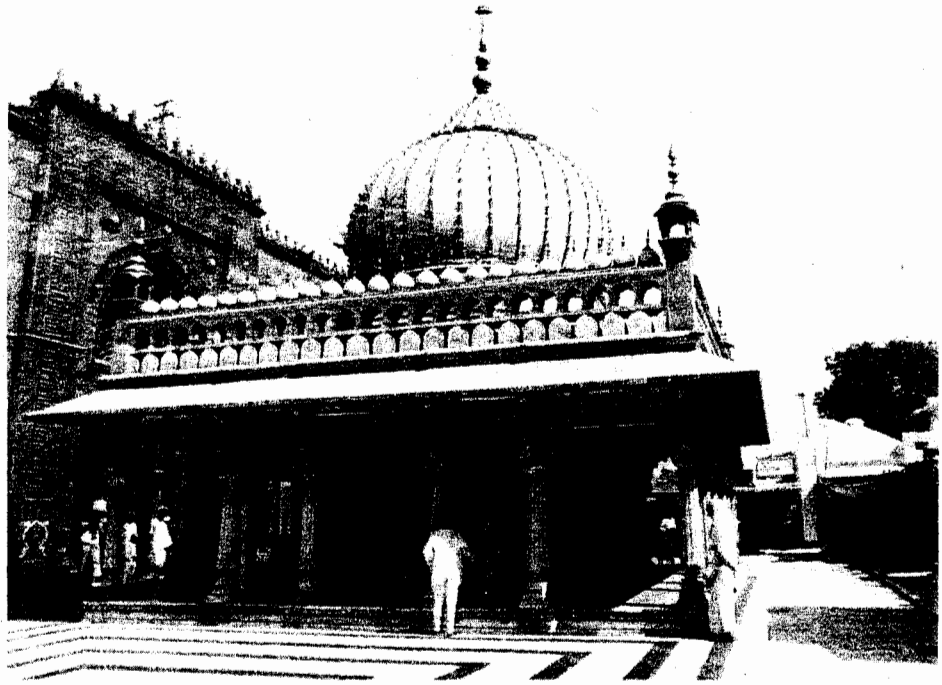


Plate 1 Tomb of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, front view (entrance at centre, mosque to the left)

audience gathered informally on each side of the tomb, several Sufi sheikhs among them, and the musical homage to the saint continues until well into the night.

But the first formal samaʿ *assembly takes place on the day of the anniversary itself.*[1] *Early in the morning a select group of Sufis make their way to the nearby* chillā, *a small stone gallery high above the river Jumna hallowed as a spiritual retreat from the saint's lifetime. Against the white sheets covering the floor and the mostly white clothing, a coloured shawl, turban, or gown clearly designates the spiritual leaders who are seated facing the single group of performers at this gathering. Other listeners fill the space between them, leaving a central area. Now the first sound rises, but not from the performers; it is the presiding sheikh who begins the ritual with cantillation from the Koran, then the spiritual genealogy of the saint and a concluding prayer are recited.*

This signals the beginning of the Qawwali performance: immediately the lead musician intones the obligatory Arabic hymn that introduces every Qawwali at Nizamuddin Auliya. A great stirring begins among the audience. One by one, most of them stand up and seek the assembly leader, bowing low with extended hands, to present him with an offering of money. Some Sufi disciples kneel before him or even put their head to the ground; others enlist a more senior person to make their offering jointly; yet others offer instead to their own personal preceptor who then rises to present the offering to the leader. The leader himself accepts each offering by raising it to his forehead in deep respect. Then it is placed on the ground where it lies until one of the singers picks it up at suitable moments in the music. Indeed, this collection constitutes the musicians' monetary reward.

Throughout this intense offering activity the performers have been singing the opening line of the

Plate 2 Qawwali in the Nizamuddin shrine. Facing the tomb are performers Meraj Ahmad Nizami, leading on the harmonium, Mahtab Ahmad on the *ḍholak*, and Mahmud Nizami

song, over and over. Now they follow with the remainder of the brief hymn and immediately, without coming to an actual close, the lead singer introduces a second obligatory hymn which celebrates spiritual discipleship. This is the moment for an even greater surge of offerings. Suddenly the music changes, the drumming and clapping cease abruptly to let the leader's voice float high, sustained only by the reedy sound of the harmonium. As he shapes the first words of the new song in a slow recitative, every Sufi in the audience recognizes the cascading melody of the classical Persian masnavī *and its message of the Sufi seeker's infinite longing:*

Muflisānem amadā dar kūe to . . . 'The distraught supplicants of love, we have come to your threshold . . .'

A prominent Sheikh at the centre, draped in the orange colour of India's highest saintly lineage, bows in a gesture of deep humility and a hush has fallen over the assembly. Now the drum joins in a compelling pattern that perfectly articulates the verse rhythm, so that several Sufis begin to sway or tap. All eyes are drawn to the central Sheikh who is visibly moved to tears, his gestures bespeaking his intense emotion. When he suddenly falls on his knees to touch the feet of the assembly leader and then kisses the hallowed wall behind him, the gathering is suffused with a sense of fervour and devotion. Exclamations rise and one venerable old Sufi loudly repeats a phrase that has moved him greatly. Immersed in the message of the song, several listeners are swooning as if entranced.

A more effusive mood suddenly arises when, imperceptibly, the singers have moved on to a devotional Hindi song with a raga-like melody full of pathos. The words and the music of Khusrau, the saint's greatest disciple, is every devotee's call from the heart. Several Sufis are quick to rise and prostrate themselves before their Sheikh, as if unable to contain their emotion. Meanwhile the performers repeat over and over the salient phrase of the song, emphasizing and embellishing it. At once the lead singer breaks in with a recitative that profoundly expands the meaning of the repeated

phrase. With this, the focus shifts once again to the orange-draped Sheikh whose expression and gestures demand a restatement of the entire recitative. The lead singer responds, skilfully returning to the salient phrase which he embellishes with variations. Soon thereafter he ends the song, in answer to the assembly leader's discreet signal. After a moment of silent prayer, all rise; it is time to return to the shrine for the day's major commemorative ritual.

What awaits the Sufi there is in stark contrast to the intimate Qawwali experience just concluded. An immense crowd has gathered all around the tomb entrance. From the most exalted spiritual leader to the lowliest devotee, from the richest to the poorest, all are there to listen to the ritual hymns now being intoned by a large contingent of shrine performers. This time the number of devotees with offerings is staggering, and the exhilaration among the audience so great that several times the threshold into spiritual ecstasy is crossed and the better part of an hour has gone by before the same two obligatory hymns of the earlier gathering have come to a close.

It is at night, however, that the spirit of Qawwali really unfolds at Nizamuddin Auliya. The saint's leading descendants preside over celebrational assemblies in special halls consecrated only to Qawwali. Performing groups from far and near line up to be admitted and the large crowds of devotees are held in awe by the spiritual dignitaries from all over India who occupy the front rows – descendants of other great saints, powerful Sheikhs, as well as lay devotees of social and political prominence. One after another, performing groups choose and present songs from a vast repertoire and a wide range of performing styles, but with a standard format. An instrumental prelude draws the listener's mind into the orbit of the powerful Qawwali rhythm. Then a solo recitative evokes a thematic realm from which the song itself then emerges, be it a simple devotional hymn to a saint, an invocation of mystical symbolism, a song of deep spiritual experience or one of simple yearning for the Beloved. The singer's aim is always to move, to arouse, to draw the listener toward his Sheikh, the saint, to God, and into the ecstasy of mystical union. But while one singer lifts the Sufi's spirit with a stately classical tune in forceful rhythm, another one melts his heart with a lilting melody or captivates his mind with a new composition. Some songs easily touch even the uninitiated, whereas others demand the spiritual knowledge of an adept.

All performers share a core of specially favoured songs, however, which Sufis never tire of hearing. But each performance of the same song invariably takes its own shape, unique to the occasion. This becomes movingly evident later that night, during one of the last samaʿ *gatherings of the* ʿurs *at Nizamuddin Auliya.*[2] *In a small cell of the shrine a group of committed Sufis is listening to two performers intone a song of mystical devotion, a special song they had sung at the large assembly earlier on. There each verse had elicited a warm response from the Sufi élite in the audience. This had resulted in an evenly balanced song structure and yielded a steady stream of offerings. But here, in this intimate atmosphere already charged with powerful emotion, one significant phrase of the song so moves an elderly Sufi that he cannot contain himself; he rises and begins a dance of ecstasy. For the performers this signals a moment of extreme responsibility, for unless the ecstatic person continues to hear the phrase that so moved him, he may die. While all the listeners rise in awe, the singers comply, hoping that upon this spiritual blessing the material reward of offerings will follow. As the crucial phrase is repeated over and over, woven into the fabric of the song in ever varying ways, this one phrase becomes the vital centre of the entire performance, and indeed of the mystical experience itself.*

The Qawwali experience overwhelms the observer with its many facets so intertwined with Sufi ritual. But what is most striking about Qawwali is the powerful impact the music appears

to have on those who listen to it and, at the same time, its remarkable variability in reaction to different performance situations: clearly, the music is at the core of all that happens in Qawwali. Experiencing Qawwali means above all hearing music, a never-ceasing sequence of songs, all unmistakably part of the same genre, yet differing widely in their individual musical traits. It means hearing the same song performed many times, but never shaped in the same way twice. What accounts for the unique musical character of the genre Qawwali and the flexibility of its structure? Is there a standard Qawwali performance, and what factors predicate the way each performance is shaped?

Experiencing Qawwali also means observing a ritual built around the core of Qawwali music. In an assembly where spiritual dignitaries are visibly dominant and everyone knows his place, the mystical quest is pursued in accordance with proper form and under a Sufi leader who controls both audience and musicians. But in pursuing his personal quest, each listener responds to the music in his own way, according to his inner needs and the mood of the moment. What accounts for both the rules of the Qawwali ritual and the obvious flexibility of their application? And what is the rôle of the music in fulfilling both purposes?

Finally, experiencing Qawwali means charting a process of interaction between musicians and listeners, between music and audience responses; in short, a performance. What is the nature of this interaction, what does the music 'say' to the audience, and how does the performance situation affect the music? If Qawwali is a musical tradition tied in with a religious ritual in the form of a performance, then what bearing does the music have on the ritual, on the performance, or, conversely, what is the impact of the ritual, the performance, upon the music?

D The ethnographic domain of Qawwali

The analytical goal of this study necessitated selecting an ethnographic domain for Qawwali in which the music can be apperceived in the totality of its context. A major Sufi shrine is such a domain, for it is the *locus* of Qawwali performances of every kind, of a stable group of performers with a standard core repertoire and a predictable audience complex – in short, a local universe of Qawwali. But Qawwali, like Sufism, is also very much a supra-local tradition, part of the cosmopolitan culture and ideology of Indic Islam. Both spiritual ties and actual encounters through pilgrimage and travel link shrines and urban centres across the entire subcontinent into one extended Sufi community. Indeed, many particular features of Qawwali derive their significance from their place in this larger scheme of Sufism, though mediated by local practice.

To do justice to both dimensions, I chose a single shrine, Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, as the primary domain for studying Qawwali, expanding my focus to include the extensive network of shrines linked to this important Sufi centre, notably Qutab Sahib, Chiragh-e-Delhi, and Abdus Salam in Delhi, in addition to Dargah Khwaja Sahib in Ajmer, Sabir Pak in Kaliar Sharif and Khwaja Bandanawaz in Gulbarga (see Table 19). But I also branched out into other shrines with their own local networks: Sheikh Yusuf Shah in Karachi, Kakori near Lucknow, Fatehpur Sikri in Agra and Shah Khamosh in Hyderabad.

Seen from the perspective of this broader experience, Nizamuddin Auliya is representative as a major shrine of high spiritual pedigree, with its own heritage of Sufi teachings and poetry, its own ritual tradition centred around Qawwali, and with a long established, thriving shrine community of Sufis and Qawwali performers who maintain tradition and articulate this heritage in catering to the present-day spiritual and ritual needs of a large and diverse community of devotees. But most of all, Nizamuddin Auliya has always been a centre of Qawwali, for here it represents the personal legacy of the great poet, musician and statesman Amir Khusrau who was also the saint Nizamuddin's favourite disciple and, in fact, is buried next to him. Indeed, he is generally considered the founding father of Qawwali and of Qawwali performers. Khusrau's beloved mystical verses and musical settings constitute the core repertoire of the shrine's hereditary performers, the Qawwal Bachche. They are favourite songs in Qawwali assemblies all over the subcontinent, but especially in two important urban centres of Sufism – Karachi, Pakistan and Hyderabad, India, where members of the same Qawwal Bachche lineage actively maintain their special Qawwali heritage.

The music of Qawwali reflects its ethnographic setting. An extensive oral repertoire (I recorded 433 performances of 261 songs with 179 different tunes) is performed and transmitted by hundreds of Qawwals at different local Sufi centres (I recorded 83 performing groups at fifteen centres). A good number of songs are common to all Qawwals and known to Sufis all over the Indic subcontinent; they are Sufi 'classics'. In addition, networks of related shrines share repertoires oriented to particular saintly lineages, repertoires which also reflect regional musical styles, especially where rural audiences abound. Within shrine networks, each shrine of some import has its own special songs, and then there are a Qawwali performer's personal songs. Finally, this repertoire is performed in different settings in many different ways (I recorded over 20 versions of the two best known Qawwali songs).

My analysis of Qawwali music arises from a careful consideration of this entire musical map, and its various constellations, which together constitute the repertoire structure of the Qawwali genre. The performance dimension of this music, however, can only be understood through the concrete music-making of the individual performer, whose competence encompasses particular categories and facets of Qawwali music, and who combines in his repertoire both unique and shared components of the music, articulating their respective significance in specific performance settings. For this purpose, the specific emphasis of this study is on the repertoire of the Qawwal Bachche at Nizamuddin Auliya and on its use in performance. Among them I have singled out an individual performer, Meraj Ahmad Nizami, senior member of his lineage and direct descendant of the famous nineteenth-century singer Tan Ras Khan, a performer rich in repertoire and performing experience.

It is the performing life of this core performer, in the surrounding of his home shrine and his fellow lineage members at that shrine, which provides the concrete context for my musical ethnography of Qawwali and for its central focus, the individual Qawwali performance. Only a thorough familiarity with this total context – as well as with the musical repertoire – can enable an observer to analyse the making of Qawwali music systematically and in all its essential nuances. By examining numerous performances within the same contextual setting it becomes possible to juxtapose systematically the core performer's rendition of different songs, of the same song with different settings and audiences, and then to compare performances of the same song in the same setting by different performers – all this so as to account for variables of musical and contextual variation.

The musical exemplification of Qawwali has been chosen to reflect this focus on a coherent repertoire and its total contextual setting, while also representing general facets of Qawwali music and performance practice. To this end, an integrated example structure is presented throughout the text that centres on the core performer Meraj Ahmad, his musical and text repertoire, his performances as well as his background and his relationships within the setting of the Nizamuddin Auliya shrine. At the same time, this structure aims to convey a coherent and representative ethnographic picture of Qawwali as it lives today in both India and Pakistan. Thus the music examples consist of a cross section of Meraj Ahmad's core repertoire, containing at the same time famous Sufi songs representative of the major categories of Qawwali music, and including versions representative of different performance styles. As for the exemplification of the Qawwali context, it emanates, wherever possible, from the Nizamuddin Auliya shrine, its assemblies, and its larger network, including social and ideological perspectives and situating the performers within their Sufi community – all this so that a picture of the total context for Meraj Ahmad's music may emerge. The two kinds

of information thus presented, musical and contextual, come together in the examples of performance events. This enables the reader to decode the process of musical and contextual interaction, in details of both fact and implication, thereby illustrating ethnographically the amazing dynamic of Qawwali music-making. If the edifice of exemplification appears enormously complex it is so only when considered in terms of its components; taken together, they constitute a living whole, organic and compelling.

1 *The Qawwali repertoire*

A The songs

Qawwali music consists essentially of songs, musical settings of poems. The 'tunes' (*dhun*, *bandish*, *tarz*) of these musical settings are the repertoire of Qawwali music. Identified normally by their text, Qawwali tunes nevertheless have a recognized musical identity. Indeed, most Qawwali tunes are movable and therefore fall into their own categories, independent or overlapping with textual ones. For Qawwali generally, and for the performers of this particular repertoire, the Qawwal Bachche of Nizamuddin Auliya, there is first of all a stock of standard tunes, most of which are associated with standard poems. This tune repertoire encompasses what Qawwals call 'old' tunes (*purānī dhuneṅ*, *purānī bandisheṅ*). Within that general category the 'special' (*maḵẖsūs*, *ḵẖās*) settings of particular poems are identified by their texts, but many are movable and adapted to different poems. Not movable are musical settings of ritual songs or of songs with a special shrine association. Also included in this general category of what Nizamuddin Auliya Qawwals call 'typical Qawwal tunes' (*Qawwālī kī ṭheṭ dhuneṅ*) are tunes for common use (*'ām dhuneṅ*) that can suit any poem within a given range of structural features.

In addition to the old stock repertoire there is an expanding repertoire of what are called 'tunes of nowadays' (*ājkal kī dhuneṅ*). Some of them, too, are settings of particular poems, mostly modern ones; often these are also known by their composers, usually well-known Qawwals. Recordings of such newly composed songs have helped generate a new musical repertoire, of songs mostly popular in style, which also constitutes a source of new tunes for adapting to suitable poems. Nizamuddin Auliya Qawwals are always on the lookout for new tunes, 'picking them up' (*uṛānā* – to snatch) from listening to performances, or, more rarely, making them up. All make sure of learning what is currently popular, but differences in personal preference and training result in a more popular orientation in some, while a strictly classical Sufi orientation is represented by their principal singer, Meraj Ahmad, whose repertoire of classical Sufi poems as well as of authentic old tunes is the most extensive.

In concrete terms, the repertoire which is actually heard in performance at Nizamuddin Auliya is a collection of songs covering all the above categories of poems and tunes and representing both family heritage and individual acquisition. This means that any one individual within the group knows four types of song:

(a) Songs specifically associated with Nizamuddin Auliya, including ritual songs and Amir Khusrau compositions. These constitute the essence of the Qawwal Bachche tradition (represented in Nos. 2 and 3 of the chosen repertoire).

(b) Sufi classics known to Sufis and Qawwals all over India (Repertoire Nos. 1 and 4).

(c) Songs that form part of the performer's personal repertoire, either handed down in his immediate family or acquired on his own, including his own compositions. Such songs may be

picked up by his colleagues, but they remain associated with his name, and they most clearly reflect his performing personality (Repertoire Nos. 5 and 6).

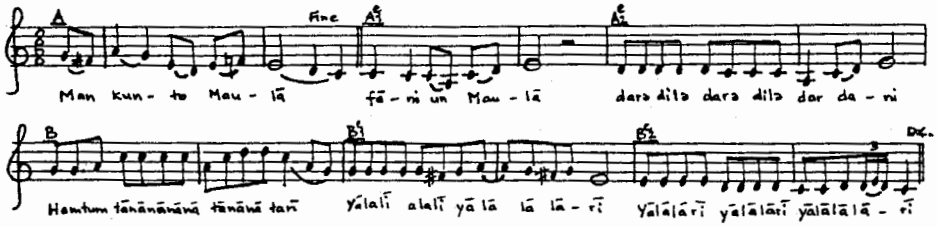
(d) Songs with popular success, added to the repertoire to keep up with the trend of the day (Repertoire No. 7).

The proportion between these types of songs varies from one Nizamuddin performer to the next: Meraj, being oriented to classical Sufism and having a particularly rich backgound, is extremely well-versed in types (a) and (b) – the latter also because of his extensive exposure to shrines all over India. He excels in type (c), particularly with his knowledge of old songs, but has kept type (d) to a minimum.

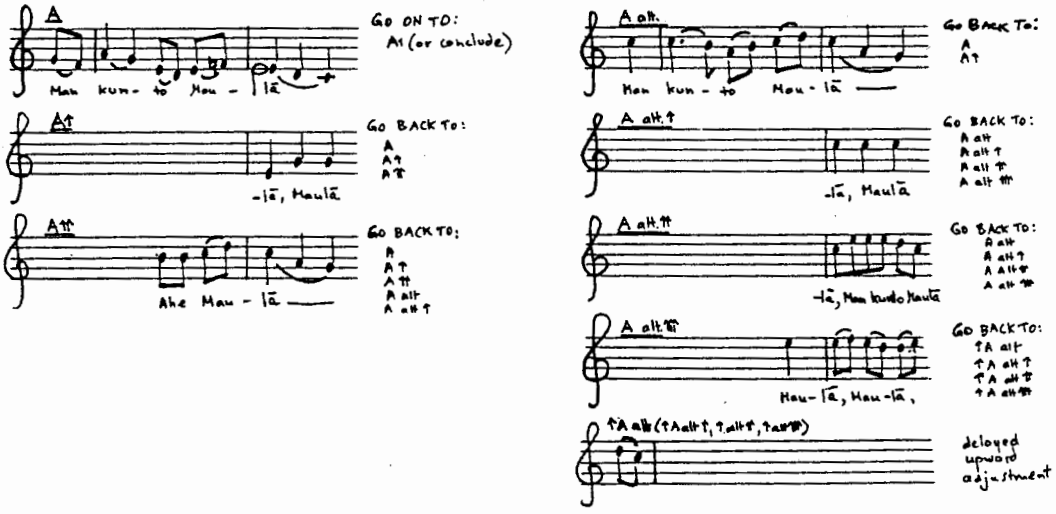
The transcriptions convey each song as the performer presents it, with its tune outline and text as well as the alternative endings and tune sections that are used in performance. The aim is to represent Qawwali as a normative musical structure rather than an acoustic event (the cassette provides that dimension). Since the instrumental accompaniment on *ḍholak* and harmonium is not considered integral to the song, the transcription does not include it, but the rôle of this accompaniment is dealt with in the analysis.

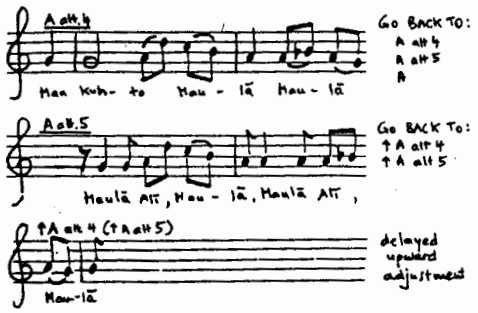
Added to each song transcription is the complete text, along with a transliteration and translation. Also appended are basic features of musical and poetic structure. Finally, each song is annotated with a thumbnail sketch of relevant musical, ethnographic and background information.

1 ***Qaul: Man kunto Maulā*** (CD item: 1)



Alternative endings





Arabic–Farsi text

مَن کُنتُ تو مولا
فعلیٌ مولا
دَر دِل دَر دِل دَر دانی

ہَم تُم تانانا نانا تانانا ناری
یلالی یلالی یلا یالاری

Transliteration *Translation*

Arabic

Man kunto Maulā — Whoever accepts me as master
Fā Alī-un-Maulā — Ali is his master too

Farsi

Dar dil dar dil dar dānī — (For interpretation of the remaining text, see
Ham tum tānānā nānā tānānānā rī — Annotation below)
Yālalī yālalī yālā yālā rī
Yālalalī yālalalī yālā yālā rī

Text–music structure

(a) Form: irregular 6-line strophe, fitted into *asthāyī-antarā* scheme.

verse line 1 = A *asthāyī*
2 = $A^{e}1$ *asthāyī* extension
3 = $A^{e}2$ *asthāyī* extension
4 = B *antarā*
5 = $B^{e}1$ *antarā* extension
6 = $B^{e}2$ *antarā* extension

(b) Metre and rhythmic realization: irregular – set to 8/8 *kaharvā*

Annotation

This is the basic ritual song of Sufism in India; indeed one can call it the Opening – or Closing – Hymn of Qawwali. At Nizamuddin Auliya no Qawwali event can start any other way, while elsewhere in India and Pakistan the Qaul serves as a conclusion. The hymn expresses a basic Sufi tenet, that the principle of spiritual succession in Sufism was instituted by the Prophet himself, as recorded in one of his sayings (*hadīs*). It is this saying which constitutes the main text of this brief hymn, which is therefore called *qaul* ('saying' in Arabic; see p. 83 below).

According to all Sufis in India, it is Amir Khusrau who set this *hadīs* to music, extending it with *zikr*-like phrases (see p. 82 below) in Farsi which today are only partly intelligible.[4]

Musically, the Qaul is set to a version of raga *shudh kalyān* which the Qawwal Bachche consider authentic, since the raga is likely to have changed over time while the Qawwali hymn tune has been carefully preserved and passed on in an unbroken succession of hereditary shrine performers.

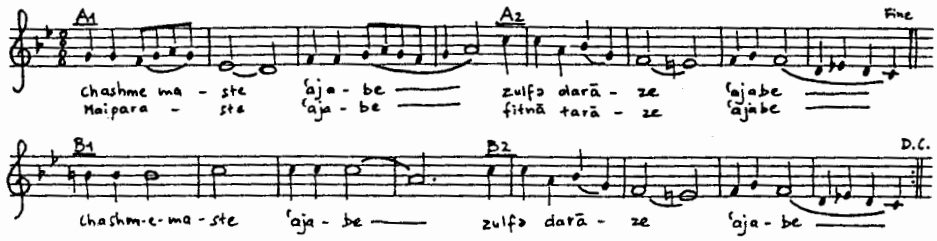
The song consists of six lines and a complete tune, with *asthāyī* and *antarā* and their extensions. However, in this song the entire textual meaning is contained in the first two lines, so that the remainder is rarely repeated more than cursorily. In fact, the entire emphasis in performance falls on the core opening statement set to the *asthāyī* and expressed through every kind of repetition. A good number of alternative tune versions allow the performer to create variety, and structure the repetition of very short units into somewhat larger musical phrases. Most important, they enable him to raise the intensity level by raising the pitch level of this low-register *asthāyī* tune.

Amplifying insertions (*girahs*) are much used in the performance of the Qaul. Since the message of the song is so basic and its implication so profound for Sufism, extension through insertions is normally expected, so that every performer at Nizamuddin Auliya has in his memory a stock of appropriate *girahs*, many of which are Sufi classics in their own right. Another aspect of the extended repetition standard for this hymn is the use of musical improvisation. Nizamuddin performers prefer melodic improvisation, while performers elsewhere also use rhythmic improvisation to the Farsi syllables.

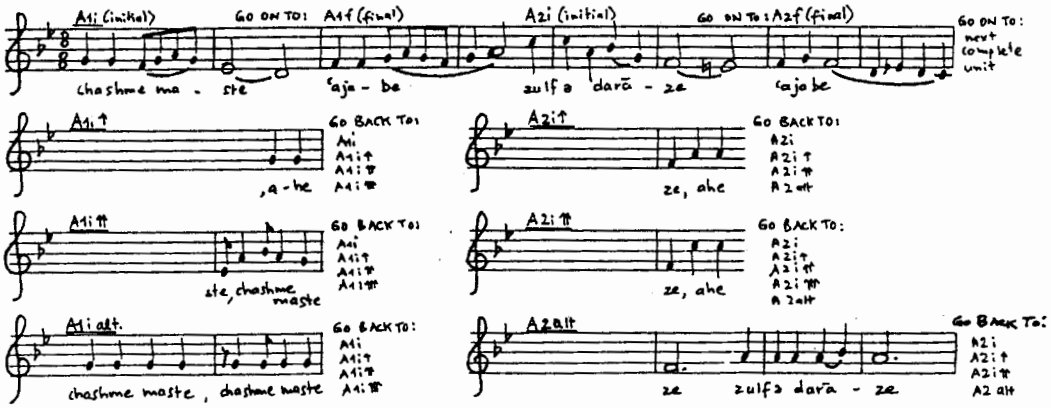
The version presented here is identical for all Qawwal Bachche and recognized throughout India and Pakistan as the one that most authentically represents the original by Amir Khusrau.

Twenty-one performances of the Qaul by the Qawwal Bachche were recorded – varying in duration from a few minutes to almost one hour – among them the brief rendition of Performance No. 1 (see below, pp. 148–52).

2 ***Chashm-e maste-ʿajabe*** (CD item: 3)



Alternative endings



Farsi text (5 verses out of a possible 8)

چشم مستے عجبے زلف درازے عجبے
ترک تازے عجبے شعبدہ بازے عجبے

مے پرستے عجبے فتنہ درازے عجبے
کج کلاہے عجبے ادبدہ سازے عجبے

بہر قتلم چو کشد تیغ نہاں سر بسجود
او بہ نازے عجبے من بہ نیازے عجبے

حق نگو کلمۂ کفر است در ایں جا خسرو
راز دانے عجبے صاحب رازے عجبے

وقت بسمل شدنم چشم بروئش باز است
مہربانے عجبے بندہ نوازے عجبے

Transliteration

Chashm-e-maste 'ajabe zulf tarāze 'ajabe
Maiparaste 'ajabe fitna tarāze 'ajabe

Bahr-e-qatlam chu kashad tegh neham sar basujūd
Ū banāze 'ajabe man banyāze 'ajabe

Waqt-e-bismil shudanam chashm barūyash bāz ast
Mehrbāne 'ajabe bandanawāze 'ajabe

Translation

O wondrous ecstatic eyes, o wondrous long locks,
O wondrous wine worshipper, o wondrous mischievous sweetheart.

As he draws the sword, I bow my head in prostration so as to be killed,
O wondrous is his beneficence, o wondrous my submission.

In the spasm of being killed my eyes beheld your face:
O wondrous benevolence, o wondrous guidance and protection.

Turk tāze 'ajabe shoba babāze 'ajabe	O wondrous amorous teasing, o wondrous beguiling,
Kajkulāhe 'ajabe 'arbada sāze 'ajabe	O wondrous tilted cap (symbol of beauty), o wondrous tormentor.
Haq mago kalma-e-kufr ast dar īn jā Khusrau	Do not reveal the Truth; in this world blasphemy prevails, Khusrau:
Rāzdāne 'ajabe sāhib-e-rāz-e-'ajabe	O wondrous Source of mystery, o wondrous Knower of secrets.

Text–music structure

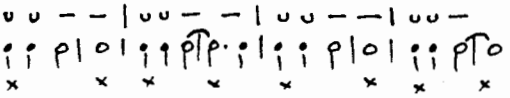
(a) Form: *ghazal and asthāyī-antarā* scheme

verse 1 line 1	a (rhyming)	= A (*asthāyī*) + B (*antarā*)
line 2	a (rhyming)	= A (*asthāyī*)
verse 2 line 1	b (non-rhyming)	= B (*antarā*)
(etc.) line 2	a (rhyming)	= A (*asthāyī*)

(b) Rhythm: verse metre *raml* and musical metre 8/8 (*qawwālī kā ṭhēkā*)

verse metre ∪ ∪ — — | ∪ ∪ — — | ∪ ∪ — — | ∪ ∪ —

musical metre



Annotation

This is one of the most famous and stirring Qawwali classics in the repertoire of the Qawwal Bachche. The poem, a *ghazal* by Amir Khusrau, conveys ecstasy and mystical love through the rich imagery of traditional Persian love poetry, enhanced by a euphonious rhyme scheme and the pervasive use of the monorhyme *'ajabe* (strangely wonderful), a term which so aptly characterizes the mystical experience.

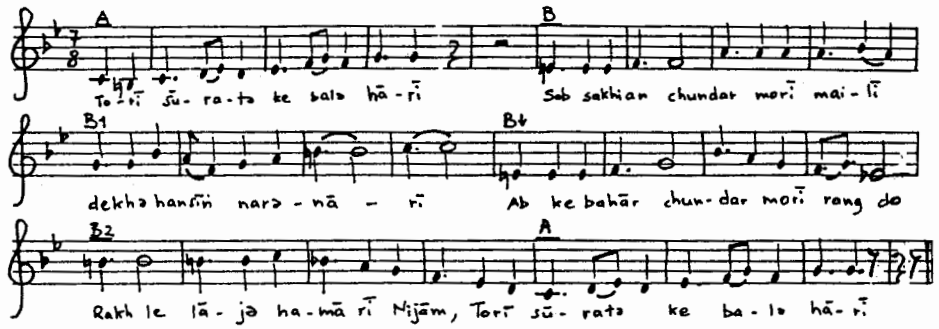
The musical setting is characterized by a strongly motivic melody typical of many 'special' or 'old' Qawwali tunes. It is highly structured in parallel phrases and sequential rhythmic patterns, both traits being favoured by a long verse line and a regular metric pattern. Of the two tune portions, the *asthāyī* is clearly the dominant one, melodically and motivically, while the *antarā* simply introduces the contrasting upper octave register and then joins into the concluding phrase of the *asthāyī* tune.

A particularity which this musical setting shares with many other Qawwali tunes, especially those associated with Farsi *ghazals*, is a musical realization of the poetic metre which renders the final long syllables of every rhythmic phrase into extended durational values. This extra duration permits the lead performer to insert word calls or even a fast repetition of the preceding text phrase (see transcription) at the end of that phrase, thus rendering the musical setting particularly suited to varied *takrār* repetition.

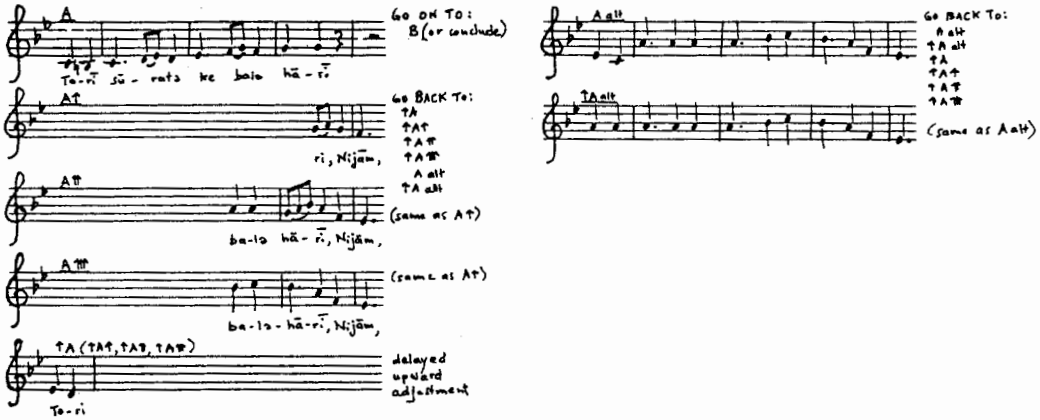
The version presented is Aziz Ahmad Khan Warsi's (see p. 102 below). The tune outline and alternative endings are identical with those of Meraj Ahmad's version, since both performers received their training from the same illustrious family tradition. Deviating versions can be heard by performers outside Nizamuddin Auliya, but the Qawwal Bachche version is recognized as standard. Elaborations are often heard in renditions of this song by Qawwal Bachche; among them Aziz Warsi excels in his melodic improvisations outlining raga phrases that match the song setting.

In addition to Aziz Warsi's version, five other performances of *Chashm-e-maste* were recorded, four sung by Meraj Ahmad and one by a hereditary performer from outside, singing at Nizamuddin Auliya.

3 ***Torī sūrat ke balhārī*** (CD item: 5)



Alternative endings



Hindi text

تُوری صُورت کے بَلیہاری بِجام
سَب سکھین چُندری موری میلی
دیکھہ ہنسیں نَر نَاری
اَب کے بَہار چُندر موری رَنگ دو
رکھہ لے لاج ہماری بِجام پیا

صَدقہ بَابَا گَنج شَکر کا
رَکھہ لے لاج ہماری بِجام پیا

تیری صورت کے بلہاری (نظام)
سب سکھیاں چندر موری میلی
دیکھ ہنسیں نرناری
اب کے بہار چندر موری رنگ دو
رکھ لے لاج ہماری (نظام پیا)

صدقہ بابا گنج شکر کا
رکھ لے لاج ہماری (نظام پیا)

کوہو ساس کوہو نند سے جھگڑے
میکا تو آس تیہاری
میری تیہاری سب کو ہو جانے
لاج میری ہے یا تیہاری

قطب فرید مل آے براتی
خسرو راج دلاری نظام پیا

Transliteration

Refrain:
Torī sūrat ke balhārī (Nijām)

1.
Sab sakhian chundar morī mailī
Dekh hansīṅ narnārī
Ab ke bahār chundar morī rang do
Rakh le lāj hamārī (Nijām Pīyā)

2.
Sadqā Bābā Ganj-e-Shakar kā
Rakh le lāj hamārī (Nijām Piyā)

3.
Koh sās koh nand se jhagṛe

Maikā to ās tihārī
Merī tihārī sab kahū jāne
Lāj merī hai yā tihārī

4.
Qutab Farid mil āe barātī

Ḳhusrau rāj dulārī (Nijām Pīyā)

Translation

Refrain:
Beholding your countenance I offer myself in sacrifice (Nijām).

1.
All the other girls saw my soiled *chundar*,[5]
And together they laughed at me.
This springtime, dye my *chundar* for me
O protect my honour (Nijām, Beloved)!

2.
In the name of Ganj-e-Shakar[6]
Protect our honour (Nijām, Beloved).

3.
Who can win against mother-in-law or sister-in-law?[7]
I pine for your support.
Everyone knows how you and I are linked:
Is my honour different from yours (Nijām, Beloved)?

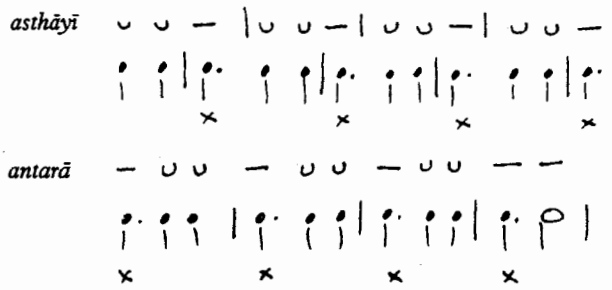
4.
Qutab and Farid have both joined in the wedding procession;[8]
Khusrau is the darling bride (Nijām, Beloved).

Text–music structure

(a) Form: refrain with stanzas and *asthāyī-antarā* scheme

refrain (*mukhṛā*)		a (rhyming)	= A	(*asthāyī*)
verse 1 line 1		b (non-rhyming)	= B	(*antarā*)
(etc.)	2	a (rhyming)	= B^{e1}	(*antarā* extension 1)
	3	b	= B	(*antarā*)
	4	a	= B^{e2}	(*antarā* extension 2)
verse 2 line 1		b (non-rhyming)	= B	(*antarā*)
	2	a (rhyming)	= B^{e}	(*antarā* extension 2)

(b) Rhythm: verse metre Hindi and musical metre 7/8 (*pashto*)



Annotation

Perhaps the most dearly beloved Amir Khusrau Qawwali in Hindi, this song most directly conveys the mystical love experience through the Hindi devotional idiom in which the devotee speaks as a bride giving up the self to merge with the beloved saint Nizamuddin, and it also touches on the supplication and invocation of spiritual seniors.

The form is typical for many Hindi songs: here, as often, the opening line stands by itself, is used as a refrain, and epitomizes the entire song. It is therefore highlighted by a distinctive *asthāyī* tune, setting it apart from the remaining musical setting, all of which is *antarā* material with extensions.

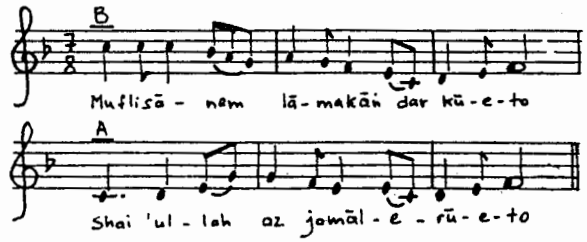
Melodically, this is a typical 'raga-like' tune or, as Meraj Ahmad puts it, the tune is raga-related (*yeh dhun rāg se wabastā hai*). The motivic pattern of the opening is unmistakably raga *kāfī*, and later phrases suggest *bahār*, but no consistency obtains throughout.

The rhythmic setting of the tune is simple, and in its long-short arrangement typical of Hindi poetry – anapaestic for the refrain and dactylic for the stanzas. But the musical metre governing this setting is the asymmetrical *pashto* (7/8) of classical or 'old' Qawwali songs, so that the long-short relationship becomes 3:2, rather than the 2:1 more common in Hindi songs.

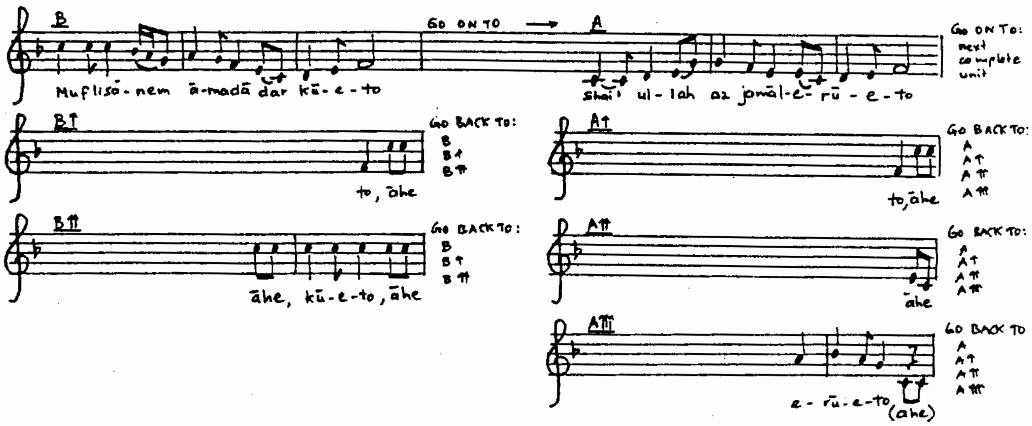
This song, both text and music, is part of the Qawwal Bachche's special heritage. It is widely sung within the entire Chishti *silsilā*, however, and can therefore be heard in a number of variants. The present version of Meraj Ahmad is standard for all Nizamuddin Auliya performers and may be considered the most authentic extant today. A performance of this song by Meraj is included in Performance No. 1 (see pp. 164–74 below); the first portion of that performance is transcribed in Example 17a (see pp. 73–4 below).

Torī sūrat was recorded in seven performances, four sung by Meraj Ahmad, and the rest by three hereditary Qawwals outside Nizamuddin Auliya.

4 ***Masnavī: Muflisānem*** (CD item: 6)



Alternative endings



Farsi text

مفلسانیم آمده در کوئے تو　　شئ للّه از جمال روئے تو
کعبهٔ دل قبلهٔ من روئے تو　　سجده گاه عاشقاں ابروئے تو

عیدگاه ما غریباں کوئے تو　　انبساط عید دیدم کوئے تو
صد ہلال عید قربانت کنم　　اے ہلال ما خم ابروئے تو
یا نظام الدین محبوب اله　　جمله محبوبان فدا بر روئے تو

Transliteration	*Translation*
Muflisānem āmadā dar kūe to	The distraught supplicants of love, we have come to your threshold,
Shaiʿ ullah az jamāl-e-rūe to	To perceive God's substance from the beauty of your face.
Kaʿba-e-dil qibla-e-man rūe to	The *kaʿba* of my heart, and the direction of my prayers is your face:
Sajdagāh-e-ʿāshiqāṅ abrūe to	For lovers the place of adoration is your presence.
Amir Khusrau verses:	*Amir Khusrau verses:*
Idgah-e-ma- gharībāṅ kūe to	We, the humble and poor, pray at the *īd*[9] assembly of your threshold
Imbisāt-e-īd dīdam kūe to	All the joy of *īd*, I see it at your threshold

Sad hilāl-e-ī'd qurbānat kunam	I offer up a thousand crescent moons of *ī'd*
Ai hilāl-e-mā kham-e-abrūe to	For us the crescent moon is the curve of your eyebrow
Yā Nizāmuddīn Mahbūb-e-Ilāh	O Nizamuddin, Beloved of God
Jumla mahbūbāṅ fidā bar rūe to	All the beloveds in the world are nothing as compared to your face.

Text–music structure

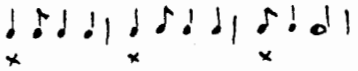
(a) Form: *ghazal* and *asthāyī-antarā* scheme

verse 1	line 1	a (rhyming)	= B (*antarā*, not *asthāyī*)
	line 2	a (rhyming)	= A (*asthāyī*)
verse 2	line 1	b (non-rhyming)	= B (*antarā*)
etc.)	line 2	a (rhyming)	= A (*asthāyī*)

(b) Rhythm: verse metre *raml* 2 and musical metre 7/8 (*pashto*)

verse metre — ∪ — — | — ∪ — — | — ∪ —

musical metre



Annotation

A classic throughout the history of Sufism, this song is derived from the *Masnavī* of Maulana Rum, that is Jalaluddin Rumi, mystic of mystics and founder of the Mevlevi order in Konya, Turkey. At Nizamuddin Auliya the tradition is to sing only two verses based on a *Masnavī* opening line and then to continue with a short and equally favourite poem, attributed to Amir Khusrau, which is composed on the *Masnavī* model, using the same poetic metre and rhyme scheme. Together, the five verses form a sort of 'mystic's self-statement', expressing his stance toward the spiritual Beloved and, in conclusion, invoking the Saint Nizamuddin Auliya as the perfect manifestation of both Lover and Beloved.

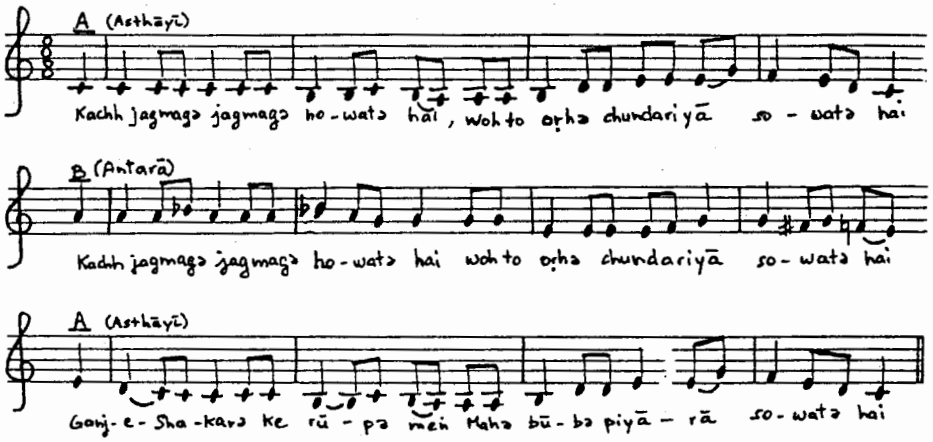
What is important about this song is that here, more than in any other Qawwali song, the musical setting itself has a very specific association with classical Sufism. Performers even consider this tune as being of non-Indian or Persian origin, if not the original setting of Rumi's *Masnavī* itself. The tune does indeed have a distinctive melodic contour in which a final rise to the fourth allows an initial fall. There is parallelism, but a raga-like motivic structure is missing. Furthermore, the structural balance between the two tune sections runs counter to the standard *asthāyī–antarā* format (see pp. 55–6 below), for the high-register section is here clearly the primary tune portion while the *asthāyī* section is rather a low-register extension. Indeed, the *Masnavī* always starts directly with the *antarā* tune sung to the opening line, not with the *asthāyī*, as is the norm.

The song exemplifies a rhythmic setting and pace which are true and proper for an authentic Qawwali: the poetic metre is realized literally, to a 7/8 metre. The presentation is at a slow and measured pace, so that in the execution of this 7/8 metre every single beat is articulated on the drum, in contrast to faster-paced songs like *Torī sūrat* where the drum only provides principal beats.

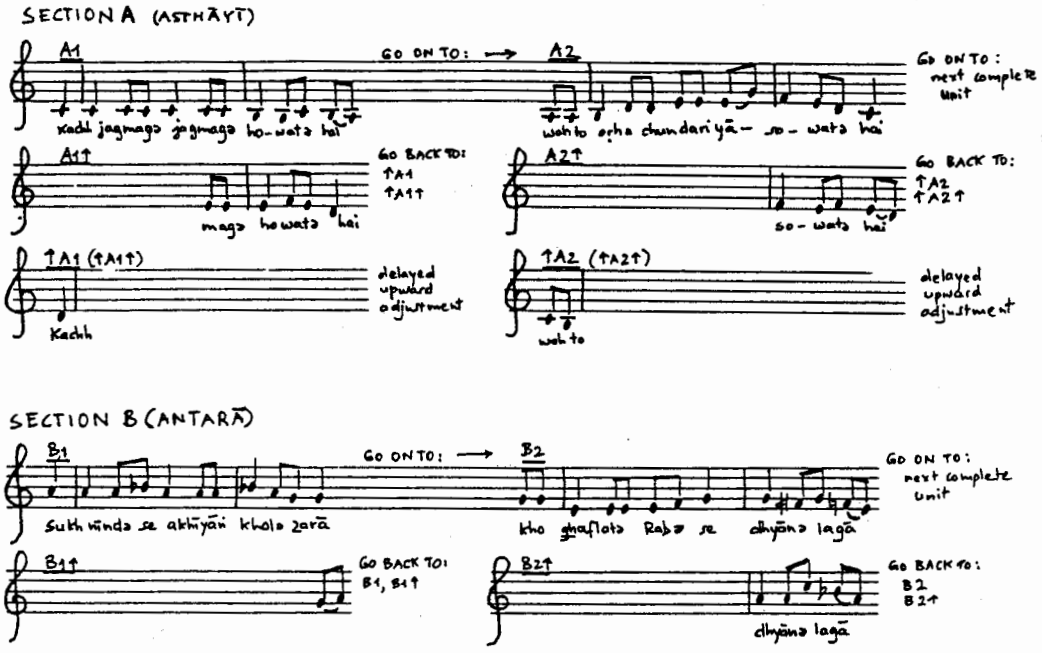
Because of its 'high stature' (*ūñchā maqām*, in Meraj's words) the *Masnavī* tune is favoured as a setting for other Farsi poems with the same metre to lend them its enhancing power. In addition, the same tune is also used when a Farsi poem of this structure serves as Introductory Verse or Insert; in that case the tune is recited in free rhythm (as shown in *Man turā*, p. 43 below).[10]

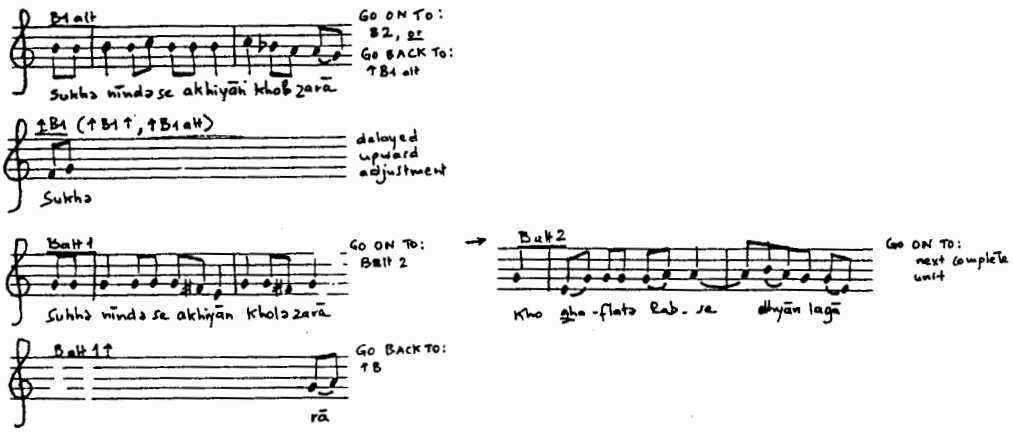
Meraj's version presented here is considered standard; other recordings made of the *Masnavī* include a demonstration by Meraj, as well as a performance by a hereditary Qawwal from Hyderabad, and four performances using the *Masnavī* tune in recitative form.

5 ***Kachh jagmag*** (CD item: 7)



Alternative endings





Hindi text

کچھ جگمگ جگمگ ہووت ہے وہ تو اوڑھ چندریا سووت ہے
گنج شکر کے روپ میں محبوب پیارا سووت ہے

سکھ نیند سے انکھیاں کھول ذرا کھو غفلت رب سے دھیان لگا
یہ پریت کرن کی ریت نہیں رب جاگت ہے تو سووت ہے

جو کل کرے تو آج ہی کر جو آج کرے سو اب کر لے
جب چڑیاں کھیت چگت ڈاری پھر پچھتائے کا ہووت ہے

Transliteration

Kachh jagmag jagmag howat hai, woh to oṛh chundariā sowat hai
Ganj-e-Shakar ke rūp meṅ, Mahbūb piyārā sowat hai

Sukh nīnd se akhiyāṅ khol zarā, kho ghaflat Rab se dhyān lagā
Yeh prīt karan kī rīt nahīṅ, Rab jāgat hai tū sowat hai

Translation

How glittering is the *chundarīa*,[11] it covers one who is asleep.
In the likeness of Ganj-e-Shakar [see note 6 above], the dear Beloved is asleep.

From a sound sleep open your eyes; become conscious and focus on God:
This is not the way of loving; God is awake, yet you are asleep.

Jo kāl kare to āj hī kar, jo āj kare so ab karle	Whatever you would do tomorrow, do it today; what you would do today, do it now;
Jab chiṛian khet chugat dārī, phir pachhtāe kā howat hai	Once the birds have picked the field clean, what will repenting achieve?

Text–music structure

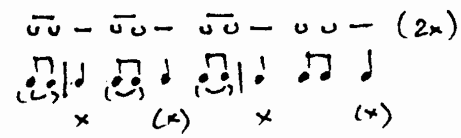
(a) Form: *g͟hazal* and *asthāyī-antarā* scheme

verse 1 line 1 a (rhyming) = A (*asthāyī*) + B (*antarā*)
line 2 a (rhyming) = A (*asthāyī*)
verse 2 line 1 b (non-rhyming) = B (*antarā*)
(etc.) line 2 a (rhyming) = A (*asthāyī*)

(b) Rhythm: verse metre *mutadārik* and musical metre 8/8 (*kaharvā*)

verse metre

musical metre



Annotation

This song is part of Meraj's personal repertoire. Considered an 'old' song, it is currently little heard, but Meraj likes to revive it for 'special' listeners.

The poem is folksong-like, drawing from Hindi devotional as well as folk idioms to address the beloved *Mahbūb*, or *Mahbūb-e-Ilāhī* (Beloved of God, the title of Nizamuddin Auliya), expressing qualities of mystical love. In form, it follows the *g͟hazal* scheme; accordingly, the musical setting falls into standard *asthāyī* and *antarā* portions.

The melodic frame of the tune is traditional, that is, common to other Qawwali songs[12] and to folk and light classical song tunes with mixed raga elements. Because of the long verse line, alternative endings clearly indicate repeat units, each one half line long. Rhythmically the musical setting corresponds entirely to a syllabic representation of the poetic metre. Its anapaestic character fits flexibly into a musical metre of 8/8.

Two versions of this song were recorded at Nizamuddin Auliya, both sung by Meraj Ahmad.

6 ***Batufail-e-dāman-e-Murtazā*** (CD item: 8)