Qawwals of Ajmer: Hereditary Musicians

Making Connections at a Cultural Crossroads

by

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“When God first made a statue out of clay (the human body) and ordered the soul, which had always existed, to enter the body of clay, the soul protested that its nature was to fly about freely, and not to be constrained by a body. God then ordered the angels to play their music. As they did so, the soul became ecstatic and then realized that to savour this ecstasy to the fullest it would do well to enter the body. Although living inside the human body brought limitations, it also offered certain compensations such as the acquisition of the five senses, thus enabling a greater appreciation of music, with all the emotional sensitivity of a human being as opposed to the calm detachment of soul. So, it is said, it was music that enabled the soul to overcome its reservations at being imprisoned, because this imprisonment, for all its drawbacks brought one major joy – the enhanced ability to savour music.”

Inayat Khan, *The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan* (1991 [1960])

“The joy of music is, then, the soul's delight in being invited, for once, to recognize itself in the body.”

Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Naked Man* (1969a:657)

“Writing about music is like dancing about architecture.”

Martin Mull, *Time Barrier Express*, September-October, 1979

Chapter One - Introduction

Entrance to the dargah of Muinuddin Chishti, Ajmer

The Dargah of Muinuddin Chishti

City of Ajmer, Rajasthan, India

June 5th, 2008, just after sunset

As you pass through the high, arched gate (commissioned by the emperor Akbar in 1567 C.E.) the noise and chaos, the hands clutching at your shirt tails fall away as you leave your

shoes to tread the warm marble worn smooth by the feet of generations of pilgrims before you. The place feels shady, clean, subdued. The soft conversation of travelers around you blends with the chirping of thousands of finches who live in the many old trees of the courtyard around the *mazār* (mausoleum) of Muinuddin[1] Chishti, India's first Sufi saint. Unlike nearly every public or semi-public place this tall, light-skinned, blond visitor finds himself in India, at the dargah[2], people leave one alone.

I follow the high, slightly hoarse voice of Asrar Hussain to the courtyard where the musicians perform on Thursday nights between *maghrib* (just after sunset) and *ishā* (night) prayers. He and his family are making the music of Sufi ecstasy known as *qawwālī.* Sitting in the courtyard are several rows of people around an open aisle between the musicians and the southern entrance to the *mazār.* The traffic of shrine visitors is in constant motion around this space: pilgrims and tourists, administrators and workers attending them, families posing for photographs.

Asrar raises his voice and projects over the ambient noise of talking visitors and the twittering of the birds over our heads. Although gender segregation among the audience in this lower-status performance space is incomplete, most female listeners stay to the left of the shrine entrance, under the canopy that protects them from the bird droppings. Men stay out in the open on the right, and also occupy the first rows along the open aisle between the *qawwāls*

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1 Spelling variants include Muin ud-din, and Muin al-din. I use the most common romanization in signs and maps in India, except where a reference quoted uses another, e.g. Currie 1989.

2 Muslim saint's shrine. Literally, "royal court." People in South Asia use the term "dargah" to denote any of the structures built around the graves of Muslim saints. Ajmer residents use the term to describe the whole miniature city of edifices: courtyards, meeting halls, offices, mosques and reading rooms surrounding the central, domed mausoleum of Muinuddin Chishti. Dargahs have individual and regional characters, but the generic use of the term "dargah" to describe a varied set of saint's shrines, tombs and grave markers all over the region suggests to me (as it does to Bellamy 2011:5-6) that pilgrims to these places "regard subcontinental Islamic memorial structures as connected...manifestations of a single type of power."

(performers) and the door of the tomb. The flecks of bird droppings are just one of many distractions that Asrar must urge us to overcome. He pushes his voice even further. He is sixty-seven, and beginning to look a bit frail, but his voice is powerful on this night. Asrar's son and grandson, sitting on either side of him, stop clapping their hands in rhythm, watching their leader's face. The supporting singers (his sons, brothers, and nephews) in the second row wait for the chorus they will repeat. The two drummers in the back keep time with their fingertips, waiting for the pulsing beat to kick back in.

Yā Ali!
Yā Gharīb Nāwāz!
Yā Muinuddin!

Asrar's vocative *yā* rings out over the courtyard. Usually translated as an honorific "O" in English, *yā* in the Islamic context has the connotation of appealing to God, the Prophet, or another member of a spiritual lineage for intercession. Its use is sometimes contested, as some Sunnis reject the idea of appealing to anyone but *Allah.* Nevertheless, its use is common. I have heard laborers in Pakistan shout "*yā Ali!"* before attempting to lift a heavy load, for example. Here the three loud invocations send the whole party into a renewed crescendo of drumbeats, hand claps, and voices in unison, repeating the lines Asrar has sung. Asrar's invocation also directs our attention to the chain of transmission from the Prophet Muhammad to Ali to the saint to us.

Many consider Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, the fourth *caliph*, to be a prototypical Sufi because of his relentless striving to become a better human being. Numerous qawwali songs praise him, in part because, while the Prophet was a naturally perfect person, Ali, like the rest of

us, had to work hard to achieve spiritual perfection (Siddiqi 2005:346). In addition, the Chishti order, although Sunnis, trace their lineage through Ali. The epithet *Gharīb Nāwāz* ("protector of the poor") refers to the Sufi saint Muinuddin Chishti's commitment to helping the needy.

This dissertation foregrounds the role of hereditary musicians in constructing ritual. The function of the ritual known as *samā* ("audition" or "spiritual concert") is not only in the inner, contemplative life of the devotee of Sufi Islam (Lewisohn 1997), but in the public, interactive life of a community of participants. When the ritual takes place at this popular shrine in an urban setting, the cultural context is cosmopolitan, the community large and heterogeneous. The resident musicians at the shrine, the qawwals, use their craft to bind together elements of hierarchy and mutuality (Raheja 1989) as they help to connect listeners to a community of practice.

Samā and *zikr*

The qawwals and their audience are engaging in *samā,* "listening, audition," the Sufi practice of listening to spiritual sounds as a way of getting closer to God. *Samā* is one of the forms of *zikr* ("remembering" and "remembrance") practiced by Muslims worldwide. While *zikr* is sanctioned by the Qur'an (Sura 33:40 and 13:28), *samā* has always remained a controversial practice in Islam, because of debates about the lawfulness of music (Qureshi 1986:82). Even those scholars who warn about music's potential for corruption and sin acknowledge its power. The influential Persian theologan al-Ghazali (d.1111 C.E.) declares that music and singing are "more powerful than the Qur'an in arousing ecstasy" (2009:95). Some Sufi orders prohibit *samā,* or restrict its performance to singing without instrumental accompaniment, or without drums

(Hussaini 1970:79). However, the mainstream of Sufi tradition in India and Pakistan recognizes *samā* as the means for a Sufi's attaining *hāl,* a "state" of spiritual arousal and intensity, and *wajd*, the ecstasy that comes from "finding" God (Hujwiri 1970:404). As a performance, a ritual, and an occasion of exchange, *Samā* is "no doubt the most widely known expression of mystical life in Islam" (Schimmel 1975:179) In South Asia, the Chishti order of Sufis was especially successful at integrating local and regional language, poetry and musical styles into their practice of *samā* (Khalidi 1989). Qawwali, a product of this integration, creativity, and tradition, is "a group song performed by *qawwals*, professional musicians who perform in groups led by one or two solo singers" (Qureshi 1986: xiii). Qawwali is "a method of worship", "a means of spiritual advancement" and "a feast for the soul" (Qureshi 1986: xiii).

Qureshi (1986:82) aptly describes qawwali as "*samā* realized in practice: mystical poetry is set to music and enhanced by a powerful rhythm as well as by repetition so as to suggest *zikr."* In the broad context of Islam, *zikr* refers to "the constant recollection of God" (Schimmel 1975:84) and may include a variety of practices (such as the silent or voiced repetition of God's name) intended to direct the believer's mind and attention away from distractions. In Sufism, the use of *samā* as a component of *zikr,* is specifically intended to inspire "immediate experience and ecstasy and inward transformation" (al-Ghazali, quoted in Nicholson 1962:120). The use of music in *samā,* embraced fully only by the Chishti order, has remained controversial, due to debates about the lawfulness and dangers of music generally. Melodic "chanting or cantillation of religious texts" (Qureshi 1986:82) is accepted by orthodox scholars insofar as it is conceived of as "recitation" or "reading." *Samā,* in the sense employed in qawwali, with instrumental accompaniment and powerful rhythms (which themselves suggest the repetition of *zikr,*

according to Sadam, the *dholak*[3] and *tablā*[4] player who works with two of the parties in this study) has been justified since the earliest recorded Sufi scholars (see, for example, Hujwiri 1970) by locating it clearly in the ear of the listener. The concept of *samā* in Hujwiri's influential Farsi text (written in Lahore in the 11th century C.E.) refers exclusively to what is heard, leaving out the agency or conception of the maker or performer. However, in practice, qawwali is necessarily a link between player and listener.

The hierarchical relationships shown in the arrangement and rules for listening neglect an important aspect of this practice: the voluntary and creative acts of the musicians, and the connections they create with and among audiences as they transmit their message. The strict conceptual separation between listener (typically called *"sufi"* or *"mashaikh"* in Sufi philosophical writings such as al-Hujwiri's) and qawwal ("the one who speaks" the message) devalues the spirituality and agency of the latter. In practice, the emotional, spiritual and material satisfaction that comes from real live qawwali in the presence of the saint is a collaboration between both parties. When viewed from the performer's perspective, the "rules for listening to *samā*" (see Hujwiri 1970: Ch. 25; Khan 1960:60-65) which emphasize a prototype setting with a strict hierarchy of "auditioning" mystics under the guidance of a spiritual master (Qureshi 1989:83) cannot paint a complete picture of the power and emotional effectiveness of real qawwali. In most of the settings I describe, the music, its message, and the blessings and money it causes to flow are more open and available to a variety of listeners outside this conception. This suggests a far more creative and authoritative role for the music makers than we see in some treatises on Sufism and *samā* (e.g. Hujwiri 1970; Hussaini 1970;

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3 barrel-shaped, two headed hand drum, common in qawwali and South Asian folk music

4 pair of small differently-sized hand drums, often associated with Hindustani classical music

Lewisohn 1997; Moini 1989).

The ritual of *samā* is not under the firm control of a ritual specialist, nor small enough to be simply called vernacular practice. It is a "vernacular" tradition in the sense implied by Flueckiger (2006), in that it is context-sensitive, and close to the heart of what people want, enjoy, and value for its emotional payoff. Rosaldo (1993), Stoller (1998), and Hirschkind (2006) justifiably urge anthropologists to consider the emotional, sensory and physical aspects of ritual. The act of performance and listening is not only a detached, meditative, or cognitive experience. Ritual cannot be reduced to a musical performance, nor set apart from the lives of the participants.

As a musical genre, qawwali, the devotional song of the Sufis of the Chishti tradition, is the medium by which an esoteric message is routed for mass consumption (Hyder 2011:26). In its ritual context, participants enact a narrative of the interconnectedness of humanity[5]. In both cases, the performer, a figure marginalized in both public life and much scholarship on religion and Islam, plays a crucial role in making this possible. By working in collaboration with hereditary musicians at this enormously popular Sufi shrine, I show how important emic categories of "knot tying" (*girah bandī),* and "chains" (*silsilā*) of transmission effectively characterize the agency of musicians in establishing meaningful junctures at a busy intersection of communities and processes.

Rethinking liminality as craft

It has been nearly a half-century since Victor Turner built upon van Gennep's concept of

[5] This is a central message of both Sufism and Anthropology. The Sufi emphasis on understanding with the heart and the body through lived experience has a corollary in recent anthropological work by Hirschkind (2006), Rosaldo (1993), and Stoller (1997).

the *limen* (“margin”) to evoke the intermediate and transitional qualities of ritual. Dated as the term may seem, the moments of liminality we experience tend to be memorable, emotionally powerful, and lucid in their revelation to us of our place in society. My collaborators in Ajmer and my students in Madison remind me of this when the notion of “betwixt and between” sparks their imagination and resonates with their own experience. The term continues to identify a window through which we may view in detail the moments of encounter, transition, and bonding that take place in ritual.

For all the participants in dargah culture, the ritual is not a discreet cultural artifact. It intersects with everyday life, in which spiritual and economic pursuits, and the religious, caste and ethnic diversity of this urban space encounter each other. It is partly through the shared experience of the ephemeral substance of sound that participants learn to live together. The community of practice established by the musicians' creativity is not a microcosm of, but rather a model for co-existence. Ajmer has been a center of cultural and religious exchange for centuries. This history is reflected and made present through the craft of the hereditary musicians who live there.

This project foregrounds the life and performance of hereditary musicians as active facilitators of integration and co-participation. Drawing on insights from Flueckiger (2006), I consider a vernacular religious space as a crossroads of traditions and religious communities. I follow Bellamy's (2011) suggestion that we consider dargahs as cultural institutions in their own right, and that much of their power and appeal resides in their ambiguity. I try to portray qawwali as a domain of sound and hearing that attunes the minds and bodies of a diverse array of participants through collective acts of performance and audition. People learn and act

meaningfully not only through isolated contemplation and meditation,[6] but through sensory engagement with dargah culture and with each other. To "connect with God," as the Sufis say, one must connect with other people. The connections that the musicians facilitate result in a community of practice that crosses boundaries of caste, gender, and religion in ways that resemble the community-building power of Mira *bhajan* singing documented by Mukta (1994) and the inter-tribal and inter-ethnic unifying power of ritual Kiowa singers described by Lassiter (1998). However, it is important to note that, while the connecting power of qawwali leads to a transcendence of boundaries, it also reaffirms hierarchies such as the spiritual authority of the saint's lineage, and the structuring power of the dargah and its organization. Unlike the *bhakti* tradition portrayed by Mukta, the community of practice in *samā* does not seem to suggest an emergent proletarian class identity, but is manifest in an open, but distinctly Islamic, frame of submission.

This community of practice, in many ways, is a learning body. An important component of the ritual is a process of teaching and learning for both the performers and audiences in the course of the real event that Lave and Wenger (1991) theorize elegantly as "situated learning." It is in this composite mode of pedagogy (in which participants learn not only from their superiors, but from each other) that I find it useful to follow Groesbeck (2009), Lande (2007), Qureshi (2009), and Wolf (2009) in noting how these performers integrate "vertical" and "horizontal" modes of transmission. Since the vertical and horizontal find expression not only through teaching, but in different contexts of social relations and exchange in the dargah, I incorporate Raheja's depiction of "the ranked aspect of social life"/"hierarchy" and its context-sensitive co-

[6] The dominant frame of reference for Sufi practice - See Lewisohn 1997 for an overview of religious treatises to this effect.

existence with the “shared aspect”/“mutuality” (1989:81-2) in South Asia. These distinguishable, but simultaneous features of everyday social life are mediated by different contexts of ritual exchange. In the context of qawwali, different performance contexts and different modes of offering and exchange express different modes of hierarchy and mutuality. The ritual context combines these elements and draws participants into these systems. The liminality of the performance and their position is active: a strategy for making a living and for transmitting the Sufi message of the interconnectedness of humanity. That interconnectedness is manifested not in a liminal suspension of “structure,” but in the binding of multiple forms of structured and communal ways of being – a liminality crafted by players who make the essential connections between them.

There is a danger in confusing “marginal” with “liminal” in Victor Turner's work, even though he states that they are not the same (Turner 1969:125). Katherine Butler Brown (2004) offers a clear distinction: marginality “implies restriction, a lack of ability, or permission denied,” while liminality is “an ability the ability to cross boundaries or to live permanently in two worlds” (Brown 2007:25). The expansion of “liminality” to include the special role of the performer or artisan is an attempt to find ethnographic clarity in a central, but somewhat opaque quality of ritual. Turner describes rituals as activities that mediate or orchestrate the opposing demands of both communitas and the formalized social order (1974:274). Bell (1992:20-1) argues that it is this relation between the two categories: communitas and the social order, that is most powerful, and least understood, in ritual. Turner himself refers to a “hybridization” that occurs that occurs between communitas and “social structure” as a kind of “’emptiness at the

center[7],' which is nevertheless indispensable to the functioning of the structure of the wheel" (Turner 1969:127). Elsewhere, he states that these "contrary processes go on in the same religious field, modifying, opposing, and being transformed into one another as time goes on" (Turner 1974:275). How are we to understand or describe this process? If we attend not to ritual itself as the structuring agent, but to the life worlds of individual musicians who play a significant role in synthesizing these "models" of social life, we find a center that is not empty, but rather inhabited by artisans whose work creates a composite of the "structure" and "anti-structure." The horizontal and vertical, the hierarchical and mutual, and the structure and anti-structure are not, then, binary opposites, but are necessary dimensions of social life to which individuals become attached in ritual.

I therefore suggest that we consider the liminality, the "marginal but crucial" role of the hereditary musician in ritual, as an intertwining, a fabric of connections between vertical/hierarchical and horizontal/mutual orientations. The liminality of the qawwals of Ajmer is active. It is not only a position "betwixt and between" or a temporary ludic reversal of rank. I argue that we consider liminality as the work-space where musicians ply their trade: entertaining, educating, inducing ecstatic trance, and facilitating exchange among a heterogeneous and dynamic population. I argue that the musicians, although their position is marginal in many ways, actively work to create many of the important connections between hierarchies and mutualities that give emotional impact and enduring relevance to the cultural life of this institution.

A central event in that cultural life is the *mahfil,* a tradition Katherine Butler Brown (2007:26) locates in its Mughal origins as "the intimate gathering of connoisseurs and musicians

[7] Here he borrows imagery from Martin Buber (1961) and Lao-tse's metaphor of a chariot wheel.

in exclusive elite spaces for the purpose of musical performance." The connection to the (real or imagined) Mughal past is evident in the dress, comportment, and trappings one sees in the dargah, but the context has shifted away from the closed, elite display of cultural capital by patrons of the ruling class, to a public, diverse, and cosmopolitan setting. In this contemporary context, the hereditary musicians I work with facilitate a spiritual and emotional bond that is available to all. In a diagram of music performance in the central enclosure of the Mughal imperial camp, Abul Fazl (1876-7; reproduced in Brown 2007:28) draws a bold line indicating a wall between the audience (both "special" and "common") and the "common people", the "*bazaar.*" In Ajmer, the wall has been breached. The sounds of the Sufi musicians reach us all. The *bazaar*, with all its possibilities for play, learning, exchange, and intersections of "low" and "high" is now located within the sacred realm of the dargah. The musicians play a crucial role in facilitating these intersections. The musical gatherings at the dargah show signs of hierarchy and structure and of mutuality, creativity and communitas. The two "models" for human interrelatedness are not only "juxtaposed and alternating" as Turner (1969:96) puts it, but are actively integrated through the craft of these hereditary musicians.

While I recognize the strong association of terms such as "artisan" and "craft" with the production of physical objects, I find these labels useful in describing the social position and skills of the qawwals for three reasons. 1. As Roy (1998) has argued, the hereditary musicians of India have a strong affinity with other communities of artisans in their adaptation to systems of patronage and market. Qureshi (2002) shows how hereditary musicians in north India are subject to both the competition of the capitalist market, and a feudal subjugation to traditional patrons. In terms of economics, the mode of production of shrine-affiliated qawwals is one of

"producers" who provide a service to an institution that regards them as skilled workers, rather than as artists or creators (Qureshi 1986:96-7). Neuman (1980:142-4) also compares hereditary ensemble musicians in north India to a craft guild in that their kinship affiliations protect them from competition. 2. Qawwals draw a meaningful distinction between themselves and those performers whom they regard as "artistes" (*kalākār*) or "professionals." This distinction implies a lower social and economic status, and also a lack of access to the transnational mobility and economic opportunity enjoyed by more famous performers. However, they also value the ability of their family pedigree and traditional ties to a musical lineage to mitigate some of the competition and alienation[8] involved with making a living as artists in a capitalist market. The descriptions of several qawwals I spoke to characterize the "professional" qawwal as a privileged, yet somewhat rootless, homeless (*beghar*) person, vulnerable and full of anxiety. 3. The term "craft" calls attention to the social relations their work facilitates as something fashioned, collectively created in the context of their service to their family, their institution, and to their own faith in the Sufi path. By referring to the qawwals as artisans, and their work as craft, I do not seek to diminish the creativity they express, but rather to emphasize the social and interactive nature of what they make. They are not entirely proletarian workers, nor individual artists, nor ritual specialists, although they embody some aspects of all these roles. The term craft therefore fits the interstitial quality of their cultural production, as well as the marginalized but crucial nature of their role in ritual.

Marginalized hereditary Muslim musicians

[8] I refer to alienation in the Marxian senses of social dissolution and of disarticulation of the producer from product through commodification. Qawwali as a recorded musical genre has certainly been commodified and sold in various markets, but no listener, to my knowledge, has ever achieved a state of *hāl* by listening to a recording.

Before I met Asrar's nephew Sadique Hussain, a young hereditary qawwal who became both my friend and key consultant, Zam Zam, a female disciple of the saint, and long-term resident of the Dargah Guest House, aware of the widespread low opinion of the moral character and social status of musicians, pointed to him and whispered, “He’s a qawwal…but he’s O.K.” Although many people in Ajmer take pride in the famous shrine, “dargah people,” and in particular the musicians who reside there, are often viewed with suspicion or even fear. My own landlord, a retired Christian minister in the “Mission Compound” area of town, initially forbade me to have musicians as guests in my flat. “They are not trustworthy,” he said. “They will steal from you.” The “common sense” attitude toward hereditary musicians as low, or marginal, has deep roots. Cross culturally, the social status of hereditary and traditional performers is generally low in the sense that they are “servants” of a set of “patrons,” “people who can be ordered about” (Merriam 1964:136). The historical literature in Persian, Hindi and Urdu from the sixteenth until at least the early twentieth centuries (see Brown 2007; Neuman 1980) suggests that elites considered all hereditary communities of musicians to be “low born.” At the turn of the twentieth century, the British census takers “classified all communities of musicians as “low caste or outcast, and stigmatized several communities as pimps and prostitutes” (Brown 2007:29). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, communities of hereditary musicians in South Asia have remained relatively poor and low-status, even as Indian music (both the Hindustani classical music with which qawwali is most often associated, and Carnatic traditions in South India[9]) emerged as a middle-class and elite cultural marker of distinction. The modes of instruction and performance introduced by modernity and the capitalist market have caused

[9] See, for example, Lakshmi Subramanian's (2006) work on the adaptation of traditional south Indian music traditions to post-colonial social realities.

many groups of kin and community-based music makers to lose the prestige they may have enjoyed under older patronage systems (Neuman 1980:207-9). The problem of locating the status of the musician as someone who is "low born" and yet capable of attaining power and prestige in the limited context of performance, leads Brown to expand Turner's (1969:128) notion of the liminal to describe this ability to "cross over into higher-status spaces" (Brown 2007:13). I suggest that the margins the musicians inhabit, and help to create and maintain, are where some of the most important emotional and spiritual work of the shrine takes place.

I do not wish to overemphasize the agency or power of the qawwals as creators of social structure. As relatively poor and low-status musicians (albeit with considerable public prestige in the dargah), the qawwals of Ajmer are indeed subservient both to the powerful bureaucracy of the dargah and its administrators, and to the requirements of comportment and tradition in Sufi practice that have come down to them through the centuries. As one qawwal says about his relationship with the shrine administrators, "In the river, the swimmer must not fight with the crocodile." However, the context sensitivity of their craft requires constant negotiation of these hierarchical relationships in present performance. The question is, what do we learn about transmission in dargah practice if we attend to the way it is lived by these crucial, intermediary social actors, the qawwals?

In the introductory chapter to their edited volume on marginality and the state, Veena Das and Deborah Poole explore various meanings of the marginal. Borders, checkpoints, crossroads, and other interstitial spaces may be sites of degradation and danger, to be sure, but are also "spaces of exception...in which the creativity of the margins is visible, as alternative forms of economic and political action are instituted" (Das and Poole 2004:19). Das and Poole remind us

to look for the creativity not only in the overt acts of resistance of the subaltern, but in the agency of everyday life. The "margins" in the dargah are not inhabited by refugees, immigrants, or minorities in the same sense employed by Das and Poole's edited, nor are they defined as marginal only in relation to the "state," no matter how broadly conceived. These musicians are marginal in the sense that they are members of a historically subordinate community of hereditary musicians, excluded from power and authority in both religious and cultural hierarchies, economically vulnerable, and part of a Sufi minority within a Muslim minority. The creativity they possess has effects on a wide range of participants in their ritual and musical life, and springs from, rather than belies, their marginal, liminal, or "in-between" status.

Katherine Butler Brown (2007:19-20) suggests institutional "liminality" as a solution to the puzzle of the simultaneously low and high social status of musicians, an ambiguous position famously characterized by Merriam in his seminal, cross-cultural *Anthropology of Music* as "low status and high importance" (1964:137). In the case of qawwals of Ajmer, their interstitial status serves to connect, rather than merely to traverse, boundaries between different social groups. The interconnectedness that their craft induces is central to the message of Sufism, and also to the maintenance of a diverse community of participants at this center of vernacular religion. I argue that the liminality these musicians inhabit is not merely a flexible, transgressive, or interstitial borderland, but is the locus of their craft – the space where they make connections between people and between traditions. These connections combine elements of hierarchy and mutuality in three modes: playing, learning, and exchange.

To describe their status as "liminal" in the sense of permanently dwelling between two worlds, is to turn attention away from the margin as the site of creativity and significant social

action. It is precisely that "in-between" quality that makes dargahs so universally appealing, effective, and powerful (Bellamy 2011:218-9). In an analogous way, it is precisely the marginal and liminal position of the hereditary musicians affiliated with this shrine that give them such an important role in facilitating the teaching, emotional effect, and exchange systems that reach such a wide community of participants.

Another aspect of the qawwals marginalization stems from the ***contested place of music in Islam***. Lewisohn (1997), Sirriyeh (1999), and Hirschkind (2006) describe debates about the lawfulness of music in Islam in terms of the listener's ability to maintain a pure or ethical state of mind in audition. Sufis maintain that the value or corruption in music is "in the ear of the listener," rather than inherent to the sound. In debates about the value of music in Sufi practice, "the performer is only incidentally a contributor to the impact of the music" (Qureshi 1986:38). The lack of attention to qawwali performers in both Islamic and Western scholarship is reflective of a lack of value placed on the producer of sound in debates about the admissibility of listening to music in Islam. The extensive theological and mystical writings on music that Islamic scholars have produced from the ninth century onward[10] consistently place all the agency (or blame) on the listener. In classic texts such as *The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan* (1960), it is the listener, rather than the emitter, of the *zikr*, who is central to the meaning of the musical experience. The Chishti saint Nizamuddin Auliya is reported to have answered the question, "what is *samā*?" by asking, "First tell me, who is the listener?"[11]

The shrine administration perceives their relationship with the musicians primarily as a

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[10] See, for example, al-Ghazali [d. 1111], al-Darani [d. 830], and Ibn al-Rajub [d. 1392], quoted in Hirschkind (2006:35).

[11] from the Introduction to the 9th section of Siyar al-Awliya, in which Amir Khurd [1388] compiles rules for samā established by Nizamuddin. (Currie 1989:63 note 110)

professional, rather than a spiritual tie. The religious background and training of the qawwals is beneath the concern of the Sufi elites. Although the qawwals I worked with are deeply committed to their Muslim identity and ethics, neither the shrine nor the traditions of the Chishti *tarīqa* have any explicit requirement for musicians even to be Muslim. Several of the drummers who work with qawwali parties in Ajmer are Sindhis, members of a Hindu community, many of whom live in the dargah area[12]. Conservative perspectives within Islam associate any music with immorality, arguing that it has power to bypass the intellect and corrupt the pure heart. It is this very power over the listener that Sufis claim as most important in *samā.*

The questionable status of music making and listening for Muslims is part of a more general ***marginalization of Sufi practice*** as low-status or illegitimate. Sufism place in Islam has been contested throughout its history. In the South Asian context this challenge has followed two major lines: 1. that the practices common in popular Islam (veneration of saints and their tombs, the use of music and dance as part of ritual practice, the use of traditional medicine and healing methods) are "innovations" and contrary to the spirit of orthodox Islam; 2. that the form of Islam embodied in Sufi practice is corrupted by "foreign" (i.e. Indian) religious traditions, and therefore inauthentic. Many writers on Islam (e.g. Ahmad 1992, Metcalf 1982, Sirriyeh 1999, Werbner 2002) have addressed this question about Sufism: why is it so consistently under attack from reformers and its own brotherhoods? Why does its influence persist? Many scholars of Islam, e.g. A. Ahmad (1967), M. Mujeeb (1967), Schimmel (1975), and Sirriyeh (1999), discuss ways in which the "mystical dimensions" of Islam have been suppressed, exploited or tolerated at different points in history. A detailed discussion of the place of Sufism within the larger

[12] As the Sindhi owner of a shoe store on dargah Bazaar put it, referring to his Muslim neighbors, "our houses meet roof-to-roof."

context of Islam is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, the widespread use of music in Sufi contexts further marginalizes the music maker as contributors to a controversial practice.

Another form of marginalization they experience is ***bureaucratic***. In the hierarchy of the dargah and its administration, the musicians I focus on occupy a relatively low position. As one qawwal puts it, "There is a pyramid. At the top is the *dīwān* (living representative of the saint's lineage), then the *khādims* (hereditary shrine administrators), then the *chobdārs* (hereditary "guards" who keep order in the dargah[13]), then the qawwals, then the other servants, all the way down to the sweepers. It has been established this way since the time of Akbar." Despite the pedigree they invoke by referring to their appointment by the Mughal emperor, the musicians are clearly members of the "service professionals" employed by the shrine. The Government of India's description of the dargah's finances[14] (an attempt to investigate widespread accusations of corruption and missing tax revenue) states that the dargah at Ajmer provides for the maintenance of eight qawwals and six "musicians" among the "dargah staff" (Currie 1989:184). The qawwals' skills, training and hereditary legitimacy "make the music happen" (Qureshi 1982) at the religious assembly, yet they themselves possess no spiritual or administrative authority. "They have the power; we have no power," Sadique whispered to me after telling me not to respond to a young *khādim* who had been taunting me in a tea shop.

The qawwals I worked with also feel ***financially and socially subordinate*** to "professional" musicians. They maintain with a mixture of pride and wistfulness that they are "Sufi" or "*dargahi*," as opposed to "professional" or "outer," qawwals. The resurgence of qawwali as a popular music genre (since the crossover success of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan) has

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[13] The fact that this security role has been weakened by the continual presence of police officers has fed the already widespread discontent about government intrusion into shrine life.

[14] Act No. 36, 14 October, 1955.

made stars of many singers, but performers "tied" to particular shrines have not necessarily benefitted. In India, qawwali numbers are frequently used in films to lend an air of "Islamic" or courtly grandeur to historical dramas, or to play with conventions about divine and erotic love[15]. In Pakistan, qawwali has been promoted by the government as a part of its national culture. Qawwali parties are subsidized in part by the government, which must walk a difficult line between promoting the Sufi music as "Pakistani Culture" and appeasing powerful Islamic reform groups who decry Sufi practice as heretical or un-Islamic. Qawwali has also been commodified as "world music" for consumption in recorded and concert performance by a global market always hungry for "mystical" and "exotic" sounds (Siddiqi 2005). However, the individual qawwals I came to know in Ajmer do not conceive of their work in terms of "music" or "genre," but rather as a craft, an action that they take because of their hereditary responsibility to the living *barkat* ("blessings", "beneficence") of the saint, their appointment to the shrine, and their role as "messengers" conveying the spirit or *zikr* to those who listen with their hearts. They also see it as a serious effort to "connect your heart with God," as Asrar puts it.

Another aspect of the musicians' low status stems from a common ***public perception that qawwali as practiced in the dargah has suffered decline*** in the past century. Some qawwals, notably Asrar and Sabir, brothers in their late 60s, sometimes fall into wistful recollections of the "good old days." W.D. Begg, in his hyperbolic, but fascinating "Holy Biography"(1960) of Muinuddin and the cult surrounding him, devotes an entire chapter to the "highly deplorable state" of the shrine and its practices, especially qawwali, in the twentieth century. Begg

[15] There are too many examples of this to enumerate, but perhaps most typical and telling would be the famous *filmī qawwali "Parda hai parda"* ("There is a veil"), from the 1977 blockbuster "Amar Akbar Anthony," in which one of the protagonists, "The King of the Qawwals" attempts to woo the woman he loves through the public performance of this suggestive song.

attributes the “deterioration” of qawwali to “changed times and the popularity of cheap songs which the Cinema world has brought in” (1960:175). He calls upon the dargah administration to appropriate funds and actively recruit musicians from the outside for the “revival and maintenance of qawwali.” However, in the decades since Begg's lament, qawwali has not only survived, but undergone a revitalization, rejuvenated not by money or recruitment by the dargah administration, but by the qawwals themselves, and by the audiences who continue to place a high value on live qawwali performed as *samā* in the close proximity to the tomb of Khwājā Gharīb Nāwāz.

The ***legacy of the partition of India and Pakistan*** has also had an impact on the qawwals' social position. The descendants of hereditary musicians who remained in Ajmer following partition face two other forms of marginalization as a consequence: 1) the perception that the most talented performers must have migrated to Pakistan, leaving behind only the inferior ones; 2) the estrangement from family members who did cross the border, many of whom have severed ties with the party who remains in residence at the shrine in Ajmer. In spite of the common description of resident qawwals as an “unbroken succession of hereditary shrine performers” (Qureshi 1986:22), the relatively recent history of postcolonial state formation in South Asia had a disruptive effect on the talent pool and status of qawwali families on the Indian side of the border with Pakistan. Unlike the *khādims* and administrators of the shrine, who mainly chose to remain in Ajmer (Currie 1989:147), many of the qawwals and their families chose to relocate to Pakistan following Partition in 1947. Sadique estimates the number who left India at “ninety five percent. Only five percent of my family are still here in India. My grandfather [the qawwal Iqram Hussain] remained here with his four sisters. None of his brothers stayed here in Ajmer.”

He describes some estrangement from the family members who migrated to Pakistan. “They mostly work in 'administration.' They don't perform qawwali. They lead a normal life, not a *dargahi* life. Their life is different from ours. They do business, they have other jobs. Most of them live in Karachi, and in Pathan. There are dargahs near them, but they...” He makes a flicking gesture of disdain. “...from qawwali. They no longer want to be connected with us.”

His father, Sabir, recalls a visit he made to Pakistan. “Our relatives now say that qawwali is not their tradition [*riwāz*]. After partition, many qawwals went to Pakistan. They couldn't make a living here only on qawwali. During the ten years from '47 to '57 it was very hard to survive and make a living. So during this time qawwals took other jobs. My family started doing separate things. Before this time, for nearly seven or eight hundred years, qawwali was enough to sustain them. In Ajmer it was enough. Because Ajmer was the main 'market' in the world for qawwali. Qawwali started here. You know about history. So the qawwals here could say 'I don't like to play in another place.' But now we have almost no contact [*taluq,* 'linkage'] with the family in Pakistan.”

Sabir visited his relatives in Karachi in 1970, returning with the only extant photograph of his father, the qawwal Iqram Hussain. Sadique describes his father's visit. “Our relatives there refuse to come to India. They call us *mohājarim*. We are *mohājir*[16]. And [they say] we are Hindus. They are calling Indian Muslims 'Hindu.' They say 'only *we* [in Pakistan] are the real Muslims.' They are small-minded.” He says they gave his father the “big snap” (photograph) readily and dismissively, as if severing ties with the family who had chosen to remain in Ajmer. “He got a weird feeling from them.” Sadique continues, “My father is a good

16 “immigrant” - an unusual epithet in this case since the term usually applies to Muslims from other parts of South Asia who migrated to Pakistan following partition.

Muslim, but he doesn't do *namāz.* Our relatives in Pakistan say he doesn't do *namāz* because we live with Hindus. But our style of prayer is mostly like this." He holds his palms upward, facing his chest, in the Sufi posture of *du'ā,* or personal prayer. I tell him about an old man in the dargah who had slapped my shoulder and corrected my posture when I attempted to join the assembly facing the *mazār* in *du'ā* after the qawwali session a few nights before. He laughs, "Well, the main thing when you pray is you're not supposed to pay attention to what other people are doing!" I appreciate Sadique's friendly attempt to assuage my feelings of awkwardness during prayer, but observation shows that people in the dargah learn not only from texts or formal leaders, but from each other.

A final marginal quality specific to the genre should be mentioned in passing**: *studies of Indian music*** tend to pass over qawwali, in favor of genres more easily classified as "folk" or "classical." Qawwali seems to fall between the cracks between "great" and "little" traditions (Singer:1972). In several ways, the genre of qawwali itself occupies a "third" or in-between space. In terms of its influence and contributors, it crosses lines of region, religion and language (Flueckiger 2006:15) It is not quite "folk" enough for studies of Indian folk music, nor properly "classical" enough for classical music study. It contains elements that are consciously rooted in Sufi poetry from the classic texts of Khusrau, Rumi[17], and some of the great Persian poets, but it is open to innovation, improvisation and adaptation. Keeping the music simultaneously traditional and contemporary is a primary task for the qawwal in his training and practice. Influences from classical and popular music styles may be carefully incorporated, but not to excess, as when a young singer lapsed into lyrics from a "*filmī*" qawwali and was mocked by the

[17] Maulana Rum (a.k.a. Jalaluddin Rumi founder of the Mevlevi order in Konya, Turkey, one of the founding figures in Islamic mysticism)

audience.

Crucial ritual actors

As the audience in the dargah quiets, and older Sufis sitting in the front rows begin to nod their heads and sway to the rhythm of the drums and handclaps, Asrar and family segue into a verse that Sadique later informed me was part of a well-known poem by the twentieth century poet Amjad Hyderabadi (d. 1961), affiliated with the Chishti shrine in the Deccan city of Hyderabad[18]:

Pukāra khāna-e-tān se yahāṅ par kaun hār ghar maiṅ
Sadai dār-e-dil se yahā Allah hi Allah hai
Allahu Allahu Allahu Allahu

"From within the abode of my body I call out,
'Who lives within this house?'
From the threshold of my heart I hear,
'There is no one but God!'"

After repeating the refrain "Allahu, Allahu" ("God, only Him") in a rhythm associated both with *zikr* (the repetition of God's name) and with the human heartbeat (*zarb*), Asrar inserts a verse familiar to this party and its listeners:

Silsilā hamārā hai
Chishtīya gharāne se

"This spiritual lineage is ours
From the 'house' of the Chishtis"

The whole party joins in repeating the line, *silsilā hamārā hai.* The term *silsilā* refers to the "chain" of spiritual descent in Sufism. It is also used to indicate specific schools or orders of

[18] See Hyder 2011:27 for a full text of this poem in another context.

Sufis. The ensemble then takes up the second line, *Chishtīya gharāne se,* using the term for "household" (*gharāna)* that simultaneously indicates artistic lineage, heredity, and musical style. The couplet is a powerful statement of the party's legitimacy, and of the legitimacy of the gathering itself as a manifestation of the Chishti legacy.

The combination of verses from different sources, different languages, and here referencing the linkage between the dargahs of Ajmer and Hyderabad, is known as *girah-bandī* ("knot-tying"), one of the principal skills that distinguish an experienced qawwal. The poetic and musical strands that qawwals tie together through this technique include Hindustani classical *rāgas,* Persian and Arabic modes, melodies from popular songs, as well as verse from classical works of Sufism, in addition to poems composed by local poets, both Muslim and non-Muslim. This "knot-tying" allows qawwals "to embed invigorating variations on a single theme by interpolating poetry from disparate sources" (Hyder 2011:27). Pushing this metaphor further, I suggest that this act of "knot-tying" is one of the strategies by which qawwals bind a group of individuals to the formal, hierarchical structure of the tradition and lineage as it has come down to us through time, and also that these "knots" link all of those present in the assembly. Indeed, the *silsilā* is a "chain" that connects as much as it restricts. The binding that qawwals facilitate comes not only from their extensive lyrical repertoire, they also "create the sensory conditions" (Hirschkind 2006:8) of co-participation, and the placement of individuals in hierarchies and mutualities.

While searching for an appropriate metaphor for the ritual/musical context of *samā* as a field which brings people, traditions and communities together, as well as a practice which links people along both vertical/hierarchical and horizontal/mutual axes, I have been drawn to several

images from scholars who examine sites of blending and interaction. From Mayaram (2004) I take the "liminal" to include shared ritual spaces where Hindu and Muslim traditions and communities interact. Drawing upon an image from Anzaldua (1987), I recognize that such contested and open sites might also be termed cultural "borderlands," especially if one wishes to emphasize the potential for conflict in such places. From Flueckiger (2006) and Bellamy (2011) I find useful metaphors in the crossroads, and ambiguity. In her analysis of a Sufi shrine in Madhya Pradesh, Bellamy (2011:20) uses the term "ambiguity" to avoid the orientalist assumptions of "syncretism[19]" and to account for the appeal that saint-veneration has for members of multiple religious communities. Indeed, she describes the ambiguity itself as a source of power and emotional resonance for pilgrims (Bellamy 2011:218-9). In her ethnography of a vernacular Islamic "healing room" patronized by Muslims and non-Muslims, Flueckiger likens such places to crossroads (*ćaurāstā*) to emphasize the site's public, open character (as opposed to the home, for example), as well as the jostling, chaotic, though largely good-natured interaction among the diverse visitors who pass through the intersection.

The emic images of *silsilā* and *girah* presuppose a human agent - a forger of links, or knot-tyer. Also, the image of a chain or knot that links orthogonal axes implies construction, creativity and movement as well as constraint. For example, the ties are the means through which the diverse visitors interact with the divine and with each other at the shrine. However, they must be anchored to both the vertical hierarchy of the shrine, and the horizontal community of the people in the audience in order to hold. I am most of all arguing that the acts of face-to-face transmission of knowledge, performance, and learning that the qawwals engage in is vital to

[19] insofar as the term presupposes "pure" and ahistorical formations such as "Hindu" and "Muslim" which are polluted by mixing with the other; See Ernst and Stewart (2002: 586)

the maintenance and adaptation of tradition and the co-participation of diverse communities of people at the shrine of Muinuddin Chishti. The liminality the musicians occupy is an institutionalized position of flexibility and potential elevation of status, as Katherine Butler Brown argues; but it is also a fabric of hierarchies and mutualities woven by hereditary craftsmen.

Qawwals are not the only people at the dargah who tie knots. One of the first images that strike the visitor who approaches the tomb is the intricate marble latticework covered in red and gold woven strings (*challā*). Pilgrims who visit the saint's shrine to ask for favors and blessings purchase a *challā* and then tie it to one of the structures surrounding the saint's resting place. This is a binding contract, obligating the pilgrim to return when their prayer has been answered, untie the string, and make the promised offering to the dargah in thanks. Night and day, Muslim and non-Muslim visitors by the hundreds tie these knots in states of humility and vulnerability, linking themselves with the legacy and power of Muinuddin.

The qawwal as messenger

Another way to conceive of the structuring role of the liminal figure is as a messenger, who not only crosses borders, but carries something with him/her along the way. On another hot, dry night that summer, I walk into the dargah courtyard known as “piety gate” with Sadique. We are returning to the dargah via an unmarked side entrance, avoiding the huge lines of visitors entering through the monumental *bulānd darwāzā*,[20] after drinking tea in one of the little shops near the dargah. I sit beside the large qawwali party, who had already begun their first song of the session. Sadique takes a position in the second row, behind his uncle, Asrar. Asrar, ignoring

[20] the “exalted gate” through which pilgrims pass in the belief that it ensures passage through the gates of heaven

his nephew's lateness and, accompanying himself on the harmonium, the portable hand-pumped reed organ which is used constantly to reinforce the vocal line in the qawwali performance, raises his open hand, palm up, fingers pointing toward the door of the *mazār* where the saint lies "alive" in his grave. Asrar's gesture, a standard motion of intensification in Sufi performance, captures the attention of the audience and his family: He sings solo:

Khwājā ko hum manā kar Nabī ko manāeṅge
Mumkin johī to ab ke Medīne ko jāeṅge

"By pleasing the saint, we will also be pleasing the Prophet
and if we can do this, we will go to Medina"

His sons and nephews repeat the line in chorus, turning the rhetorical *hum* ("we/I") into a literal plurality of voices. We in the audience pay attention, for we are invited along on this journey.

Sufi saints are wanderers (Schimmel 1975; Werbner 2003). Their dargahs are their final resting places. The ritual of *samā* may be conceptualized as a journey. The metaphor resonates with other traditions[21], especially as described by participants themselves. The act of *samā* recollects travel and pilgrimage by invoking the *hajj* lyrically and through the metaphorical travel the soul or spirit undertakes in ecstatic trance (Qureshi: 1986; see also Kapchan 2007 on trance in Moroccan Gnawa). By indexing the attentive listeners potential transportation to the holy land in his song, Asrar brings to mind a foundational event in the life of the Prophet, his

[21] For example, in an alternative to van Gennep's (1960) and V. Turner's (1969) tripartite conception of ritual, Drewal (1992:37) argues convincingly that participants in Yoruba performances in Nigeria conceive of their ritual as a metaphorical journey or pilgrimage with five components. "1) Travel from one place to another, and a return–sometimes actual, sometimes virtual, 2) new experiences, 3) joys and hardships along the route, 4) material for further contemplation and reflection, and 5) presumed growth or progress as a result of the whole experience" (Drewal 1992:37).

"Night Journey," in which, accompanied by the archangel Gabriel, Muhammad was rapidly transported to the temple in Jerusalem and into heaven, to "within two bows' lengths" of God" (al-Hujwiri 1970). The Sufis consider this journey to be both physical and spiritual, an exemplary ideal for the *tarīqa* ("path" or "way") by which a devotee, under the direction of a guide (*pīr*) strives to achieve stages (*maqāmat,* pl. of *maqām*) of nearness to God. In qawwali, the musicians exhort their listeners to travel, serving as messengers, rather than as objects of veneration of worship themselves. As "messengers," they are entitled to payment, since Muslim tradition encourages rewarding messengers and deliverers, even though the "gift" presented to them may have no direct correlation to that which has been delivered. Indeed, this is the rationale behind the qawwals' claim to all the offerings which change hands during the *samā* assembly.

Some Muslim visitors stated that they could not afford to visit the holy land of Mecca and Medina, but that a pilgrimage to Ajmer was an adequate alternative. One English-speaking Pakistani man I met during the *'urs,* voiced a more eyebrow-raising reason, "So long as it pleases God to keep Mecca in the hands of these fucking Saudis, He will forgive me for not going there!" As Currie (1989:140) puts it, "as the cult of Mu'in al-din developed Ajmer came to be regarded as a threshold to the next world–a second Mecca." As the oft-repeated qawwali couplet reminds us, the "night journey" of the soul may take place while the body remains in the *samā* hall or courtyard.

In a story Sadique's father, Sabir related to me one afternoon over tea in his sitting room, legendary composer and Chishti Sufi Amir Khusrau (1253-1326 C.E.) trained a group of subordinate musicians and singers to carry messages to the saint Nizamuddin Chishti (a third-

generation spiritual descendant of Muinuddin) during his eight-year wait to be accepted as a disciple. Contemporary qawwals are the descendants of these intermediaries[22]. Like the Kiowa singers documented by Luke Lassiter (1998:146-7), Qawwals conceive of themselves as "messengers," the go-betweens who point the attention of the listeners (in all of their diverse modes of attention and reasons for listening - what a late-career Turner would have called "multivocality") toward the power of the saint. The "knot" Asrar inserts in the qawwali, "if we can [please the saint], we will go to Medina," suggests that those who attend *samā* are travelers, that the qawwals through their sound, words and gestures are engaged in pointing the way. As Sadique puts it, the messages of the Sufi *tarīqa* are "like signposts showing the straight way."

Chapter two of this dissertation contains a brief overview of **dargah culture and qawwali**, in which I describe the power of the dargah as emanating from its origins as a crossroads of traditions and visitors - a case for considering such places as cosmopolitan as well as Islamic. The following three chapters examine three modes of transmission and interaction that the musicians engage in, three ways of seeing the crucial role of hereditary musicians in binding hierarchical (vertical) and mutual (horizontal) structures in action. These modes necessarily overlap in practice, but I use them to refer to different aspects of the process of combining horizontal and vertical elements. The chapter on **playing** describes variation in performance and audience interaction and structure in terms of spatial arrangement, instrumentation, and party membership. In my discussion of **learning** as transmission, I show how traditional modes of hierarchical study and apprenticeship are mediated by horizontal

[22] This is a popular origin story familiar to all the qawwals I spoke with. However, Asrar and Sadique consistently maintain that their song tradition, and its use in the ritual of *samā,* is older - dating back to the lifetime of Muinuddin himself. The story may be popular because it legitimizes the genre of "qawwali" and the profession of "qawwal" in a particular historical moment of Muslim power and Chishti influence. The association of qawwal as "messenger" and "go-between" is strong, despite the possibly apocryphal nature of the story.

relationships of training, performance and participation. In the chapter on **giving and receiving**, I discuss ways that various qawwali occasions invite both performers and audiences into complex relationships of sharing and reciprocity that create communitas and inclusion in the liminal space of the *samā* session (Turner 1969, 1982; Lewis 2008). In all of these, I attempt to foreground the everyday performance and behavior of the resident qawwals at South Asia's largest and most venerable Sufi center as links and knots that connect diverse listeners to a vernacular Islam that is inclusive and cosmopolitan.

The lives of hereditary musicians who facilitate rituals help us see the craft and strategy that undergirds the ritual process. Performing musicians have to grasp a complex dynamic that negotiates the appearance of order and an unspoken, often turbulent and conflicting world that lies beneath it. As the anthropologist Martin Stokes observes, "It is this fact that makes musicians rather important to anthropologists since it is their social skills and knowledge (and often theirs alone) that glue ritual occasions together." (Stokes 1997: 674). In a ritual context in which listeners seek a loss of control in the form of ecstatic trance, a temporary "loss of self" (Rouget 1985:25), the musician must maintain control of his body, his senses, his memory and concentration - a constant awareness of the shifting dynamics of the session. The hereditary musicians at the shrine in Ajmer display a mastery and a facilitating ability that is not reflected in their overtly low or marginal status.

In the dargah, this "glue," that Stokes refers to is an intermediary quality that binds participants in *samā.* It is not only a shared spiritual awareness. It has manifestations in the areas of economics and pedagogy as well. I highlight the ways in which the ritual occasion, the Sufi "assembly for listening," (*samā*) contains multiple communities, social groups, and elements of

pedagogy, sensory experience, and exchange. At the same time, I relate the qawwali occasion to the performers' lives outside of the ritual context, recognizing, following Rosaldo, that “the crossroads simply provides a space for distinct trajectories to traverse, rather than containing them in complete encapsulated form” (Rosaldo 1993:17). The essence of this ritual and its power is transmission, by which I mean not only the process of teaching and learning which often takes place in performance among hereditary performers, but also the importance of transmission of a spiritual message and sensory experience, and also the transmission of money and blessings in the form of exchange.

In presenting the ideas that have emerged from collaboration with the musicians, I draw upon what Bourdieu has called the “semi-theoretical” disposition of the subject (1977:19). The musicians are experienced in analyzing and teaching about their work. They continually engage with those outside the inner circle of Sufi devotees, since their role is consciously that of the “messenger” who draws the peripheral listeners in and “explains” the message to them with words, rhythm, and emotion. As intermediaries, they serve to expand the public understanding and appreciation of the Sufi message. As the ethnomusicologist John Chernoff observes, "despite the ambivalence with which people in some societies view musicians, or possibly as an aspect of that ambivalence, musicians are a kind of elite group resembling intellectuals. They are the ones who know their culture and have a role in events (ritual, ceremonial, communal, festive) that are most significant for maintaining cultural identity and continuity" (Chernoff 2002:395). For this reason, the musicians are crucial not only to the function of dargah culture, but our understanding of its meaning.

Methodology

As an anthropologist, I acknowledge a tremendous debt to ethnomusicology, especially in its recent endeavors to portray both the music and the music maker as agents who negotiate a complex array of forces (Manuel 1993; Sutton 2002). Regula Qureshi's (1982; 1986) scrupulous attention to repertoire and notation, as well as her thorough translation of qawwali lyrics, are essential to our understanding of this Sufi musical genre. My work, which focuses more on the lives of the qawwals as individuals, and the social processes they help to enact through their craft, should be considered a counterpoint or accompaniment to hers. Mine is also a portrayal of the current status of the hereditary qawwals of a single shrine, Dargah Sharif in Ajmer, since the publication of her text. In my approach, I openly recognize one of ethnomusicology's most important stances: that of the researcher who positions him/herself as a student or apprentice who learns from his/her consultants. If I am able to convey any understanding of dargah practice to the reader, the credit goes to the qawwals who shared it with me.

I first heard qawwali at the dargah in Ajmer while on a break from a summer language program in Udaipur in 2000. My two friends and I had come to the dargah as tourists and music enthusiasts. The night we arrived, I was transfixed by the power this music, so unlike other forms of South Asian religious song I had heard, yet so familiar in its call-and-response form and driving backbeat. The next two nights found me parting with my companions, who wished to visit the nearby Hindu holy city of Pushkar, to return to the dargah to hear qawwali. I later attended multiple performances at the Nizamuddin dargah in Delhi, then during an academic year studying Urdu in Pakistan, at Data Ganj Baksh and several smaller shrines in Lahore. With a generous fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies, I spent 2008 living in

Ajmer, the site of my first encounter, and home of what many believe to be the first Chishti Saint in India, along with my wife, Kim.

with Sadique at the harmonium in his room at Zeba Cottage (Photo by Sadaqat Hussain)

My first research goal was to hire one of the members of the resident party of the dargah as a music teacher. I soon found that the qawwal with the best grasp of my interest in qawwali as a method of face-to-face transmission of the Sufi message, Sadique, had no interest in getting paid. Instead, he wanted my help and advice for some of the personal problems that he could not discuss with his family or with the spiritual guide he shares with his father and brother. After helping me shop for a harmonium and lending me some appropriately basic Hindustani music workbooks ("This one is my brother's from when he was nine," he said), the first lesson he taught me was that he could not teach me qawwali, but "only music" (*sangīt*). Qawwali, he told me, must be learned in practice, connected to the family, the *silsilā,* in the context of dargah

performance.

Although he squirmed when I called him *ustād* (“teacher” - a role as binding and respectful as g*uru* in the Hindu tradition) in a half-serious way, he did in fact serve as my instructor and entry point into qawwali and the people who make it happen. Over the next eleven months, I learned only the basics of singing and playing, but our “lessons” together began to turn into extended interviews with the recorder running. We talked in his home in the dargah neighborhood, in tea stalls and restaurants, in the dargah between sessions, in the homes of friends and relatives, and at my rented flat. Through him, I met and interviewed the senior members of the party, his brothers, and other family members. I attended dozens of qawwali performances at the dargah, and a few in private guesthouses. I spoke to shrine administrators, pilgrims and tourists. I was able to record qawwali performances in several locations within the dargah and outside. Since dargahs are also wonderful places for reflection, conversation, and interaction with locals and visitors from all over India and beyond, many fruitful discussions came about simply by spending time in the dargah courtyards and pilgrims’ shelters.

Throughout, Sadique was an indispensable teacher, collaborator, and friend. Our bond was a mixture of mutual interest in trying to explain cultural expression to people outside the community, and genuine companionship[23]. The main language we spoke was Urdu, but since my translations almost always needed help, Sadique's competence in English was a very useful device for checking meaning and clarity. However, for inconsistencies and inaccuracies in lyrical translation, I take full blame. Most of all, my role as his “student” helped me position myself as subordinate to him, rather than as some kind of foreign “expert.” Many ethnomusicologists who study as apprentices to master musicians subvert the power dynamic

[23] See Casagrande's (1964:x-xi) reflection on the complexity of this fieldwork relationship.

between researcher/informant very well (see most recently Weidman 2012 on this relationship). Ethnographers are always students of the people they write about, but the ethnomusicological model of apprenticeship with a teacher makes it especially clear that the “informant” is the one who has the expertise about the field site, rather than the scholar/”outsider”. I have drawn inspiration (if not the ostensible result of musical competence) from this method. In addition, I found the process of going over fieldnotes with Sadique and attempting translations back and forth between Urdu and English to be sometimes frustrating, sometimes exhilarating, and always illuminating. I have tried as much as possible to present this dissertation as a collaboration between us.

Sadique and I discuss interpretation while listening to the previous night's recordings at my flat (photo by Kim Weston)

My focus on the intersection of marginality and centrality in the life of the musicians grew directly out of discussions with Sadique. He appreciated my aim to enhance the

ethnographic record of Sufi music by placing the performer at the center of discussion, and by acknowledging the value and insight of their position, especially in a genre which often marginalizes or takes for granted the critical voice of the music maker. A basic premise of my dissertation is that analysis of a ritual institution centered on the human voice should include the interpretive and explanatory "voice" of the musicians who make it happen. In addition, the influence this family of musicians exerted on the ritual context of *samā* was powerfully evident in their nightly performances. However, Sadique cautioned me against overemphasizing the agency and authority of his family. The public respect and deference many visitors and locals showed to Sadique when he and I strolled the streets around the dargah were tempered by his daily concerns with political relations with the shrine administration and his family. He was always aware that, by appearing with me in the dargah, some shrine administrators might suspect that he was presenting himself as a *khādim,* or otherwise overstepping the bounds of his hereditary position. "If any *khādim* should ask you what we are doing together, make sure you just tell them I am your music teacher. Otherwise they might talk about me, saying I'm taking their 'business' away from them." When we met outside the dargah neighborhood, Sadique always changed into Western clothes, and withstood some suspicious questions from middle class people in my neighborhood. The tension between the qawwals' low status and lack of institutional power, and their vitality as ritual craftsmen is the source of my characterization of them as marginalized, but crucial.

For this recognition of the collaborative nature of ethnography about an essentially collaborative cultural expression, I am especially indebted to Luke Lassiter (1998; 2005), whose work with Kiowa songs and singers invites us to see both the performance, and the description

and interpretation of ritual and celebration from the performer's perspective. The complexity of my relationship with Sadique - and the ongoing involvement we have in each other's lives goes beyond any expected notion of an anthropologist's "rapport" with his "informant" and has led me to think of this dissertation as "our" project.

My focus on the male performers as agents of transmission in dargah ritual should not imply a denial or ignorance of the importance of women's participation. Roughly half the visitors to the shrine of Muinuddin Chishti are female. The women in Sadique and Asrar's family do not perform publicly, but are educated and knowledgeable about Sufism and the musical and literary sources of qawwali. Indeed, one of the important aspects of the intersection that takes place during the ritual sessions I describe is the breakdown of gender segregation that occurs during informal *samā* occasions. I have tried to show examples of successful performances leading to increased incorporation of women and girls from the margins of the audience into the center of ritual life. However, since this project seeks to place the musician at the center, my main sources, like the performers, are male. Part of this limitation also stems from my desire to respect the gender separation that the men and women in the Muslim families I worked with value highly. My own gender gave me the gift of unquestioned access to men and male spaces - the Mosque, the formal *mahfil* hall, as well as the bedrooms and private meeting places of the performers, for example - but also limited my ability to talk to women, and to enter female spaces. It served my project to be known as a moral, modest person who understood and respected cultural boundaries, to be sure, but it also prevented me from telling the whole story of the life of qawwals and of the dargah.

Coda: alone under the cloth

My first venture into the dargah as a researcher began with a somewhat brisk passage through a process expected of all visitors, tourists, and supplicants - entrance into the *mazār.* After sitting with me in his *gaḍḍī* (a kind of office room in the interior wall of the dargah where he receives visitors), the senior *khādim* Niyazi-Sahib stood and led me and his son out to a flower stall. There, he made me take a paper plate full of rose blossoms and other petals, while he took up a handful of red and orange-colored strings (*challā*).

They led me through the crowds to the tomb of Khwājā Sahib itself, passing though the women's area of the shrine where women were doing *namāz*. It was awkward, with the old man saying curtly "we're going through," and stepping casually over the prostrate bodies. They led me to the covered tomb with crowds pushing to circumambulate the sarcophagus clockwise. The *khādim* called me to the silver rail, told me about its solid silver construction, put my hands on it, and said some prayers while I somewhat abashedly closed my eyes and prayed for courage and strength to provide for my family. He handed back the flowers and we both took some in our hand and threw them underhand over the saint's body. Then he placed the *chaddar* – the very cloth which poor pilgrims had come at great trouble and expense to touch – over my head for a long time. He prayed in Arabic and I closed my eyes and prayed as selflessly as I could for the courage to do this project. The *chaddar* was full of rose perfume, which lingered on me the rest of the day. He took two small bunches of rose petals and ate one, placing another one in my mouth. I still taste it now. Then he took a *challā* and tied it around my neck with more prayers. I followed the son around the tomb and stopped half-way around, where the *khādim* took a very old gold and silver-laced rope with a heavy, worn key on the end and placed it around my neck,

uttering further prayers. The son used the key to unlock a padlock on an old silver door next to the tomb, I followed him in, again pursued by the swarming masses who wanted only to touch the interior. Inside, it smelled like decay. The *kẖādim* pointed out a gold staff and a huge, heavy, solid silver ark in which resided a Qur'an which had been brought by hand from Arabia. I felt discomfort at being afforded such exclusive access to things which people had paid and travelled so much to be near. I completed my circumference of the saint and returned, thickly sweet-smelling, to the nook in the wall, *gaḍḍī* #22, where I sat with the father and son, drinking tea and trying to recall the most polite forms of Urdu. I left the dargah with a newly purchased tight knit white *topī* on my head and a bright orange cord around my neck. Two days later, Sadique called me on my mobile phone. He had been given my number by Niyazi Sahib, although he didn't yet know why.

Chapter Two: Dargah Culture and Qawwali

The diverse crowd circumambulating the tomb of Muinuddin Chishti

While Asrar and party sing on an ordinary Thursday night, the courtyard is clogged with traffic. A disorderly but patient line of pilgrims, heads covered with a variety of garments, from the ornate to the improvised, snakes around the *samā* space, on its way in and out of the mausoleum. The pilgrims who visit the inner chamber of the tomb to circumambulate the narrow way around the sarcophagus generally do so clockwise, in the Hindu/Buddhist fashion; but some visitors prefer to go counter-clockwise, in the manner of pilgrims at the holy Kaʿba in Mecca. During busy times, the crowds moving through the *mazār* in both directions look very much like a crossroads of traditions, in which purposeful individuals jostle and rub against one another without disrupting the validity of the process. This literal manifestation of a busy intersection, a sometimes unruly cultural crossroads that nonetheless retains its emotional power and Islamic flavor, is a strong metaphor for dargah culture in all its powerful ambiguity. The qawwali performers have a strong role in regulating the traffic and attention of travelers in this

crossroads. The sound they generate, like the guiding voice of Asrar who leads the visitor to the *mazār*, provides, in the words of Hirschkind (2006:21; drawing on the work of Steven Connor (1997) on the urban "sensorium"), "a vocal-auditory consciousness to [help us] find our way around." After completing their circuit and making their offerings to the saint in the form of money and rose petals purchased form one of the dargah's licensed vendors, the Sikh brothers return to the courtyard, to sit and listen to qawwali with the attention that Asrar commands, and that they observe in others at the assembly.

One of the most striking features of the cultural life of the dargah is the co-participation by Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, and others in its rituals. This diversity is not necessarily obvious at first glance, since following Indo-Muslim codes of dress and behavior is part of the expectation, and, for many, part of the attraction of dargah culture. An audience who listens, responds, and exchanges money and blessings as a single unit during qawwali performance will, when the music is interrupted by the Muslim call to prayer, split in two. Roughly half of the audience will rise to perform *namāz* in one of the dargah's mosques. The other half includes both non-Muslims, and those Muslims who choose not to participate in the public act of communal prayer. Many spend this period in quiet contemplation or conversation. Others would seize this moment of reduced congestion to enter the central tomb of the saint to circumambulate and make offerings.

During these intervals Sadique would perform *namāz,* then exit the mosque quickly and leave the dargah via a side gate to take a tea break between performances. This was often a good time for us to discuss his life, hidden in a booth in a tea stall, on the margin between the dargah and the urban traffic, between his duties as a Muslim and a hereditary performer of Sufi music,

between his family history and his private plans for the future.

The first time I crossed the threshold from the open dargah spaces into closed ritual space of the mosque, Sadique pulled me by the hand to meet a man, surrounded by young followers, whom he described as "An *ālim* ("scholar"), not a *maulvi* ("master"), a learned man." Although these terms are not exclusive or formally delineated in South Asian Islam, Sadique meant to address the scholar with respect, while not identifying him as a personal spiritual guide (*pīr*)[24]. I had asked Sadique whether the *ālim* was part of the Chishti order of Sufis. "Chishti, Naqshbandi, Suhrawardi, and Qadiri, all four,"[25] he had replied.

The *ālim* lowered himself gracefully to sit cross-legged in a carpeted area adjacent to the prayer hall and said, "The Jews are right to follow their prophets and the book. The Christians are right to follow the prophet Jesus and the gospels. The Hindus are right to follow their *dharma*. The important thing is to be in the presence of God. But this is indispensable." The *ālim* paused to let one of the young men listening to him smooth his shirt tail for him, then continued. "If God is not with you, even if you go to Mecca, it won't make any difference. You might as well have stayed home. If you are present with God, even in your own room, then you are in the same place as if you had performed the *hajj*. The point is not to visit a sacred place, but to move closer to God."

There is a great deal of variation in the forms of prayer qawwals and visitors follow. Asrar could often be seen kneeling before the *mazār,* performing *zikr* silently with prayer beads in his hands. Sadique and Sadaqat, two of the youngest qawwals, perform *namāz* in the huge

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[24] Individuals are free to choose their own *pīrs,* and there is no requirement that the qawwali performer must have a spiritual guide. However, qawwals view this as important source of education about the religious context of *qawwali*.

[25] Flueckiger (2006) notes a tendency among contemporary spiritual guides and healers to identify with multiple lineages.

public space of the *Shah Jahānī Masjid*, the mosque adjacent to the tomb. Asrar and Sabir do not. All of them place a high value on the contact and instruction they receive from their *pīr,* Khwājā Muhammad Farokh in Ahmedabad. Sadique framed his visits to Khwājā Farokh in terms of personal improvement, "to help me love God, to be a better person," rather than as part of instruction in the Sufi poetics and practice essential to his professional life as a qawwal. These skills he claims to have learned from his family, and as a consequence of having grown up in the dargah. The heterogeneity of religious practice among Muslims at the dargah is part of a continuum of expression that includes the actions performed by "others," including Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, and at least one secular academic with his digital recorder. Qawwals make distinctions between legitimate and frivolous participants in the ritual based on the observable effect of their message. Just as Lassiter's (1998:150-1) Native American consultants maintain that the all-important "feeling" in the Kiowa song event arises from participatory experience rather than listeners' background, the hereditary musicians I worked with only care about what audiences "feel", rather than their ethnic or religious identity.

By focusing on the liminal context and position of the musicians as the locus of a craft which binds participants to hierarchies and mutualities, I emphasize the legitimacy of participation by non-Sufis and non-Muslims, visitors and residents often perceived as marginal in studies of Muslim saint shrines. The binding of multiple cultural elements and social positions in performance, pedagogy, and exchange that the musicians facilitate contributes immensely to the vitality of the dargah as a "composite culture" (Mayaram 2004; Hyder 2011) and of "dargah culture" as a powerful, cosmopolitan phenomenon (Bellamy 2011). Qawwali is certainly not the only reason for the participation of members of many faiths and communities, nor are dargahs

the only spaces recognized as sacred by multiple communities.

Qawwals broadcast classical mystical texts for a mass audience. Their songs are instructive as well as entertaining. In their open, public performance, they offer audiences a counterweight to messages generated by other sites of religious knowledge production, such as temples and mosques. The qawwals' craft leads the listener into an alternative world with less rigid gender, caste, and religious divisions, where difference is accommodated, and connections between systems of hierarchy and mutuality are possible through the expression of simple, heartfelt sentiments and emotionally engaging, powerful rhythms.

Qawwali is not only a musical genre performed by a hereditary party, nor is it only a meditative/contemplative listening experience within the heart and mind of the Sufi devotee. It is an interactive embodiment of sense and movement through which different participants connect with each other, and with structures of hierarchy, history, and spiritual authority. For the individual qawwal, it is a livelihood, of course, but not one seamlessly contained by the framework of either “patronage” or “market” systems of economics. All but the most senior musicians have jobs outside the dargah, and see the money they claim as their rightful share of donations as a supplement, rather than a mainstay of their livelihood. However, they must also maintain their legitimacy as members of the “first party” of the dargah, recognized as descendants of the qawwals appointed by the Mughal court, messengers of the poetry, message and sonic power of *samā.*

Sufism is an inner struggle to approach God personally (Shah 1964). The dargah is the worldly structure commemorating those who achieved this, in which has grown a bureaucracy and routine through which those present may emulate their predecessors (Asani 2004; Pinto

2004). The lived experience of the esoteric tradition is the pursuit of divine blessings and abundance (*barkat*[26]) which is available to all (thus all are equal) through association with a structure that is historically and hierarchically ordered. Qawwals help make these associations by linking listeners with both structural and communal dimensions of the Sufi path. However, they do not consider themselves Sufis. "We are only ordinary Sunni Muslims," said Sadique, "The Sufis are the ones who have given themselves totally to God. They own nothing. There are very few of them nowadays."

India is certainly not unique as a place where we find vernacular Muslim practice associated with saint veneration[27]. However, the Chishti order of Sufis, especially those who took root in South Asia beginning in the 12th century C.E., place exceptional value on music and poetry, drawing from a wide array of sources and influences from the subcontinent and beyond (Khalidi 1989; Qureshi 1986). Some sources (see Begg 1960; Qureshi 2003) maintain that the Chishti order originated in the teachings of the *sheikh*[28] Abu Ishaq Chishti (d. 940 C.E.), the first member of the *silsilā* to have lived in the in the Chisht region of what is now eastern Iran, but the qawwals and *khādims* I interviewed almost always assert that their lineage began with the Prophet Muhammad's transmission of his message and authority to Ali. However, the emergence of the Chishtis as they are now known began when the seventh-generation disciple of Abu Ishaq, Muinuddin, migrated to the realm of Hindu ruler Pritviraj in Rajasthan and settled in Ajmer where he established a circle *(halqā)* of disciples, starting what came to be the dominant Sufi lineage in India.

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[26] I generally use the Urdu and Hindi term, *barkat*, although some informants and sources use the Arabic, *baraka*.

[27] For only a few examples outside of India, see Bowen (1993); Crapanzano (1973); Ewing (1997); Hoffman (1995); and Morsey (1993).

[28] The term *sheikh* is an honorific title indicating an older or esteemed member of the order. The term *pīr* refers to such a person's position in the *pīr-murīd* ("master-disciple") relationship.

The Muinuddin of History

In his history of the shrine and cult of Muinuddin Chishti, Currie (1989) sifts through an immense archive of hagiographic and traditional accounts of the life of the founder of the Chishti order in the Subcontinent. The material he deems historically valid as Muinuddin's "biography" is scant indeed: a single paragraph (Currie 1989:54-55). Born in Sajistan, Persia around 1130 C.E., Khwājā Muinuddin Chishti was orphaned at an early age, renounced his worldly wealth and status, and embarked on a wide ranging spiritual journey. Influenced by Sufi *pīrs* (spiritual leaders) at centers of learning in Samārkand and Bokhara, he devoted himself to the Chishti order under his *murshid*, Hazrat Khwājā Usman Haruni. In a trance, Muinuddin Chishti was ordered by the Prophet Muhammad to travel to India and show the path of truth to the people there.[29] He journeyed throughout North India before settling in Ajmer, Rajasthan in 1190 C.E.

Currie makes it clear, however, that the historicity of accounts of the Saint's life, struggles and miracles, are far less important than their symbolic value. Hagiographic anecdotes "serve the didactic purpose of demonstrating the popularity of the Chishti *sheikhs* despite their humility and lack of involvement with the state" (Currie 1989:47). This "lack of involvement" with government is an important part of the Chishti doctrine, but is somewhat at odds with the important role their institutions like the *khanqah* (Sufi refuge and place of study) played in the Islamization of the territory sought by Muslim elites. The choice of Ajmer for the saint's residence, and later his shrine and cult, is significant. Along with the nearby Hindu holy city of Pushkar, Ajmer was an important power center for the Hindu Chauhan dynasty (Currie 1989:87).

[29] Following Begg (1960), Qureshi (2003:64-5) maintains that Muinuddin was ordered by his master to spread the word of Islam and the Sufi path in the "wilderness" of India.

Fantastic tales describe Muinuddin Chishti's contests with armies, magicians, and yogis which show his miraculous power, in spite of Chishti doctrine's outward disdain for miracle stories. Currie states that "he had a unique position of his own as a pioneer of Islam in India, and the founder of the Chishti *silsilā* in India." (Currie 1989:85) Hagiographers emphasize this by focusing on his arrival in India and his settlement there in spite of opposition (cf. Begg 1960). Currie argues that his survival in a hostile place is a source of strength to later generations of Indo-Muslims who found themselves a religious minority (Currie 1989:87). The very strength of the local shrine as a place of ritual practice and spiritual orientation has been a challenge to orthodox institutions who value a more centralized concept of the *umma*. "In the mind of his devotees, Muin al-din, the Muslim darvish, has become 'the Prophet of India'" (Currie 1989: 96).

Despite attempts to disengage, or "reform" Islam from its Sufi aspects, there is evidence that proponents of the esoteric or mystical aspects of Islam have been part of Muslim life since the time of the Prophet (Denny 1994, Schimmel 1975, Ahmad 1967, Trimmingham 1971). It took generations, however, for Sufism to find expression in institutionalized forms: "societies, literary genres, meditation patterns, artistic traditions, and systematically articulated genres" (Denny 1994:219). Followers of Sufi paths[30] (*turuq*, singular: *tarīqa*) coalesced into established orders and brotherhoods (*silsilā* – "chain" of spiritual transmission) along with Muslim expansion into new territories (Trimmingham 1971). They played a crucial role in the expansion

[30] Qawwals sometimes refer to the Chishti order of Sufis as a *tarīqa* - a "way" or "path" to enlightenment - the practical side of a devotional approach to spirituality, sometimes as a *silsilā* - the "chain" of received knowledge and devotion that is passed from spiritual guide to student, constituting a hierarchical and genealogical tree whose roots reside in the presence of God in the Prophet Muhammad. The lyrics often sung by Asrar at the shrine define it as a *gharānā,* a "household" of musical, poetic, and professional tradition which validates and guides the work of *samā*.

of Islam into South Asia (Lawrence 1978, Currie 1989). The ability to "sacralize space" in the "wilderness" is one of the chief attributes of the Sufi saint (Currie 1989, Werbner 2002, 2003, Eaton 1978, 1996). Schimmel observes that despite the occasional appearance of Sufi-soldiers in the frontier provinces of India, "the Islamisation of the country was achieved largely by the preaching of dervishes, not by the sword." (Schimmel 1975:346). Ernst highlights the importance of the Sufi orders in textualizing oral teaching, establishing centers for religious study, and translating Muslim religious doctrine into vernacular languages. On the subject of "conversion" (and the problems with the Western understanding of it as a "sudden change of heart" as idealized by Christian missionaries) and the use of local idioms by Sufis, Ernst argues that in the early medieval period a process was initiated that was not simply the Islamization of India, but also an Indianization of Islam (Ernst 1992: 160-7).

Sufi Shrines and Muinuddin Chishti

Many scholars have addressed the role of the shrine in popular Islam in the Subcontinent, notably Currie (1989), Ernst (1992), Qureshi (1986), and Rizvi (1978). Sufi shrines are institutions that provide "a frame of reference [in which] ideology becomes operational." (Qureshi 1986:88) Sufi institutions, and with them qawwali, took root during the thirteenth century, within the framework instituted by Muslim rule. Shrine organization to this day reflects the influence of court ritual, hierarchy and patronage established during the period of Persian cultural hegemony (Currie 1989, Qureshi 1986). Since Sufi leaders played such an important role in the spread of Islam among the non-Muslim population, the imperial rules were "generous in granting property endowments to such Sufi establishments, particularly the shrines built

around the graves of their founders" (Qureshi 1986:91). Among these, the dargah of Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer is most prominent and venerable. As the current "living saint" of a Sufi order in Pakistan, Zindapir, commented on the dargah at Ajmer during the British raj: "When the Viceroy of India visited the shrine of Khwājā Ajmeri he saw all the people coming there – Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs. After his visit he said, 'India is ruled by two governments – the British government and the government of Khwaja Ajmeri [Muinuddin Chishti], and the second is the greater power because it rules over people's hearts" (Werbner 2003:86).

In his excellent archival work on Sufism in South Asia in the pre-Mogul period, Lawrence (1978) shows that among the major orders in the region (*Chishtiya, Suhrawardiya, Firdausiya, Naqshbandiya, Qadriya*), the Chishtis have been especially brilliant and enduring in their influence, through emphasis on dynamic *pīrs* (spiritual leaders), immense contributions to literature and poetry, and their use of the *samā',* or "spiritual concert" as a key component of religious life. Lewisohn (1997) describes the journey and transformation of Persian cultural idioms such as *samā* in the Indian environment, stressing that *samā* became an important tool for the popularization of the Sufi orders in the non-Muslim environment of the subcontinent (Lewisohn 1997:11).

The combination of heredity and spiritual descent evident in the structure of the Chishti community has its roots not only in Islam, but in other North Indian traditions. Daniel Gold notes that the development of Hindu and Buddhist traditions based on religious autonomy of individuals arose during a period of decentralized power in India's postclassical period. As princely states emerged, a political and socio-religious system based on kinship flourished (Gold 1987: 14-18). He characterizes the early forms of loosely organized traditions of holy men who

flourished during the era, including the early *siddhās* and *nāths*, yogis within Hinduism and Buddhism, and the Chishti Sufis, as moving from a pattern of succession of spiritually qualified "gurus and disciples" to a succession based on heredity. He finds this pattern in the later organization of Sikh Gurus as well. Shrines in many rural areas are frequented by both Muslims and Hindus alike. Gold asserts that since the *sants* drew power and legitimacy from their own experience, sayings, and personal manifestation of "the formless lord," they provided equally accessible "channels of grace" independent of the lettered traditions, either Hindu or Islamic (Gold 1987:31). The availability of the blessings and benefits of Sufi saints to all, regardless of religious orientation, accounts in part for the dargah's still-growing popularity[31]. It is also what has made it a target for attack.

On October 11th, 2007, a bomb blast in the courtyard of the shrine of Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer claimed the lives of three pilgrims, seriously wounding seventeen others. It is still unclear who is responsible. Early evidence seemed to point to the *Harkat al-Jihad-e-Islami* (HUJI), a neo-conservative Islamist group based in Bangladesh with affiliates in India, including Ajmer. More recently, the Indian government has filed charges against several conspirators affiliated with extremist Hindu organizations[32]. Regardless of the accuracy of either charge, the shrine, "the most venerated Sufi site in South Asia[33]" may be a target for radical reformers who seek to destabilize the country by attacking institutions that run counter to strict religious or communal ideologies. Conspiracy theorists among Ajmer residents I spoke to blame the Government of India for staging a terror attack in order to justify state intrusion into the dargah's

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[31] Estimates range from one to ten million visitors per year, making the dargah the second most popular pilgrimage site in the Muslim world.

[32] *The Independent,* Wednesday, January 12, 2011

[33] Praveen Swami, *the Hindu*, October 14, 2007

lucrative business as a pilgrimage center. Regardless of the debate over who is responsible, the fact that the dargah was targeted highlights the importance of the shrine as a symbol of popular religious practice in the region, Islamic in orientation, yet open to participation by Hindus, Christians, and others. The most notable aspect of the anger locals and visitors revealed to me in recalling the event was that they directed it not at one religious community or another, but rather at the state, for failing to protect its citizens. "After the blast, there was no riot or anything like that, but a crowd of us went to the police station and yelled at them. We told them we would burn their station down," said a young friend of Sadique's.

Dargah culture

In the dargah, Muslims and non-Muslims interact freely in an overtly Islamic cultural framework. However, the presence of shared ritual grammar (Narayanan 2006) and participation by members of multiple religious traditions leads Bellamy (2011) to consider "dargah culture" as a Subcontinental cultural institution in its own right, without making fruitless claims about the "syncretic" or "Islamic" nature of such places. Indeed, the visitors seldom express worry about whether or not the dargah was "really" a Muslim place, or whether it was "authentic." They are there to partake in the blessings of the Saint, and to hear qawwali. Above all, the qawwals conceive of their role as a personal duty to the saint they call ***Khwaja Sahib***, although Sadique and Asrar both describe themselves as "ordinary" or "mainstream" Muslims. Van der Veer (1994:34-5) argues that Hindu participation in Muslim ritual life is generally marginalized, peripheral and subordinate. However, this presupposes a kind of adjunct position for "popular" practices such as shrine worship and qawwali. Bellamy finds that an important feature of dargah

culture is the anonymity it affords visitors of all backgrounds, so that the transgression inherent in adopting the practices of the "other" is a key ingredient in the potency of Sufi ritual for non-Muslims (Bellamy 2011:78). I find in the context of qawwali that the qawwals are key agents in creating the context for co-participation by various groups by making music which is attractive and emotionally powerful to all audiences - even those who hear it merely as "music."

My interpretation of "identity" is sometimes limited to observable markers of religious affiliation, such as *tikkā* on the forehead (Hindu), *pagrī* (distinctive turban worn by Sikh men), or by leaving the *samā* area to go to the mosque during breaks for *namāz* (Muslim). In some cases, people volunteered that they were "Hindu" or "Christian" to me in conversation in order to make a point about the openness and tolerance of the dargah. However, all of these markers are flawed and incomplete, especially in light of my point that part of the attraction of dargah culture involves "playing"' with modes of dress and behavior associated with Muslim identity.

In the past, Muslim saint shrines were linked with Muslim rulers and institutions. Although much of the hierarchical, quasi-feudal, "vertical" relationships that qawwals contend with – and sometimes challenge – is based upon a history and a memory of these systems, contemporary dargah culture is part of a cosmopolitan and democratic public sphere. Some historical studies of dargahs suggest that the legitimacy and authority of dargahs in the Subcontinent was simply a product of their affiliation or endorsement by Muslim rulers. Certainly, in the medieval period, these shrines played a large role in legitimizing Muslim rulers and in turn benefitting from their patronage (see Van der Veer 1994; Troll et al. 1989). However, these studies cannot account for popular use and perception of the shrines, or of the experiences and contributions of non-Muslim pilgrims in the popularization and legitimization of these

shrines. In qawwali, I find a contemporary revitalization of the shrines popular appeal, emotional effectiveness, and community participation by ordinary people, even as powerful elites (from heads of state to Indian film producers) continue to patronize the dargah.

In her ethnographic account of daily life at a Hussain Tekri, a collection of Muslim saint shrines in Madhya Pradesh, Bellamy argues that dargahs are "simultaneously local *and* cosmopolitan, and that they are fundamentally shaped by cross-tradition exchange." (Bellamy 2011:6) Several important historical works on dargahs in South Asia (Troll et. al. 1989; Currie 1989; Eaton 1984; Gilmartin 1984) have traced the shift in authority in shrines from one of discipleship, a spiritual lineage (reflected in the transmission of authority from *pīr* to *murīd*) to one of kinship, a family lineage (reflected in the transmission of authority within families - as is the case with the *sajjādānishīn* - the purported "son" of the saint, a hereditary office since the reign of Akbar). In a similar vein, historical accounts of music patronage in South Asia (Silver 1984, 1976; Neuman 1980) trace a transition of support for music makers from the temple or saint's tomb, to the medieval court, to the state or market supported concert hall and studio. The lives of the qawwals of Ajmer contain all of these elements.

The perspective of intermediate (and intermediary) persons such as Sadique Hussain compels us to reconsider some beliefs about Sufi saint cults, and religious formations in the Subcontinent. First, as Van der Veer argues, that the "shrine and veneration of the saints create a community that is hierarchized in terms of the degree of its involvement in the brotherhood" (1994:37). While I agree with Van der Veer's juxtaposition of shrine and mosque as, respectively, "open" and "closed" to non-Muslims, and that the practices of the shrine do not draw the clear distinction "between the community of believers who submit unanimously to Allah and the rest

of the world" as *namāz* does, the assertion that various others are permitted to participate in shrine life only in a peripheral and limited way may only be true of special public ceremonies such as the "saint's day" he documents in Surat (1992). In most of the settings where it is performed by the hereditary qawwals of Ajmer, qawwali enacts mutuality as well. There is a hierarchy of spiritual and worldly power, but the complex interactions (including the training and performance of qawwals themselves) often resembles a cosmopolitan, voluntary and egalitarian community. I do not wish to fall back on the orientalist assumption that there is a sharp distinction between Hindu and Muslim elites, on the one hand, and a cultural "syncretism of the masses" on the other (see Brass 1990), but rather that, when we consider the life of the dargah, and the professional lives of the musicians there, we see an everyday interaction that complicates, or even challenges, stratification, social, economic and religious. In the *samā* gathering that qawwali creates, especially when it is not mandated or overseen by the "patron" in the person of the saint's living representative (itself a complicated and contested category) that we see a kind of cosmopolitan culture, a community of practice.

Qawwals, like the legendary emissaries between Khusrau and his *pīr*, mediate between systems of religious hierarchy and egalitarian humanism, between discipleship and peer-learning, and between symbolic, sacrificial religious offerings and monetary transactions. When we look at real lived experience we see a model of different communities in this South Asian urban center "living together," within the structure of a Muslim saint's cult.

Many non-Muslim visitors, including friends who have come in as my guests, tell me that they *enjoy* dressing according to Muslim traditions and learning *adāb* ("etiquette"; "moral conduct"; "correct, formal behavior") from *khādims*, from qawwals (especially Sadique), and

from other visitors. In the dargah, we follow rules and bureaucratic authority figures; but we also follow each other. Some Indian tourists engage in a serious form of "play" with Islamic culture, style and ritual and in so doing experience a "liminoid" (Turner:1982 [1974]; St. John 2008:8-10) boundary crossing that, as the power of the sound that the qawwals craft takes effect, evolves into a genuinely "liminal" encounter with others. This encounter involves non-Muslim's imitating Islamic actions, and imitative learning among performers. In his seminal work on "play," Bateson urges us to take such imitative experiences with "others" seriously, as a foundation of the development of culture. Since the process of playing is necessarily reflexive, it fosters self-awareness (Bateson 1972:185). People attend *samā* for various reasons, some in the officially prescribed company of their personal spiritual guide or *pīr,* some on their own or with groups of family and friends. They may be tourists or pilgrims, music aficionados or spiritual seekers. By following the patterns of comportment and response implied by *adāb* in the Muslim "court of saints" (Gilmartin:1984), they experiment with modes of behavior that are both hierarchically structured and personally liberating. For some visitors, the line between tourism and pilgrimage is blurred as qawwali they came to hear as "authentic Indian music" produces effects that lead, if not to the *hāl* and *wajd* that Sufi adepts have learned to access, at least to a form of communitas that involves interaction and exchange in unexpected ways. I use the term communitas in the sense employed by Lewis (2008) to mean the embodiment of experience by a ritual community, as indicated by observable collective emotion and action.

The continuing practice of qawwali in front of the *mazār* is fundamental to the shrine's power, legitimacy, and connection to the past. The transfer of the Sufi message in live, context-specific spiritual concerts makes the space sacred, and compels audience members to act and

interact with each other as well as with the shrine officials and performers in a specifically Chishti Muslim way. However, the cosmopolitan nature of the dargah derives in part from the great diversity of its visitors. Qawwali produced in a live performance setting is fleeting. The ephemeral nature of this ritual space requires constant maintenance, reinvention and reinvigoration. This is accomplished through the continual training and nurturing of qawwali singers in the families who reside here.

In a sense, dargah practice is overtly Islamic in that the awakening participants seek is conceived of as remembering, and in that it refers self-consciously to a Muslim past, reinterpreted through a Muslim present (Asad 1986:14-5). There is a distinguishing sadness and longing in Islam, manifest in the lovers' laments in Sufi poetry, that “the human heart has somehow forgotten it actually has the capacity to encompass that splendor and mystery.” (Sells 1999:28) It is not a world-renouncing sadness, but a longing for reconnection with something lost. So awakening through *zikr* is oriented toward a past, articulated in the present, with an underlying hope for the future.

Certainly, dargahs and similar Islamic memorial structures exist outside of South Asia, but it is only in the network of shrines associated with the chishtiya in South Asia that we find this particular mode of *samā* and qawwali (Khalidi 1989). In describing dargah culture, in spite of the presence of many elements of shared ritual practice and the important participation by non-Muslims, I resist the term “syncretism.” Ernst and Stewart (2002) have convincingly argued that the term is condescending and flawed since it relies on ahistorical and pure categories such as “Muslim” and “Hindu.” It is also inadequate since the qawwals describe their own practice not as “syncretism,” or even “Sufism” but simply as Islam.

In a political environment often focused on the inclusion or exclusion of self-contained, clearly demarcated groups (e.g. caste, language, gender, region, religious community), the participation in a popular event which crosses those boundaries and enacts universal gestures of participation, learning and exchange, may be seen as a form of "counterpublic," in the sense employed by Hirschkind (2006). Dargah culture, like the popular cassette-sermon listening phenomenon in Egypt, "exhibits a conceptual architecture that cuts across the modern distinctions...that are central to the public sphere as a normative institution of modern democratic polities" (Hirschkind 2006:107). Dargah culture is an old phenomenon, but the uses to which the public puts it - an intimate encounter with "others" as well as pilgrimage and requests for blessing - has a particular value in a diverse, urban, twenty-first century South Asian context.

The sound of dargah culture

Hereditary performers must keep a tradition, while remaining attuned to the social world and all its changes. They are an interface between the Sufi establishment and the wider public. They produce a key part of the sensory and interactive experience of dargah culture – its sound. Qawwali is a major means of transmission of the esoteric message of Sufism to the public. For the visitor to the oldest and most popular Sufi shrine in South Asia, a major source of the emotional power of the ritual experience is the music.

I would like to continue the anthropological conversation which questions the privileging of the mind and reason over the senses and the body in general (Stoller 1997:xi-xiii, 4-8; Taussig 1993), and a hierarchy of the senses which favors "the rationality of the visual over the mechanics of sonority" (Hirschkind 2006:14) in particular. The distrust of the bodily practice of

hearing as a mode of understanding is especially puzzling in the case of analyses of Islam, a religion that consistently emphasizes the ear and hearing (*sam'*) as most valuable sites of receptivity and understanding (Quran 7:179) and the pedagogical virtues of listening and recitation (Hirschkind 2006:14-17). These authors, following Derrida (1988) also critique the persistent tendency within the social sciences to emphasize the cognitive dimensions of listening: the phenomenon of "phonocentrism" in which speech, rendered consciously as meaning, is taken as the most important field of the production and reception of sound (Hirschkind 2006:218). Many of us in the academy are "accustomed to think of listening as a cognitive act and often tend to ignore its practical and sensory dimensions" (Hirschkind 2006:25).[34] The necessity to respect and portray the sensory and auditory aspects of our field sites includes what I have tried to show is a conscious, active role of the producers of sound in society. I share with the field of ethnomusicology a commitment to the validation of a society's music-makers, and the auditory aspect of ethnographic description as keys to understanding cultural processes.

Ethnomusicologists point to society's music makers as significant agents who merit special attention as mediators, creators and interpreters of cultural practice. Much recent ethnomusicology has successfully placed music-makers in the context of daily lived experience I would like to highlight a few recent examples which show how musicians have a clear, material need to master a wide range of rules and expectations, while at the same time affecting those contexts through their creative output. The musicians in these works show two important aspects of Bourdieu's (1977) approach to the relationship of agent to structure. First, we may see how

[34] I recall a meeting with one of the administrators of a research center in Pakistan, at the beginning of my academic year of study there in 2001. My Urdu was still quite basic at that point, and when I mentioned my enthusiasm for qawwali, he smirked and said, "So, what, do you just 'feel the beat'?" Abashed, I made some apologetic remarks about how hard I intended to work on my language skills and knowledge of poetry. Thinking back on the scene, I wish I had simply said, "Of course. Don't you?"

their actions are recuperated into the reproduction of structure, including systems of hierarchy. Second, qawwali performers show how structure depends on actions that often involve the expression of mutuality and co-participation. Qawwals are the agents of transmission between the Sufi devotee and his Saint's blessing, between Muslims, Hindus, and others in the audience, and between a heterogeneous listening public eager to hear real qawwali in a live setting, and an esoteric Sufi message intended to lift the consciousness of the elite, trained listener. Masters of a traditional style which has always relied on improvisation and adaptation to maintain its relevance, they are expert in negotiating these difficult junctures.

In a review of the relationship between anthropology and ethnomusicology, Chernoff (2002) advocates an anthropology that considers music makers as central actors, complaining that too many ethnographies treat musical life as "something derivative or peripheral to what a social situation was really about" (Chernoff 2002:384). He argues that ethnomusicologists influenced by anthropology have led to a more refined understanding of the passage of tradition from generation to generation (Chernoff 2002:388). He sees valuable potential in ethnographic context in the study of music directed "as much at the people who are the world's music-makers as at the merely sonic character of the world's music. For these people, music has served as a positive force to strengthen identity, revealing processes of cultural resistance and potential redemption" (Chernoff 2002:392-3). Studies of music makers help us understand their often marginalized, but crucial role in social and political expression, the role of a minority culture in shared or composite social spaces, and the visceral and emotional power of ritual.

In her exemplary work, Meintjes (2003), opens our ears to the importance of music making in understanding cultural context, and situates music makers in the social, economic and

political realities of day-to-day life. In her collaboration with the producers and musicians who create the popular South African music style *mbaqanga* in Johannesburg during the nation's tumultuous post-apartheid period, Meintjes introduces this idea of tying musical change and expression to a time of transition – South Africa's democratization. Music and ethnic identity are global qualities that "share the same space in the studio" (Meintjes 2003:255). "Mbaqanga music recorded in state-of-the-art studios played a significant part in the popularization of Zulu-ness, that is, in the shaping and circulation of particular images of the Zulu at the height of the Africa-centered World Music boom and in the transition period from apartheid to democracy" (Meintjes 2003:7). These images, she argues are shaped dialogically, by the collaboration between musicians and producers in the creative and capitalist environment of the studio. For Meintjes, mbaqanga is a genre dependent on context, deliberate manipulation of individual positioned performers, and on the relationships they have with each other, with the past, and with their audiences.

Gross, McMurray, and Swedenberg (1994) explore the use of rap and rai by young Muslims in Algeria and France as a medium for the expression of a "Franco-Maghrebi identity." The musicians offer a valuable insight on the political expression of a composite culture. In *Echoes from Dharamsala: Music in the Life of a Tibetan Refugee Community*, Diehl (2002) describes the local soundscape in Dharamsala, India as a varied lexicon of musical idioms including traditional Tibetan music, Hindi film songs, and Western rock from which young, politically aware musicians like the Yak Band (with whom the author performed during part of her fieldwork) may draw to fashion their own statements. Her musical collaborators use their music to voice their political messages about displacement, Tibetan nationalism and resistance to

persecution, using their musical source material in original and creative ways. At the same time they are conscious of their role as representatives of a community concerned with maintaining Tibetan tradition and authenticity (to themselves and their refugee "sponsors") for their survival. (Diehl 2002:11) She places her musicians in the context of real life challenges of poverty, work and family obligations, showing music as a social construction grounded in daily life.

Stoller's (1984) intimate experience as a student of ritual healers in the Republic of Niger convinces him that the power of incantations and music resides in the sound, rather than the meaning of the words. Sacred vocal sounds and the sound of sacred instruments carry forces that can penetrate an object and effect change (Stoller 1984:559). As Stoller argues, "given the spatialized view of reality so engrained in Western philosophical tradition, a deeper appreciation of sound in and of itself could open anthropological ears to a penetrating comprehension of cultural sentiment" (Stoller 1984:559). Stoller describes the *godji*, a "monochord violin" whose voice recalls the presence of the ancestors, in a way that recalls the longing inherent in Sufi music (Stoller 1984:564, Lawrence 1978).

Stoller's among the *griots* of western Sudan indicates that not only the words, but the sounds produced, along with the performers who produce them are figures of widespread social and symbolic importance (Stoller 1984: 566-7). Qawwali also uses specific sounds to produce its meaningful effect, but the producers of the sounds are not afforded the same social or academic importance.

Stokes (1997) examines ways in which musicians participate in historical knowledge in two urban locales in Turkey and Algeria. In the ethnically and sonically mixed environment of Istanbul, he finds musicians who must grapple with two opposing forces in Turkish life: a

liberalized media system and a religious orthodoxy with more political force (Stokes 1997:674). The performers at urban weddings, for example, must balance the needs of their patrons for "the appearance of modest, sober, religious respectability" with the need for "those aural textures which make or break a ritual occasion."

The qawwals' marginal status is an important component of their ritual power. In *samā*, the focus is on the sound as a sensory experience and interaction of those in attendance as a model for social interaction with each other. In dargah culture, the integration of hierarchies and mutualities takes place in the context of shared bodily and emotional experience, whether through healing (Flueckiger 2006), through smoke and spirit posession (Bellamy 2001), or through the overwhelming power of music and the ecstatic states it induces.

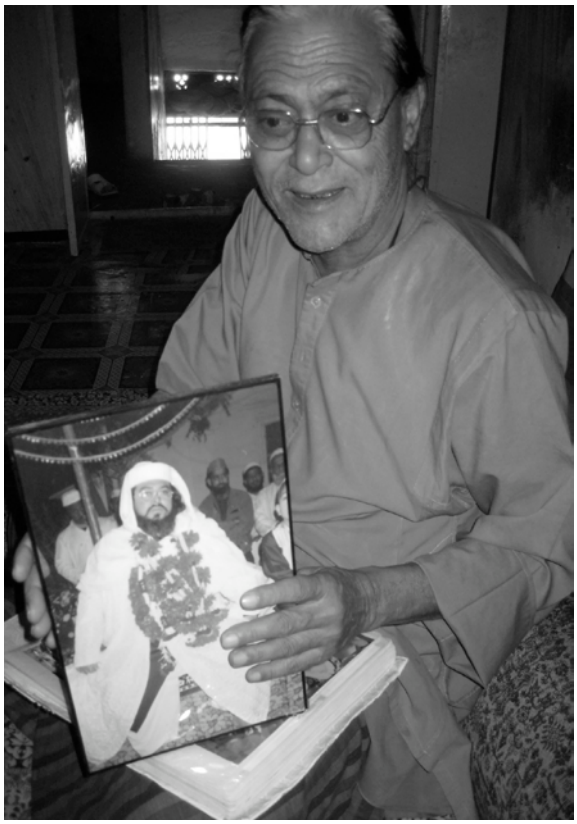
Wajd, and *hāl*

The goal of *samā* is the mystical arousal of the audience. This may culminate in a trance state known generically as *hāl.* The positive effects of listening to qawwali in the dargah are manifest in varying degrees, from mild arousal, causing listeners to make monetary offerings, to intense trances that involve weeping, turning, and dance-like involuntary movements.

Although occasionally glossed in both scholarly and colloquial English as "trance" or "ecstasy," the forms of arousal I observe during the qawwali performance are defined by qawwals and audiences most often using the generic term *hāl* ("state") a kind of prefiguration of death, the ultimate union of the soul (lover) with the divine (the beloved). Qawwals and listeners use the term *wajd* to indicate cases of total emotional abandon manifest in weeping, turning and involuntary dancing (*raqs).* Anything perceived as "voluntary" dancing or "false *wajd*" by the

qawwals, the shrine officials, or the audience, results in expulsion from the *samā* area. *Wajd* literally means "finding" and indicates a significant aspect of the desired outcome of the *samā* experience: the listener, the longing bereft lover, seeks to reconnect with the divine as something that has been lost. (see Rouget 1985:5,25 and Qureshi 1986:79-80). Both *hāl* and *wajd* are distinct from *hāzirī* ("presence"), a term used to identify the entrance into the body of a *jinn* ("genie") *or bhūt* ("spirit", "ghost"). This is usually translated as "possession." Qawwals say that this sometimes happens to female audience members, especially non-Muslim ones, but I did not witness this form of response to qawwali[35]. The highest state of spiritual arousal, *wajd*, is conceived of as a recollection of something one originally had, rather than the intrusion or visitation by something outside of the self. It is, furthermore, a collective act, one that occurs in the presence of others in a public *samā* gathering. My experience suggests that there is an important component of lateral identification and interaction that works alongside the more obvious vertical hierarchy (of, for example God - prophet - saint - *pīr* - listener) to make the event successful and emotional satisfying. The states of *hāl* and *wajd* are facilitated and conceptually defined by the performers and the relationships among audience members. As the musicians use the term, *hāl* is something that happens to the listener, rather than a result of his or her own efforts. "It comes from God and from our success in lifting you up to Him," as Sadique puts it.

35 see also Bellamy 2011 on possession in another Indian dargah and Kapchan 2007 on possession among Gnawa audiences in Morocco



Qawwal Asrar Hussain in his home, displaying a photograph of his *pīr*

Qawwali and genealogy of spiritual kinship

Many hereditary musicians recite their patrons' genealogies[36]. For Sufis, *silsilā* means "lineage" as well as "chain" of tradition. Qawwals recite the spiritual, rather than the familial, genealogy of the Chishtis as a part of their repertoire.[37] The versions of this recitation vary in length and detail, but always begin with the Prophet Muhammad, note the original model of spiritual transmission of authority to Ali, mention the founder of the Chishti order outside of

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36 Among others, Stoller (1997:24-43), in the context of Griots of the West African Sahel, and Neuman, Chudhuri and Kothari (2006:39-50), in an overview of genealogy recitation among hereditary musician communities in Rajasthan, describe the role of hereditary musicians as reciters of patrons' genealogies. As both these ethnographies illustrate, the musician's public invocation of the host's genealogy by the is often part of a permanent, hereditary patron-client relationship.

37 see Qureshi 2003:65 and Begg 1960:98-122 for complete diagrams of the Chishti lineage.

India (Abu Ishaq Chishti) invoke the name of Muinuddin's own *pīr (*Khwaja Usman Haruni), Muinuddin himself, and sometimes include key successors such as Nizamuddin Auliya (d. 1325) and Amir Khusrau (d. 1325). The singers describe the dyadic, kinship-style relationship of master-disciple (*pīr-murīd*) that forms links connecting the present listener (and current representatives of the Chishti lineage, such as the *dīwān*, or assembly leader) to the hierarchical chain of spiritual ancestors. However, in the current, public and cosmopolitan context of the dargah, the "patron" of the assembly is far from clear. In the case of the institutional and economic business of the shrine, the *khādims* are administrative patrons. The spiritual guides, elders, and initiated Sufis of the Chishti lineage are "patrons" by affiliation. The *dīwān* only partly represents the "living saint" in the assembly, since his own legitimacy is contested. Most significantly the public is also a form of "patron." Listeners who establish their affiliations with the shrine in the context of ritual form the largest part of the audience, and supply most of the musicians' income during the occasion. The links that are formed in the dargah have a horizontal dimension of mutuality that runs along with the hierarchies of authority and spiritual succession. The legitimate participation by "common" audience members, though not part of the formal *samā* structure described by Qureshi or the Sufi literature (e.g. Hujwiri 1970 [1911]), is absolutely essential.

Qawwali lineages are governed by a combination of descent and professional talent that Neuman (1980) describes as a pattern in other musical "households" (*gharānā)* in the north Indian music tradition. The family of qawwals who make up the *awwal* ("first") party of the dargah at Ajmer employ a combination of selection and teaching practices that is both vertical in its alignment with hierarchical structures of descent and transmission and horizontal in that there

is a great deal of lateral movement of personnel and peer-learning in training. The firm distinction between qawwals as "reciters" and "Sufis" as "listeners" maintained in work by Qureshi (1982; 1986) and Siddiqi (2005) is complicated by the fact that several qawwals pursue spiritual guidance with a personal *pīr,* and also because they attend the *samā* performances by visiting qawwali parties, who they view as both professional rivals and members of a common *silsilā* and community of practice.

Dīwān, *sajjādānishīn*, and spiritual leadership

Descriptions of qawwali assemblies by Johnston (2000), Qureshi (1986), Begg (1999) and others usually assume the presence of a clear "spiritual leader" of the assembly as a key agent. The category "leader" in the case of the dargah at Ajmer is sometimes elusive, and not always a prerequisite for qawwali performance. During my stay there the official "*sajjādānishīn*" seldom showed himself in public. Several people in the dargah suggested that he was embroiled in several lawsuits and petitions involving allegations of misuse of dargah funds. Conspiracy theories abound, even including stories that the 2007 bomb blasts in the dargah courtyard were a failed assassination attempt on him. When I used the term "*sajjādānishīn,"* a qawwal quickly corrected me, explaining that the term implies a direct inheritance of both the *wilāyat* (spiritual authority) and the *amānat* (personal insignia of office: the saint's *sajjāda,* or prayer rug, staff, and begging bowl). The implication is one of an unbroken line of succession that no one in the dargah seems to believe is the case. "He claims to be the 'son' of Khwājā Sahib," the qawwal said, "but he is not really the son. The direct line [of descent] is finished." Therefore, both qawwals and *khuddām* almost universally use the more

generic term *dīwān* (leader), which carries no notions of unbroken descent. A *khādim* remarked with some bitterness that the *dīwān* has acquired his position through political maneuvering. The elder *dīwān* usually appears only at the end of the night, bearing the torch for the ceremony marking the closing of the *mazār* for the day. The *dīwān* most often present at qawwali functions is his son, a round-faced man of middle age, with a quiet voice and a serene, almost sleepy, expression. His office requires him to maintain a cool demeanor during *samā.* The "spiritual leader" in the audience is supposed to act as a counter balance to the high emotion and ecstatic response that qawwali is intended to elicit, explains Asrar. He is expected to remain outwardly calm during the sometimes chaotic event.

However, both father and son are often absent, except on special occasions such as the *'urs.* On most nights when qawwali is performed, there is no clear "spiritual leader" present. This, like other hierarchical relationships in the subcontinent (cf. Dirks 1987, Raheja 1989), is often the domain of individual negotiation, context specific power relations, and ad-hoc arrangement.

Devotees prostrating before the *dīwān* (son) in his court in the *mahfil khāna* during the *'urs*

Shrine administration and staff

Several scholars describe the history and development of administration, finances, maintenance, and employment of "service professionals" (including qawwals) of the Sufi shrine (Asani 2004, Currie 1989; Ernst 1992; Liebeskind 1998). As the Chishti order expanded and institutionalized, requiring more permanent management of its dargahs, their reckoning of descent expanded to include familial descent, rather than the purely spiritual descent embodied in the teacher-disciple relationship (Ernst and Lawrence 2002:16). This has led to the development of entire communities of representatives at sites like Ajmer who share the hereditary spiritual and material benefits of managing the shrine (Qureshi 1986:92). At the dargah at Ajmer, these hereditary representatives constitute the elite, or "nobility" of the community. This elite relies on the work of service professionals who are attached by right to the shrine, but who are subject to control of the shrine descendants (Currie 1989:184). The Qawwali performers occupy a unique place among these service professionals, since their position relies not only upon familial descent, but on superior professional skill and training.

Bridging the divide between shrine and mosque

I agree with Gellner (1994:201) that, too often, discussions of "syncretism" or combined elements of religious traditions (especially Muslim and Hindu in the Indian context) use the term as a hollow trope of multiculturalism. Ethnographers sometimes mention "participation" by Hindus in Muslim shrine ceremonies (Pinto 1989; Geaves 2005) without specifying what that participation entails or what it means. In this study, I attempt to show some concrete ways that the performance of qawwali not only brings a diverse audience of listeners together generally, but also creates a space that is "open" and public, expressing the multiplicity of interactions of a

"crossroads" or bazaar. The qawwali occasion (especially the "ordinary" performances that form the bulk of the qawwali experiences for players and listeners in the dargah courtyards) allows Muslims and non-Muslims, low and high status visitors, and men and women, a forum for the exchange of money and blessings, communal consumption of blessed substances, including the sound of qawwali itself, and face to face contact and public recognition of self and other. Participants in *salāt* (prayer) in the Mosque face the *qibla* (the direction of Mecca), while listeners in the courtyard areas face each other.

This is not to fall into an orientalist assumption about Sufi practice, that elite participants in the "great traditions" of temple and mosque remain separate, while a syncretic tradition of the masses involves a great deal of shared ritual and tradition (see Burman's 2002 critique of this dichotomy). One of the important forms of transmission that takes place in the qawwali occasion is the intermingling of elites and low status visitors. The seating arrangement described by Qureshi (1986:113), for example, exists mainly as an ideal type. In practice, audiences shift, change places, and share space in unpredictable ways. Audience and performers all sit on the same level. The open space between rows of listeners, the musicians and the tomb is a field of interaction and play among different participants.

The notion of a simple opposition between exoteric and esoteric practice, or between "orthoprax" and "Sufi" Islam is complicated by the fact that the Sufi shrine contains three mosques, only one of which (the *Shah jahān masjid*) is widely used. The performance of qawwali, on ordinary nights, takes place during the interstices between *namāz* times in the mosque. In fact, on most nights, the singing of qawwali is abruptly interrupted by the crackly PA system broadcasting the call to prayer. However, when I examine the individuals and the variety

of actions they perform in order to create meaningful and emotionally satisfying dargah practice, I find that the divide between mosque and tomb is not as distinct as indicated by Van der Veer (1994), among others. From the perspective of the qawwals, who often occupy the space between the tomb and the mosque, it is useful to think of the two spaces as companion/counterbalance institutions (Geaves 2005:298). Let me illustrate some of the useful points of contrast between mosque and *mazār,* as ritual spaces, before considering some of the ways that qawwals and their craft make chains and knots among the separate pieces.

Mosque	**Mazār Courtyard**
Closed (in terms of religious identity, gender)	Open (in terms of religious identity, gender, to a degree)
Egalitarian (total submission)	Stratified (Sufi hierarchy and constrained participation by non-Muslims)
Special occasion: communal breaking of the fast - open and hierarchical (a "host" is present at small gatherings)	Special occasion: *band samā* - qawwali held in the closed *mahfil khāna*
Ritual Substance is motion (praxis) only for Muslims Participants "recite" Leader: Imam	Ritual substance is available to all: Sound, *barkat* Participants "listen" Leader: Only for high-status Sufis who align themselves with the "patrons" Leader may also be the lead qawwal for whom the gathering is also focused on making a living
Message: "You are all the same." but distinction of Muslims/non-believers	Message: "divine love is available to all," but distinctions of commitment, skill and taste
Direction: the *kaba* in Mecca Participants face the *qibl'a,* bow to "face" the earth	Direction of attention: inward, divine love, the power of the saint Qawwals face the tomb, audience members face each other

Ramanujan's (1989) essay on the context-specific as the norm, and the context-free as exceptional in South Asian society is apposite to the boxes on special occasions. These important exceptions show points where a totalizing narrative of opposition between "shrine practice" and "orthopraxis" breaks down when we consider the real lived experience of visitors and locals in these spaces. Two special occasions deserve mention here. During *iftār;* the evening breaking of the fast during the month of *ramzān,* the normally "closed" space of the

courtyard of the Shah Jahan mosque is open to everyone; Muslims and non-Muslims, men and women (although women sit in separate groups from the men) sit around oblong cloth floor coverings spread with fruit, salty snacks, bottled water, and sweets, to eat together. These small gatherings are sponsored by *khādims* of the dargah, local and visiting *pīrs* or other prominent spiritual guides. I attended one hosted by a visiting *ālim* from Hyderabad to whom Sadique had introduced me. He had invited around thirty guests to sit with him in the mosque, including several Hindus, and some hungry children who had been hanging around the entrance. During the *'urs*, the *samā* sessions held in the closed *mahfil khāna* enclosure are far more hierarchically structured and dominated by Muslim audiences who conspicuously display an affiliation with the Chishti lineage by sitting with a *pīr,* and making offerings through the formal channels of the Sufi hierarchy. This type of qawwali gathering should not be used as a monolithic description of what qawwali is. The *band samā* is the only type of qawwali assembly at the dargah from which women are excluded, and in which the performers face the *gaḍḍī,* or "throne" – the Moghul "court" style seating area for the *dīwān,* or patron of the gathering. On all other "ordinary" performances in the dargah, the qawwals face, and direct most of their hand gestures toward the door of Muinuddin's tomb. Musicians are central actors in the practice of *samā,* but their subordinate position as "clients" to quasi- feudal "patrons" is far from complete or universal. It varies with the context of performance.

Dargah culture, because it invites participants from diverse communities and backgrounds to "play" with their identities and status and to experience the Indo-Muslim tradition as modern, valuable, and accessible public culture, temporarily, but significantly, breaks the binaries of Hindu/Muslim, traditional/modern, orthodox/vernacular, and majority/minority in

the emotional, physical, and economic co-participation in the qawwali session. The Dargah Sharif is where these performers live. Qawwali is where we live together.

Chapter Three: Playing

"Audition [*samā*] is like the sun, which shines on all things but affects them differently according to their degree: it burns or illumines or dissolves or nurtures."
Ali Bin Uthman al-Hujwiri (a.k.a. "Data Ganj Bakhsh" of Lahore; d. 1089 C.E.)

"You can listen to qawwali on CD but it's not the same. Real qawwali can't be captured on tape. It is in the air for all of us to hear if we learn how to hear it. You will not find it in the market."
Sadique Hussain

"Just listen, and we will connect your heart to God."
Asrar Hussain

Sadique sits at the harmonium in the "piety gate" courtyard beside the *mazār* (tomb) of Muinuddin Chishti. *ishā* prayers are over and he is hoping to catch a few listeners as they file out of the mosque toward the main gates at the end of the night. Sadique begins his first number with an instrumental prelude (*naghma)* based on the rhythm of the phrase "*Allahu, Allahu, Allahu."* He begins singing.

Shah-e-Ajmer merā masīha hai tū

"Ruler of Ajmer, you are my messiah"

His youngest brother Sadaqat soon joins him, clapping with palms only, his adolescent voice cracking. His gaze is distracted by a group of teenage girls who have gathered under the tree nearby. Saddam, the oldest brother has brought his *tablā* to this session, rather than the

traditional *dholak* their uncle, the *chaukī awwal* ("first party") leader insists upon. When the brothers play in this "*ċhoṭā* (small) party," they are no longer restricted by the conservative tastes of the lead qawwal, Asrar Hussain. He is recognized by the public, the shrine administrators, the hereditary *khuddām,* and the Government of India (through its nine-member *waqf board*) as the *shāhī* ("top," literally "royal") qawwal of Ajmer. The musicians claim their party is "Asia's largest." Certainly it is one of the oldest, tracing their lineage to their appointment by the Mughal emperor Akbar in the 16th century C.E.[38]

Sadique's thirteen year old cousin Amir, fine boned and delicate-featured, arrives in a hurry and quickly sits next to the somewhat pudgy Sadaqat, executing a perfect flourish of his long *shalwār-kamīz* shirt-tails so that they settle gently around him, covering his feet and remaining unwrinkled. He's just like his grandfather, they say.

Sadique leads them as the tempo increases:

Ali madad Ali madad
qadam qadam

"Ali, help me, Ali help me
Step by step"

They are singing together now. Amir is late but they forgive him because his high, boy soprano is so cutting, his pitch so good. Sadique, now that the elder qawwals are not around on this peaceful Tuesday night, indulges in a long passage of wordless *tān* improvisation, lovingly imitating the "*klās kī āwāz*" ("classical voice") of his idol, the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan - a towering figure in the revitalization of qawwali he knows only from his CD collection.

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[38] Asrar and Sadique both suggested that the family goes back even further, to the musicians who accompanied the meditations of Muinuddin himself in the 13th century. However, the pedigree of their "appointment" by the Mughal Emperor is the point they most emphasize.

This is not an official *samā* gathering. Those take place on Thursday nights, on the sixth night of each lunar month, during the *'urs* (the saint's death anniversary), and other special occasions when they are called upon by the *dīwān,* a *pīr* (spiritual guide) or some other "patron." Tonight there is no assembly leader. They are here because it is their birthright to sing qawwali in the dargah, because they want to practice, because a little pocket money will come in handy, because they love God and the saint they call Khwājā Sahib.

The group of teenage girls (who clearly have eyes for the aloof, handsome Sadique) has attracted a group of teenage boys. They sit separately, of course, but there are some flirtatious looks. Soon, a group of older women come and sit between them, causing the girls to cover their heads more scrupulously.

A young man stands and approaches Sadique's harmonium. He drops a ten-rupee note onto the keyboard. Sadique lifts it lightly with his left hand and holds it in front of his eyes so that the *barkat* ("blessing," the saint's power) can enter him, keeping the decaying notes of the keyboard going with his right. He drops the money onto his brother Sadaqat's lap beside him. A few girls make offerings, too, followed by some of the older women, who pass the money to the young men sitting near the front.

In the gathering crowd, a former classmate of Sadique's from the Urdu-medium "Imambara School" near the dargah appears in the courtyard behind the qawwals. I recognize him as someone Sadique has called "a good singer...an amateur singer, but not a qawwal." He seats himself near Sadique after touching his hand to his heart in the Muslim greeting. He sits facing the same direction as the musicians, just slightly behind and to their left, in the place usually occupied by low-status, but recognized devotees and extended family members - the

space I sometimes occupy when the whole party is performing there, if Asrar is in a generous mood.

The guy is obviously trying to get Sadique's attention, leaning forward and looking eager. Sadique gives him a barely perceptible nod, but continues his Nusrat-style flourishes. His throat trouble seems to have cleared up, I think to myself.

The piece comes to a close. The guest singer whispers something to Sadique, who nods and shifts over slightly. Sadique starts playing the *pakkar* ("catch"), an opening modal introduction of the *rāga* to be used in the forthcoming piece, on the harmonium. Saddam stifles a laugh and starts playing a beat that sounds a bit too familiar.

The singer shuts his eyes tightly and begins crooning:

Khwājā mere khwājā
Dil meṅ samā jā

"Lord, my lord
Fill up (enter) my heart"

One of the teenage boys yells out the standard North Indian expression of audience approval, "*Wah! Wah!"* in a sarcastic tone. The girls giggle into their hands. Some older men exhale sharply. Sadique grits his teeth. I can see the jaw muscles working. He does not change his expression, however. He finishes the song, a current pop hit by A.R. Rahman, featured in the Hindi film *Jodha-Akbar,* during a scene set in a fantastically serene and expansive re-creation of the dargah in Ajmer. The film is currently banned in Rajasthan because of the objections of influential Rajput groups to what they regard as revisionist history. However, the song is ubiquitous. One hears it blaring from wedding receptions, passing trucks, chai shops and mobile

phones. Here in the dargah, though, it is an embarrassment.

Sadique gives his friend a few bills from the pile, a smile, a handshake, and a polite gesture inviting him to sit somewhere else. He looks at me and then upward, past the green canopies, the ancient tree limbs, the strings of lights, the towering minarets, the electrical cables, the smog and dust, into the desert sky.

In this casual but reverent atmosphere, experimentation with melody, rhythm, and lyrics is permitted, even encouraged by the crowd and the other musicians. Outright pop singing, the intrusion of *filmī qawwali* (a genre often disparaged by the qawwals) is not. The irony, of course, is that Rahman, composer and performer of the (admittedly lovely) song is a semi-frequent visitor to the dargah and admirer of qawwali, and of Asrar Hussain. In his sitting room, Asrar proudly displayed a photograph of himself sitting with Rahman in the dargah. They are side-by-side at a harmonium, trading vocal lines and obviously enjoying themselves.[39]

Asrar (left) and composer A.R. Rahman (right) sit together in the courtyard of the dargah (photo of a print in Asrar Hussein's personal collection)

[39] When I saw the photo, I felt a slightly prideful rush of recognition, having contended for years that there was a distinct qawwali influence in Mr. Rahman's composition.

Qawwals improvise and also keep the tradition. They are messengers, transmitters of the sacred sound to the people. The young generation is engaged in life outside the dargah, but they always seem to return. Sadique and his brothers and cousin pick up where they left off. They don't make a lot of money this night, but the people get a taste of real *samā,* if their ears and hearts are properly tuned to hear it.

In this chapter, I provide some background on the party personnel, essential components of successful qawwali performance and descriptions of the variety of venues and configurations of ritual listening sessions. I show how any understanding of popular religious spaces must take into account their auditory character, the soundscape generated by the craftsmen who reside there. Even for listeners who do not understand the lyrics, or who are engaged in other activities, the qawwals provide the shrine's essential sonic character. I argue that in all of the variation in performance and context, one thing remains constant: the hereditary musicians take a commanding role in binding together different listeners and maintaining the legitimacy and effectiveness of the ritual for a wide range of "patrons" - including the "common people" (*ām lōg*). My reinterpretation of liminality as craft arises from experience of what actually happens at different venues in the dargah in a wide range of performances.

Throughout this dissertation, I contrast qawwali performances on "special occasions" with those on "ordinary nights." The Urdu terms sometimes used by qawwals, *mahfil-e-khās* ("special assembly") and *mahfil-e-ām* ("common assembly'), have specific meanings elsewhere in literature on Sufism and *samā* to distinguish between assemblies that are held in the private chambers of elder initiates for an exclusive group of specially invited listeners, and those which are open to the public. With one notable exception, all the qawwali events to which this study

refers were, with some limitations (on the basis of gender, for example, but this is neither universal nor completely enforced) open to the public. So I use the English terms “special” and “ordinary” to distinguish between events which are convened by the dargah administrators or particular patrons to commemorate a “special” event, such as the birthday or death anniversary of the saint, and those that take place when the qawwals themselves make arrangements to perform in the dargah, or simply set up and play. I use the term “ordinary” to indicate the latter events because they are by far the most frequent. In keeping with the theoretical concerns of this ethnography, these are also nights when some of the most surprising and creative interactions take place. Since I deliberately avoid presenting one type of gathering as more or less “legitimate” than another (here I disagree with some of the *khādims* and qawwals I spoke to), I also wish to emphasize the gatherings on “ordinary nights” as valid expressions of dargah culture and meaning.

In this chapter, I illustrate some of the features of the resident qawwals' craft as they establish different sorts of “communitas” (Turner 1982:45-50) in different types of performance. First, I discuss the intermediate and intermediary position of the qawwals of Ajmer in terms of the hierarchies they inhabit and sometimes transgress, and in terms of their traditional role as “messengers” of the *zikr* that connects the listener to the divine. An important aspect of their role as “cultural performers” (Singer 1972) is their ability to preserve and revitalize the tradition of qawwali. I then describe some of the tools of the qawwali trade: voice, harmonium, and drums, in the context of the performers own presentation of their values and qualities. In the next section, I recount the complex situation I encountered at the dargah in 2008 when I attempted to discover who the “resident party” (*shāhī chaukī awwal*) is at present. Since the space of *samā* is

made sacred through the actions of the performers and listeners, I then detail the arrangement of bodies in the qawwali occasion in three sites in the dargah. These three arrangements reveal different types of relationships among the listeners and performers and suggest that any single model for a "proper" *samā* gathering is inadequate. Given the heterogeneity of spatial arrangements, styles of performance, and audience responses, I try to interpret qawwali based on the priorities of the performers and the emotional effect and effectiveness of their craft.

Part of the craft of "playing" involves a form of traffic control at this busy crossroads of participants and traditions. From the perspective of these marginalized but crucial people, the performance is not a bounded cultural artifact, but an intersection "where distinct processes crisscross from within and beyond its borders" (Rosaldo 1993:20). In collaboration with these hereditary musicians, I explore their role in coordinating traffic at this intersection.

"Play": *khelnā* and *bājānā*

Dargahs offer a venue in which visitors, through their dress and behavior may engage in a kind of "play" at "passing" as Muslim and an opportunity for anonymity and reinvention of the self. For some non-Muslim worshippers, services to saints are alternatives to services for pay or to family (Bellamy 2011:61). The large number of non-Muslims who ask for saintly intervention in matters of family and fertility suggests that the dargah offers an alternative to traditions which, because of their links with kin networks, might be uncomfortably close to the source of the problem. Non-Muslim guests I brought with me to qawwali performances often told me that they felt a delight in dressing and acting according to the etiquette and expectations of an "other." At the same time, they found the rhythms and melodies of qawwali invitingly familiar.

The “playing” that qawwals engage in also involves a mixture of the familiar and the new. In remark that reminded me of what Drewal's (1992:23) Yoruba informants told her about improvisation and tradition in ritual performance, Sadique says, “Sufi qawwali is the old style of qawwali, but in the old days, too, they had to bring in new ideas, new songs, new mixtures of *moquams* (Persian modes) and *rāgas.*” Sadique did not hesitate to let some outsiders, even non-Muslims “play” with his small party, even though he would never allow this when he performed with his uncle. But it is the “play” of the younger generation that gives them training and experience to be successful producers of effective Sufi qawwali, a skill that involves flexibility and improvisation in response to the shifting conditions of the *samā* occasion.

Qawwals of Ajmer: one party or four?

By glossing these cultural actors simply as “hereditary musicians affiliated with the shrine” (Currie 1989), or “resident Sufi tomb musicians” (Siddiqi 2005:364), one diminishes the complexity of their status and role. The qawwals of Ajmer are neither passive repositories of tradition, nor generic fixtures of the shrine. Their craft takes many forms and appears in multiple contexts. There is no contradiction between the desire to “connect your heart with God,” as Asrar puts it, and to earn a living in part from the money that visitors to the shrine are eager to give. The position of the the qawwals with each other and with the administration of the dargah is also more complex than these accounts would imply.

My dissertation is mainly about the party of Asrar Hussain and family, officially known as the *shāhī chaukī awwal* (“first party”) of Ajmer, but they are situated in a rather complicated milieu of local qawwals. Ajmer is home to three other parties: the *doyim* (“second”) party, a

newer, “spin-off” party formed by Asrar's “adopted brother” Qurban Hussain, and the small party Sadique has started with his brothers and cousin.

awwal: Sadique told me that, “there are other qawwals, but only our party is recognized as *morūsī* [“ancestral” or “hereditary”]. Our power is from Akbar. Any other qawwals who want to sing here can only do so with our permission.” Here I must emphasize that there is no kinship with the *sajjādānishīn* who is believed to be the descendant of the saint. Nor is this musical family part of the network of families of *khuddām,* who are the hereditary (also subject to approval and “election” from within their ranks) servants of the shrine. Nevertheless, Sadique makes a point that his family has had a hereditary affiliation with the shrine “For seven hundred years. We are servants also, servants of Khwājā Sahib.” Sabir and Asrar point out that their “first party” has the right to all performance time and space since Akbar gave them the post. However, the administration of the dargah sometimes overrules them.

Doyim (“second”) party: This adjunct party traces its roots only to 1955, when the dargah committee, in an effort to shore up what was then a shortage of qawwals in the area, owing to migration to Pakistan following Partition in 1947, and also to what Asrar calls “losses to film and other kinds of music,” appointed them as a supplement to the *awwal* party. According to Asrar, the party was formed by a “friend” of his father's from Nasirabad, formerly affiliated with the shrine he calls Allah Baksh. The current lineup of this party features Nobim Khan and his three sons and usually includes one or two of the *dholak* players employed by the *awwal* party as “servants.” This party usually performs only when the *awwal* party is engaged elsewhere, or as part of a longer night-long lineup of qawwali parties at special events such as the *ʿurs.* Since Asrar and others in his family regard this party as having derived their position

from the dargah committee[40], rather than the *morūsī* ("hereditary") affiliation with the Mughal court, their attitude toward them is dismissive, though not overtly hostile. Sadique said, "They're here, but they play only with our permission."

Qurban Hussain and party: When I first asked Sadique about the charismatic, flamboyantly dressed qawwal who had appeared in the *atā-e-nūr* courtyard at the same time that the *awwal* party was performing qawwali in the "piety gate" courtyard on adjacent sides of the tomb the previous night, he seemed a bit reluctant to talk. "He's our servant, another servant of our party," he said, and then changed the subject. The two simultaneous performances had interfered with each other only on the border between them, an area marked off by a low wall enclosing the Women's library and reading room – a space used for reading, education and discussion by female devotees. Since neither party was amplified, the voices and drummers of the two parties bled together into dissonance only at the margins. There was no *dīwān* or obvious "assembly leader" present at either gathering. Although an influential *khādim* I recognized attended Qurban's *samā* session, along with a small entourage of devotees, more "ordinary" listeners had gathered in the "piety gate" area to hear Asrar and party. This had been an ordinary Thursday night *samā* between *maghrib* and *ishā* prayers at the mosque. I later found out that Qurban had a "reserved" spot at "piety gate" on Tuesday nights at the same time, so his appearance on that Thursday must have been a special request by the *khādim* and his visitors.

Asrar Hussain was also reluctant to speak of the burly qawwal whose small, but very good party consisted of himself and his four sons. At first, Asrar dismissed my question about

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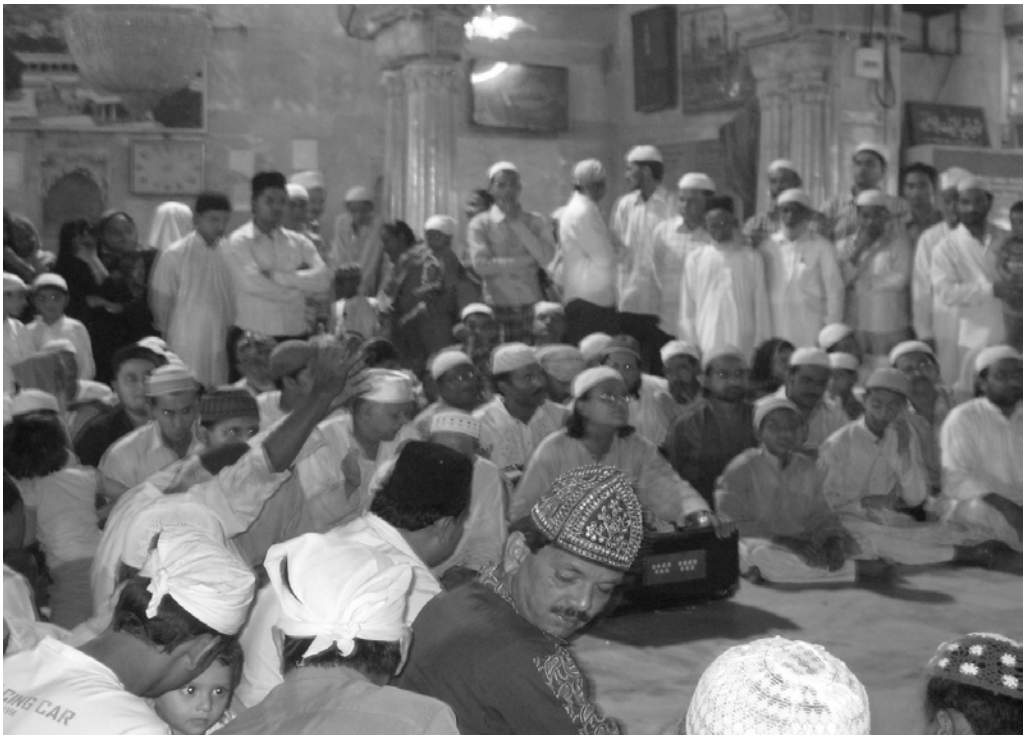
[40] Among *khuddām* and workers, I hear a common complaint that the Government of India's Dargah Committee has served only as a venue for in-fighting between the branches of dargah administration it represents, while having done little to stop the corruption and misuse of funds from donations and rental of dargah properties it was designed to oversee.

his performance one night with the *awwal* party as a subordinate singer by saying “Qurban is no relative of ours.” Gradually, as I spoke to more people about the situation, fragments of a story began to emerge.

Sadique tells me that his grandfather, Asrar's father, the well-known qawwal Iqram Hussain accepted a young orphan named Qurban as a student, a family “servant,” a musical *shāgird* (disciple) and eventually a kind of adopted son, in the way that the *ustād-shāgird* (“teacher-disciple”) relationship takes a traditional form resembling a bond between parent and child. When he reached adulthood, Qurban and Asrar quarreled over leadership of the party. Qurban married outside the family. When his four sons became old enough to play with him, he started his own small party. Asrar and Qurban are no longer on speaking terms. According to Sadique, “Qurban is making a court case to say he is a *shāhī* qawwal. Asrar objects. The case is in process now.” This bitterness seems to have taken its toll on the sixty seven year old Asrar, who, in a rare unguarded moment sighed, “Actually, I want to mend. There is too much competition in qawwali as it is. What can I do?” During the *ʿurs*, Qurban is last on the list of performers. Sadique remarks, “Yes, he's 'last' on my uncle's list, too.”

Sadique and his brothers: this small party performs at irregular interval after *ishā* prayers at the end of the night in the “piety gate” area, or occasionally in the *atā-e-nūr* courtyard. The party consists of Sadique, his brothers Saddam and Sadaqat, and their cousin Amir. Sometimes they invite other musicians and singers to join them. The format is much looser and more experimental that during the performances all of these young qawwals engage in with the *awwal* party. Several times, Sadique permitted friends, guests, and other qawwals to “sit in” with his party for limited appearances. At times the atmosphere was playful, but the seriousness

and calm demeanor of Sadique always brought the session back to qawwali's main purpose: to attempt to elevate the listener into closer contact with God. The visitors who sat and listened to Sadique's fledgling party tended to be younger, less formally incorporated into the Sufi hierarchy (very seldom did I see disciples in the company of their *pīr,* for example), and familiar with popular and mediated forms of the qawwali genre, from *filmī* to "techno." They come to the courtyard to seek out the real thing.



Asrar Hussain (center, seated at harmonium) and Party perform at "piety gate"

Qawwals' aesthetics, instruments, and abilities

The voice

Some of the distinctive qualities of the qawwals' voices – roughness, hoarseness, sheer volume verging on shouting – which would be non-standard in pop or classical singing are heard

as signs of authenticity and emotional immediacy in qawwali. During one of our lessons, Sadique made this comparison, “In classical, the voice is soft, sweet. It's like this: 'la, la, la'.” His voice takes on a velvety quality I hadn't heard before. “But qawwali depends totally on voice power and chest power.” Some of this, he admits, is simply a product of trying to make himself heard over the crowd and ambient noise of the dargah without amplification. But some of this is part of the careful management of style and performance that makes the qawwali performance convincing and effective. Sadique and his father, the qawwal Sabir Hussain, both struggle with asthma, a condition Sadique treats by seeing a traditional Muslim healer, a *hākim*, in Delhi. This *hākim* practices what Sadique calls “traditional *yunānī*[41] medicine.” “He gives me herbs and also forbids me to drink cold drinks.” Sadique refuses even water at anything below room temperature.

At times, the party leader Asrar Hussain would sing so loud and so long that his voice would break or cut out completely. Far from being a sign of inadequacy or an artistic gaffe, this breakdown would often intensify the emotion of the audiences and lead to expressions of arousal and an increased rate of donations coming their way. Asrar would take a moment to recuperate himself, giving a slight nod to his son Amjad, his nephew Sadique, or his grandson Amir to let them take the lead for a few lines. Sometimes he would let the chorus repeat the last line he uttered, the very repetition of a simple phrase leading to increased tension which would be broken when his single voice broke back in to take the song in another direction.

One night, when Sadique had sore lungs, Asrar motioned to him to take the lead in a passage. Sadique's voice cracked and he lost the note. His usually confident gaze fell to his lap as he stopped. His uncle picked up where he had left off. The failure of one singer to maintain

[41] Literally, “greek,” a form of homeopathic medicine practiced by Muslim healers

the proper sound was an opportunity for another to rescue the *samā*. Maintenance of sound and physical space are a big part of how this large party exerts its energies.

In her incisive account of her experience as an apprentice in the Karnatic vocal tradition, Weidman (2012:226) notes a similar association of imperfection and authenticity. Audiences indicate that "singers who have unappealing or unpliant voices but struggle to put forth musical ideas are often praised for it; the unbeautiful voice carries a certain stamp of authenticity. I have heard listeners appreciate the straining voice of one musician as authentic while disparaging the smooth, agile voices of other musicians as more suitable to singing light music or film music." Qawwals often clear their throats, cough, or clear their nasal passages during performance, acts that would be unthinkable on a refined "classical" stage or in popular studio recording. Asrar himself criticized the "showy" and overly refined style of his rival Qurban's voice, as well as his flashy appearance (lots of jewelry, *shalwār-kamīz* in gaudy colors) as evidence of his insecurity about his legitimacy as a qawwal.

Although the qawwals do not consider themselves Sufis, they nevertheless are expected to avoid ostentatious displays in comportment, dress and performance style. In the case of vocal quality, roughness of voice, clearing throats, etc. are read by audiences and by other qawwals as signs of legitimacy, plainness, and honesty. The qawwals that Sadique himself made sure to listen to during special occasions such as the *ʿurs* were often not the most famous or aesthetically lovely, but the ones who had what he called "the most power, the best 'feel.'" The roughness and plainness qawwals display during *samā* resemble the habits of Weidman's performers in that they are an important feature of "authentic" live qawwali that is lacking in "program" or "*filmī*" versions of the genre that my informants so openly criticized. Habits of clearing the throat and

coughing for example, are part of the performance style. I am inclined to agree with Weidman, that “rather than considering this simply 'natural' behavior, I would suggest that it is part of a learned bodily hexis that produces the kind of authentic sound and persona” (2012:226) that makes the live performance of qawwali effective.

The harmonium

The harmoniums played by Asrar, Qurban and Sadique are all favored for their volume and durability. The instrument is clearly a tool for the ensemble to stay in tune, follow the correct *rāga* and structure, and for introducing new passages and motifs, rather than an instrument for displaying virtuosity or significant sound in itself. The scuffed portable wooden pump organ is stripped down and played with all stops out for maximum volume, but is still only audible to the singers themselves, and to the listeners seated immediately near them. During the big *mahfil* gatherings when a public address system in used, no one even bothers to mic the harmonium. The voices boom out from the overdriven speakers, the *dholaks* and distinct palms-only handclaps cut through the slurry of sound, but the harmonium is only prominent during the interstitial passages that mark the end of one verse or passage and the next. Here Asrar delivers a swelling mash of chords that attune his party to the correct *rāga* and point them in the direction they are to follow.

The keyboard is also the platform upon which devotees heap money. On the more formal *samā* occasions, there is a clear pattern of donation, but on ordinary nights, during private programs, and even during moments of chaos or transgression in the *mahfil khāna* people toss the banknotes on Asrar's harmonium. At times, the keyboard becomes so full of folded and

crinkled bills that he can't play. He lifts his right hand in the classic Chishti gesture indicating the door of the tomb, allowing his nephew Sadaqat to scoop the cash into his lap. Sadaqat then folds the money into a neat pile for later distribution among the party members who showed up that night. The group usually ranged from eight to sixteen, with members on the fringes sometimes coming and going throughout the performance.

In a recent article, Matt Rahaim (2011) traces the controversy over the authenticity of the harmonium as an Indian instrument. The objections, and its ban from the All India Radio airwaves, seem to come only from elites, never musicians, and take two forms: first, that the harmonium is a "foreign" instrument, second, that its standardized intonation and inability to bend notes renders it incapable of reproducing authentically Indian notes and *rāgas*. The first objection does not occur to players like Sadique and Asrar, whose harmoniums, as Sadique puts it proudly are "made in Calcutta - with German reeds" and so ubiquitous among qawwali parties and music instructors that their "authenticity" is without question. In addition, the issue of "foreign-ness" or "indigenousness" that so bedeviled the nationalist discourse about music does not apply in the case of qawwali, whose very power derives from its fusion of Persian, North Indian classical and multiple local linguistic and musical sources. The second difficulty, producing a complex variety of *rāgas* and notes that do not match exactly the twelve-tone intonation of the Western keyboard, is addressed through several techniques which Sadique demonstrated to me and which I observed in the playing styles of several qawwali leaders. Sadique achieves complex effects on his harmonium through a combination of passing notes, "slurring" notes together, pressing multiple keys to draw complex harmonic overtones, and variations in pump pressure that alter pitch. Finally, since the harmonium in qawwali as always

subservient to the vocal melody, players sometimes simply stop playing during a vocal passage that lies outside the keyboard's intonation.

The drums

Asrar feels that excessive instrumentation in qawwali is a sign of decadence or conformity with popular music trends. "In the old days, there was no *tablā*, *daf* [42]only; *ektāra*[43] too." He uses the English word "music" to describe the instrumental accompaniment to qawwali singing. "If the music is too prominent, it is not appropriate for the dargah." The use of instruments such as *sitar, tablā,* and even eletronic keyboards and guitar, he feels, debase qawwali and make it more of a "stage program" (in which restrictions are looser) and therefore inauthentic, even dangerous. The guidelines published in both English and Urdu by the dargah administration claim that *samā* is "unlawful" if "musical instruments that help in unlawful activities such as drinking alcohol and committing adultery are used[44]." However, Sadique disagrees, "Music doesn't put anything in your heart that isn't already there. If you are pure, you will listen purely, if you are impure, the music will excite impure feelings in you." Nizamuddin Auliya, famed Sufi saint of Delhi pronounced that *samā* is itself neither lawful nor unlawful, it is the listener who makes it so.[45]

Whether they promote sensual or spiritual arousal, the prominent *zikr*-like drumbeats are

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[42] Although he may mean "tambourine," Sadique maintained that he was referring to a pair of steel or iron tongs, struck together as a percussion instrument. I have seen this instrument used at one qawwali performance in the Sher Shah Wali shrine in Lahore, Pakistan

[43] Literally "one string," a plucked instrument normally used to accompany *bhajans* and other devotional songs (Neuman et. al. 2006:132)

[44] http://dargahsharif.com/CHISHTISM_%20SAMĀ_QAWWALI.htm

[45] Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliya* (quoted in Currie 1989:63)

key features of qawwali, and partly serve to distinguish it from other types of religious and classical music (Qureshi 1986:58-60). In addition, the performers consider the repetitive, syncopated rhythms of qawwali absolutely essential for the listener's spiritual arousal. Saddam, a drummer in both the *awwal* party and Sadique's small party compares the strong rhythmic framework and emphatic stress pattern (*zarb*) to the human heartbeat (also called *zarb*). He claims it is a major force in moving the listener's soul, even those who do not hear or understand the lyrics. Other listeners and musicians report that the distinctive, recurrent beat serves to reinforce the constant repetition implied by *zikr,* as a tool for guiding the attention (*dhyān*) of both qawwals and audience. Similarly, as Qureshi (1986:60) points out, the recurring beat serves "to guide the Sufi's movement in ecstatic dancing (*raqs*)." The key features of qawwali drumming and hand-clapping are repetition and intensity, two qualities that underscore the intention of *zikr* in *samā*: the repetition of a musical or lyrical phrase that connects listeners to God, and the elevated, aroused state that leads simultaneously to individual ecstasy and the presentation of money to the qawwals.

Saddam plays the *dholak,* the standard two-headed qawwali drum, with his uncle's party, but often prefers the *tablā* when performing with his brother's small party, a performance context in which he can experiment more freely with the finger drumming techniques he has learned from classical Hindustani music lessons. In general, even when *tablā* are used by other parties in the dargah, the players employ the same flat-handed strokes (*thap*) typically used on the *dholak.* The emphatic rhythm achieved by the syncopated hand-claps and firm "down beat" of the drums may be partly responsible for the immediate accessibility of qawwali to "world music" audiences, since it bears a strong surface similarity to the "back beat" of Western rock music

(Siddiqi 2005:365).

Arrangement of bodies in *samā* at three venues: *mahfil khāna, atā-e-nūr,* and "piety gate"

The different locations within the dargah where qawwals perform and audiences listen suggest different sorts of bodily arrangements whereby the space is sacralized, and different styles of performance. Here I observe some of the differences among three performance spaces within the dargah: the *mahfil khāna,* the courtyard known as *atā-e-nūr,* and the open space between the tomb and the heavily-used Shah Jahan mosque known as "piety gate." I should be noted that in none of these spaces do audience members face the qawwals. The notion that *samā* is a collective act of listening takes precedence over any resemblance the event has to other forms of public performance. There is no applause from the audience or acknowledgment of praise by the performers, who do not occupy a stage of any kind. The audience and performers all sit on the floor, to indicate their equal position as co-participants in the *samā* ritual. However, important distinctions in status and hierarchy are evident in the different venues, as well as different forms of musical and economic interaction. There are also different degrees of individual agency and lateral transmission among the participants depending on the type of occasion and the locale. Most of all I wish to indicate that it is often the craft of the musician that adjusts to all this variance and maintains a consistently effective performance of s*amā.*

Samā has an inward focus, but is fundamentally a social action. This is a point of meeting between self and society. It is also coded in very specific ways as Muslim, esoteric, ascetic, commemorative, related to foundational texts and personages, and courtly in a self-consciously Mughal style. However, it is also open to all, individual, voluntary, and for non-

Muslims, transgressive in the same appealing way that Bellamy documents for pilgrims at Hussain Tekri (Bellamy 2011:172-5). The accessibility and enlightenment available at the dargah is available to all, but it is always coded in specific ways. The "subcontinental" nature of dargah practices does not imply that they are not communal or socially embedded. In fact, the process of temporarily adopting modes of behavior, dress, and devotion that are clearly "Islamic" is part of the liminal quality for non-Muslims, or for those who regard themselves as Muslim but do not ordinarily engage in Sufi practice.

What is most important about the transmission of sound in *samā* is the effect it has on the listener. Qawwals do not concern themselves with whether their audience is explicitly Muslim so much as whether or not they receive the message. Asrar told me that he was not overly worried about whether or not some audiences understood the lyrics. "We prefer to sing in Farsi, because that was the language of Khwājā Sahib. But we sing in Urdu, and Hindi also. But we only hope that the message of Allah will bypass the intellect [*aql*] altogether. We want people to listen only with the heart [*qalb*]." I saw Hindu *sādhus* (holy men identifiable by their ochre robes[46] and sacred beads) in visible states of ecstasy, making offerings to the qawwals, while families of Muslims, stopping by the *mazār* after performing *namāz* in the mosque pulled out mobile phones and snapped photos, oblivious to the withering looks that the qawwals cast in their direction. From qawwals' perspective, the distinction between Hindu and Muslim is far less important than the distinction between the listener who hears with his heart, and the one who hears only "music." As Asrar puts it (after complaining about people who claim to have been "born Muslim" but who slip into the dargah restrooms to smoke hashish and drink alcohol), "if

[46] Ochre is also the traditional color of the robes worn by members of the *dīwān's* family. In general, the higher status Sufi listeners are identifiable by their plain, muted, "sober" *shalwār-kamīzes* and vests.

you come to the dargah and you hear our sounds as 'music' [*sangīt*], then this is not qawwali."

The dargah imposes rules for listening to *samā,* including the recommendation that one should attend in the presence of one's spiritual guide [*pīr* or *murshid*], but in practice, audiences tend to respond to each other and to the qawwals in ways that do not strictly adhere to this hierarchical and Islamic structure. The qawwals consider themselves messengers who perform "only for Khwājā Sahib," and offer audience members an equal opportunity for participation and consumption of the substance of *samā.* Only on the most formal *mahfil* occasions do distinguished *murshīds* or *pīrs* make specific requests for songs or verses. On most nights, Asrar, Sadique, or whichever qawwal is seated in the center with the harmonium exerts autonomous control over the session, so long as they follow the general guidelines of their position, such as not performing during *namāz*. During the regular performance of *samā,* what is most important from the perspective of the dargah administration is the comportment of visitors to the shrine[47], rather than their identity as "Muslim" or "Hindu." From the performer's perspective, what matters most is the *effect* of their message. Does it cause spiritual arousal [*hāl*]? Does it stimulate offerings of money [*nazr*]?

In my assessment of qawwali as a mode of transmission that takes place collectively among listeners and performers, I acknowledge the heterogeneity of the audience members and the different types of participation by performers as important contributors to the qawwali event as ritual, rather than simply as a music performance or genre. In this, I do not distinguish, as Asrar does (and, in his capacity as a professional concerned with his status in the shrine, *must* do) between worthy and "ignorant" audience members. As Drewal concludes from her study of play and audience interaction in Yoruba ritual, "Each participant in this way has her or his own

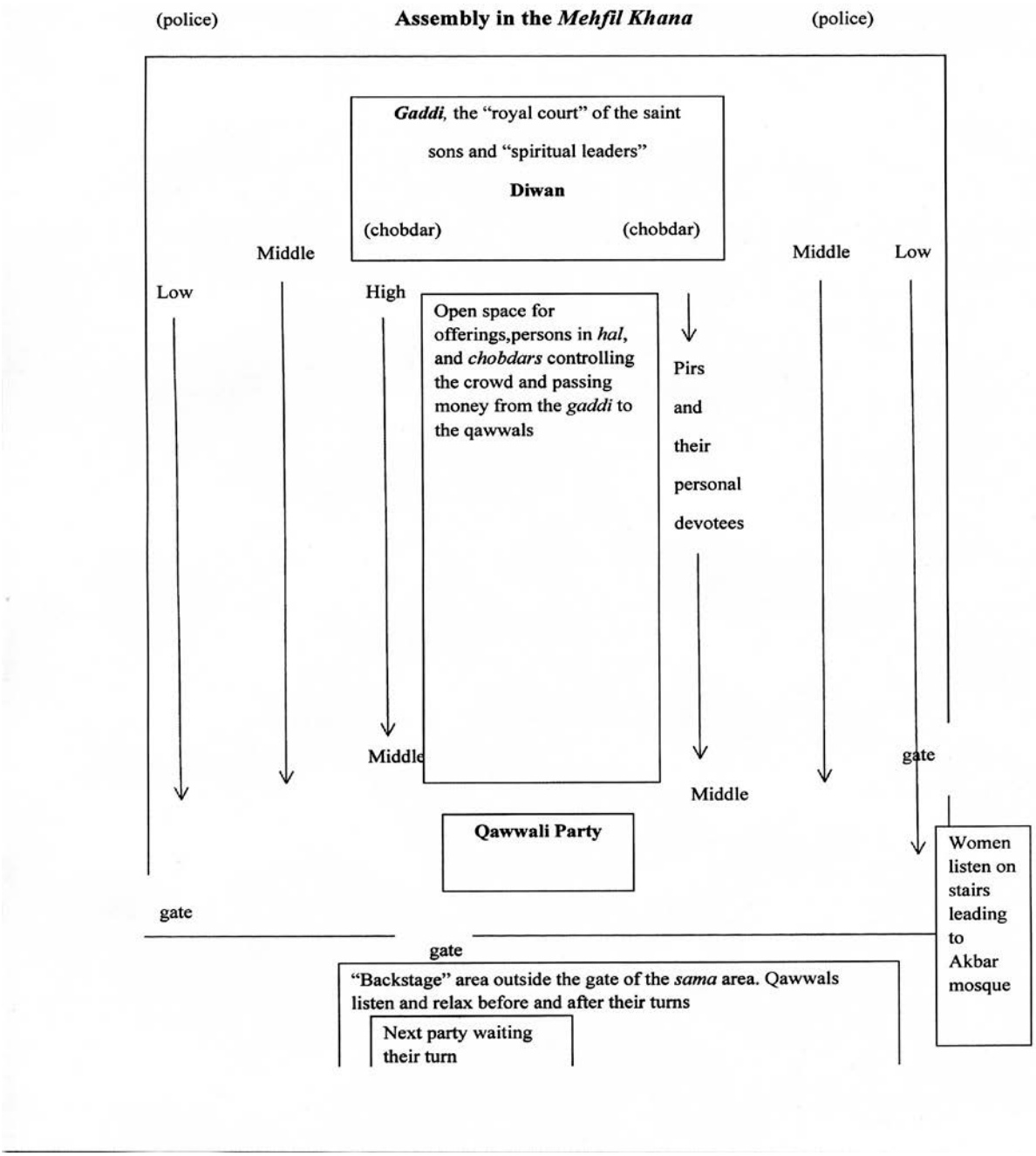
[47] See "Rules of Conduct During Samā", www.dargahsharif.com/CHISHTISM_ SAMĀ_QAWWALI.htm

portion of culture. The portions are shaped by many things – individuals' motives and self-interest, their levels of knowledge, their relationships to each other, their formal ritual roles, and their access to the various parts. It is the combined force of people's personal interactions and representations of them...that shapes the entire experience for each participant, including myself" (Drewal 1992:25).

In the oldest Persian treatise on *samā,* al-Hujwiri explains that each listener hears according to his own position and emotional state. "Thus, whatever is heard by penitents augments their contrition and remorse; whatever is heard by longing lovers increases their longing for vision; whatever is heard by those who have certain faith confirms their certainty; whatever is heard by novices verifies their elucidation of matters which perplex them" (al-Hujwiri 1970[1911]:407-8). The listeners in the dargah often interpret qawwali as "Indian culture" or as "light classical music," but for the qawwals, the potential connection and spiritual transmission is present for all listeners, along with the possible monetary offerings which accompany it. The different locations of qawwali performance allow for different arrangements of listeners and different orientations of the performers. Much of the writing on qawwali assumes a monolithic structure of the *samā* assembly, but even within the boundaries of the "traditional" abode of Chishti practice, the dargah sharif at Ajmer, we see variation across these locations. I will now describe some of this variation in terms of 1. manifestations of hierarchy in the seating arrangement; 2. the identity of the audience members; 3. the degree of agency of the performers; 4. the modes of communitas (Turner 1982:47-50; Lewis 2008:53) observable in the assembly; and 5. the amplification, instruments, and style of performance.

The "special" programs in the ***mahfil khāna****,* which Qureshi (1986) takes as paradigmatic

of the "qawwali occasion" take on this form of seating arrangement for performers and listeners:



In an opening performance by Asrar Hussain and party on the first night of the *ʿurs*, the qawwali party face the *dīwān,* flanked by his two sons who sit slightly behind him. On either side of this *gaḍḍī* or "royal court" stand *chobdārs (*"mace bearers") in the regalia of Moghul

palace guards. The symbolism here is of worldly power, the "king" (the living representative of the saint) sits under a canopy, supported by engraved silver poles, resplendent in his ochre robe and turban. The markers here are all symbols of worldly, rather than spiritual authority, invoking a historical Muslim state which the Chishti order had helped to validate. In one of the *mahfil khāna* sessions during the *'urs*, the *dīwān* invited the Dalai Lama to sit at his right side in the "royal court," causing some disapproval among the qawwals, who thought the *dīwān* was acting like a head of state.

The arrangement of people in this particular location conforms well to the description offered by Qureshi (1993) of the *samā* assembly as *darbār-e-auliyā:*

> [T]he royal court of saints' is a formal assembly convened in the name of a saint, headed by the highest spiritual authority represented, structured in accordance with the saintly hierarchy represented, and musically attended to by the service professionals [qawwals]. Rules akin to courtly etiquette serve to articulate relationships within this hierarchy. Thus it is only within the boundaries of proper form (*adāb*) that the devotees may give free expression to their mystical emotion. (Qureshi 1993:113)

The seating arrangement is firmly hierarchical, with the visiting spiritual guides (*pīrs*) occupying the first row along the right side of the open central aisle. All present sit on the floor which has been covered with white cloth. The hierarchy is manifest only in the relative position of bodies to each other. These rules are not explicit, but are enforced in a general way by *chobdārs* and *khādims* who remove misplaced or presumptuous audience members to their proper places. Those *pīrs* who have the largest number of devotees with them sit closest to the "throne" (*gaḍḍī)* of the *dīwān.* In the front rows on both sides of the aisle sit listeners whose age, "sober" dress, and deference they elicit from other audience members distinguish them as "high status." As one moves closer to the qawwali performers' area, the seats become slightly less prestigious. Those seated there are attentive, appreciative (occasionally visibly ecstatic), but do

not typically receive offerings of money or displays of submission by listeners. Areas adjacent to the *gaḍḍī* and the qawwals' area are also occupied by listeners of middle status. Low status listeners sit around the periphery and stand, looking and listening through the painted iron bars surrounding the *samā* area proper. Across all these other status markers, age is an important factor. Younger attendees habitually give up their seats for older listeners, whether they were identifiable as *sheikhs* (senior initiates of the Chishti order) or not. Notable at these gatherings are small groups of state and local uniformed police officers, visibly armed, who lurk behind the railings behind the *dīwān's* canopy.

This setting is the only one from which *khādims, chobdārs,* and other shrine workers actively exclude women, girls, and young children. Women who attempt to enter the *mahfil khāna* are directed to a portion of the adjacent Akbar mosque, one of whose stairwells affords a limited view and audience of the qawwali assembly. Women and girls sit on the steps and listen. Although they are unable to make offerings directly, a few older women exhibit signs of ecstatic response to the *samā,* including head shaking, weeping, and hand gestures.

The qawwals sit directly opposite the *dīwān* and his "court," addressing the throne, as it were. This spatial arrangement highlights the role of the living representative of the saint, the *dīwān,* as the spiritual leader, patron, and director of the pacing, offering patterns, and to some degree, the musical and lyrical content of the qawwali assembly. This location most clearly places the performers in a peripheral and subordinate relationship to a living "patron" as "service professionals." Audiences in these gatherings pay no direct attention to the qawwals themselves, since the exchanges of offerings and blessings that take place here connect them only to the high status Sufis in the front rows, or to the *dīwān* seated on his throne. The money

they give only reaches the qawwals indirectly, through the intercession of the *chobdārs,* who scoop it up from the floor at the *dīwān's* feet after he has converted it from spiritual offerings into money by accepting it, blessing the donor, and letting it fall.

The *mahfil khāna* also has a remarkable "backstage area" behind the iron-barred railing that marks the qawwali performance space. Since these "special occasions" include performances by multiple parties, performers sit and stand in this area in small groups, chatting quietly and listening to the performances by their friends and professional rivals. The *dīwān* and the dargah administrators make a strict schedule for performances in these gatherings, posted on a handwritten sign on the outer wall of the *mahfil khāna,* with parties given between ten and thirty minutes for their qawwali, depending on the number of groups attending. Both the absolute authority of the "patron saint" present at the assembly and the limited time for performance leaves the qawwals with less control over the event than at other locations.

The audiences at this locale are overwhelmingly Muslim, although there is certainly no formal requirement for this. The Hindus, Sikhs, and others I spoke to at the *'urs* tended to listen to qawwali in the *mahfil khāna* from the periphery, either in the back rows of the *samā* area, or from just beyond the railings that surround it. I usually sat next to the qawwals, both because I wished to view the event from their perspective as much as possible, and because my own status as an Urdu-speaking foreigner (who appreciates qawwali, but is not a pilgrim or devotee of the saint) seemed to place me in the "middle" status category. Occasionally, audiences would make a place for me near the front of the right side, behind the *pīr* Inam Hasan, who was well-known to have a number of Westerners among his *murīds.* People who did not recognize me quite naturally assumed that I must be with him.

The collective feeling that audiences in the *mahfil khāna* express through offerings and emotional responses such as rising, turning, bowing to superiors are closely aligned with Victor Turner's (1982 47-50) concept of “normative communitas,” in which the transcendent ritual experience (*hāl*) is framed by a clearly bound social organization – in this case, the Chishti Sufi hierarchy. The responses of audience members take the form of an affirmation and public display of their place in a hierarchy which begins with the *dīwān,* as the head of the assembly and the living representative of the saint, through the chain of seniority of *pīrs* and their followers, to the ordinary (*ām*) audience members, and finally to the qawwals and other “service workers,” who are marginal (though indispensable) to the event. Of the two formal terms which qawwals and audiences use to describe the *samā* gathering: *mahfil-e-samā* (“assembly for listening”) and *darbār-e-auliyā* (“royal court of saints”), it is the latter which is most strongly expressed by the arrangement of bodies and movement in this locale.

Turner's scheme also recalls the process Weber called the “routinization of charisma” (1968: chapter 14). Although Weber was describing the historical evolution of religious systems and the development of a bureaucracy from an original, charismatic leader, his term came to mind as I observed the physical expression of an ostensibly transcendent emotional experience which depends so strongly on hierarchical authority. The highly structured *samā* gatherings in the *mahfil khāna* overtly express the embodiment of Muinuddin's personal *barkat,* or God-given power, in the “normative” social relationships of a religious and bureaucratic order, mapped out in the arrangement of bodies in the space.

In the *mahfil khāna,* the qawwali is always amplified. Four microphones and a rental amplifier are connected to four big speakers on poles. The qawwali is also broadcast through the

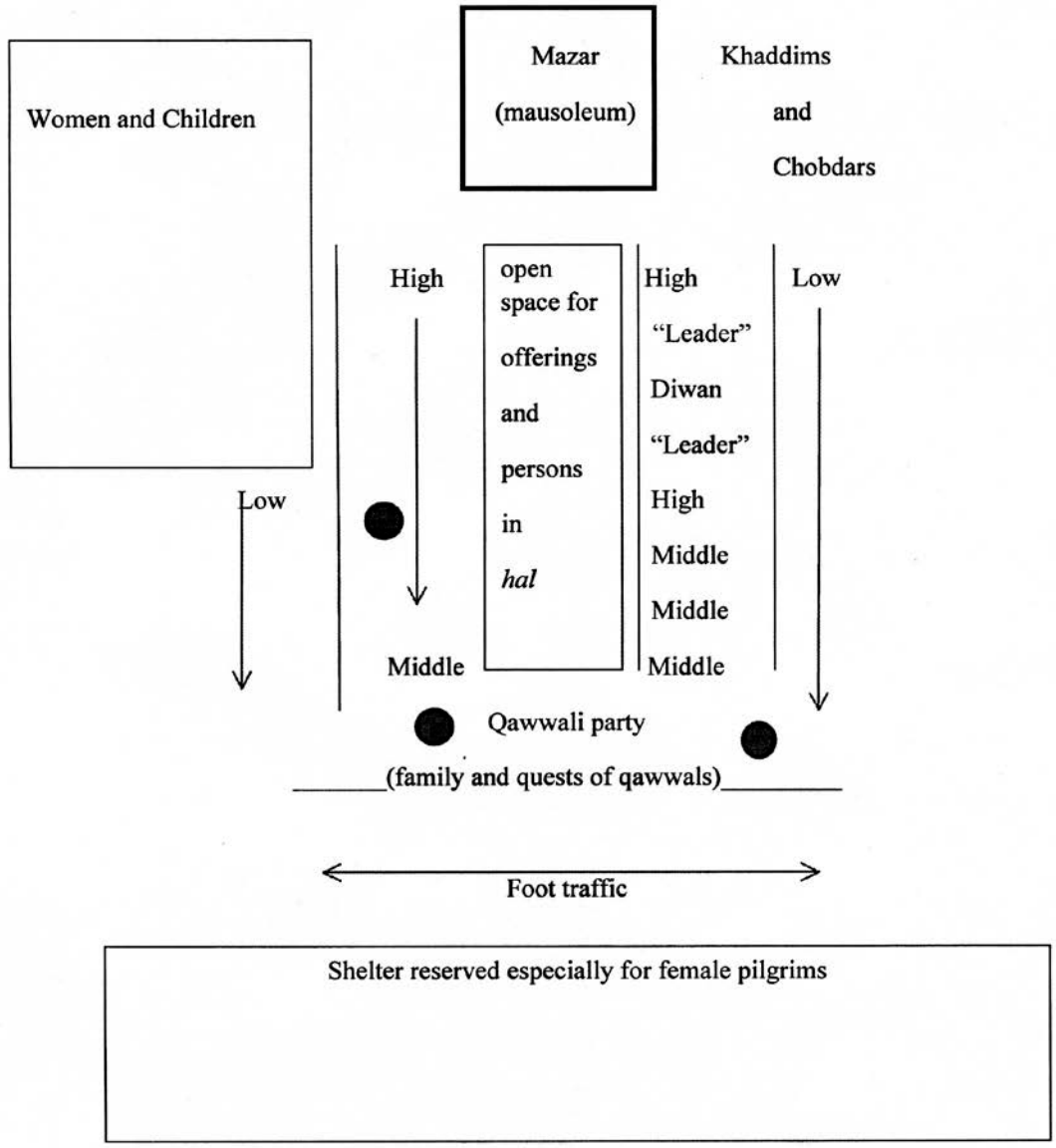
crackly horn-shaped speakers of the PA system the dargah uses for announcements and calls to prayer. The microphones are only placed in front of the singers. The harmonium serves more as a guide for the performers than an audible part of the qawwali for the audience. The drums and handclaps are loud enough to get their slightly distorted, reverberating signal through the microphones. In the *mahfil khāna,* the seating position of the highest status listeners thus does not correlate to the best listening vantage point, but rather to proximity and access to the *pīrs* and the *dīwān.*

The *samā* in the *mahfil khāna* always follows the formal pattern: one of the microphones is moved to the *dīwān's* "court" and handed to a *fātah khwān*[48] who recites the *sūra-e-fāteha* (the Quranic recitation and prayer offered to the dead). A young employee of the rental company scrambles to get the microphone set up in front of Asrar, who immediately begins the opening lines of the first qawwali, a genealogy of the saint. This obligatory opening device sacralizes the gathering first by framing it in reference to the Qur'an, then by linking the presiding "saint" (the *dīwān*) to Muinuddin Chishti, reaching up to the Prophet Muhammad. After the other qawwali parties have performed, at the end of the gathering, in the early morning hours, the *awwal* party returns to perform the other obligatory hymn of the dargah at Ajmer, *khwājā-e-khwājagan* ("lord of lords").

In the courtyard known to the qawwals as ***atā-e-nūr*** ("giver of light"), the seating arragement was much more flexible, but tended to follow this general pattern, at least when the space was used for *samā* gatherings convened by particular *pīrs* or "*khās" khādims:*

[48] This is another hereditary post, a family of part-time reciters of Quranic verse who all hold other jobs in Ajmer. The *fātah khwān* who initiated *samā* during the *'urs* works as a railway clerk.

Assembly at "Ata-e-Noor"



One night, after the *ishā* prayer, Mura Alim, a *khādim* whom Sadique described as both wealthy and influential, who "shows himself very rarely in the dargah," had called a *samā* assembly for the second night of *milād an-Nabī* (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad). At this gathering, the *khādim* and his son flanked the *dīwān* as leaders of the assembly. The highest

status places tended to be in the front rows nearest to the *mazār.* At this event, however, there was a great deal of movement among the audience. The listeners did not form neat rows as they do in the *mahfil khāna,* and the *chobdārs* did not intervene to arrange people, although several listeners who stood for too long or who strayed into the open aisle between the qawwals and the tomb were ushered aside and told to sit down. Women and children were both present at this *samā* event, although they were segregated in two areas: to the left of the *mazār,* and to a raised shelter behind the qawwals' space. The hierarchy in seating arrangement reflected the seniority and prominence of the *khādims* who attended, rather than a hierarchy associated with devotees of particular spiritual guides. The *khādims* dressed in distinctive peaked black felt hats, friends of Mura Alim's, were seated closest to him. However, a pair of Hindu holy men (*sādhus*) also sat in the front row, across from the *dīwān.* The *atā-e-nūr* gatherings (even this one during an obviously Islamic celebration) brought many visibly Hindu and Sikh audience members into the main gathering. The circles on the diagram indicate places where I usually sat during performances at *atā-e-nūr.*

The *dīwān* sat passively during the three hour performance, allowing Mura Alim the privilege of receiving offerings. Many people also presented offerings directly to Asrar and the qawwals, alone, or having joined hands with other audience members. The gatherings at *atā-e-nūr* frequently featured a mix of giving along hierarchical channels and giving more spontaneously and directly.

The qawwals sat facing the most ornate, eastern door of the tomb. In this gathering, the "saint" addressed by the qawwals was not his living representative in the "patron," but rather Muinuddin himself, considered to be alive in his tomb, still possessing the *barkat* he had in life.

Mura Alim and his son partly guided the performance of Asrar Hussain and party, exhorting listeners to rise and leading by example, giving large amounts of small banknotes. However, the qawwals had much more flexibility in terms of repertoire and duration of performance than they had in the *'urs* gathering. They were the only party performing and had as much time as they wished, since the final *namāz* had already concluded.

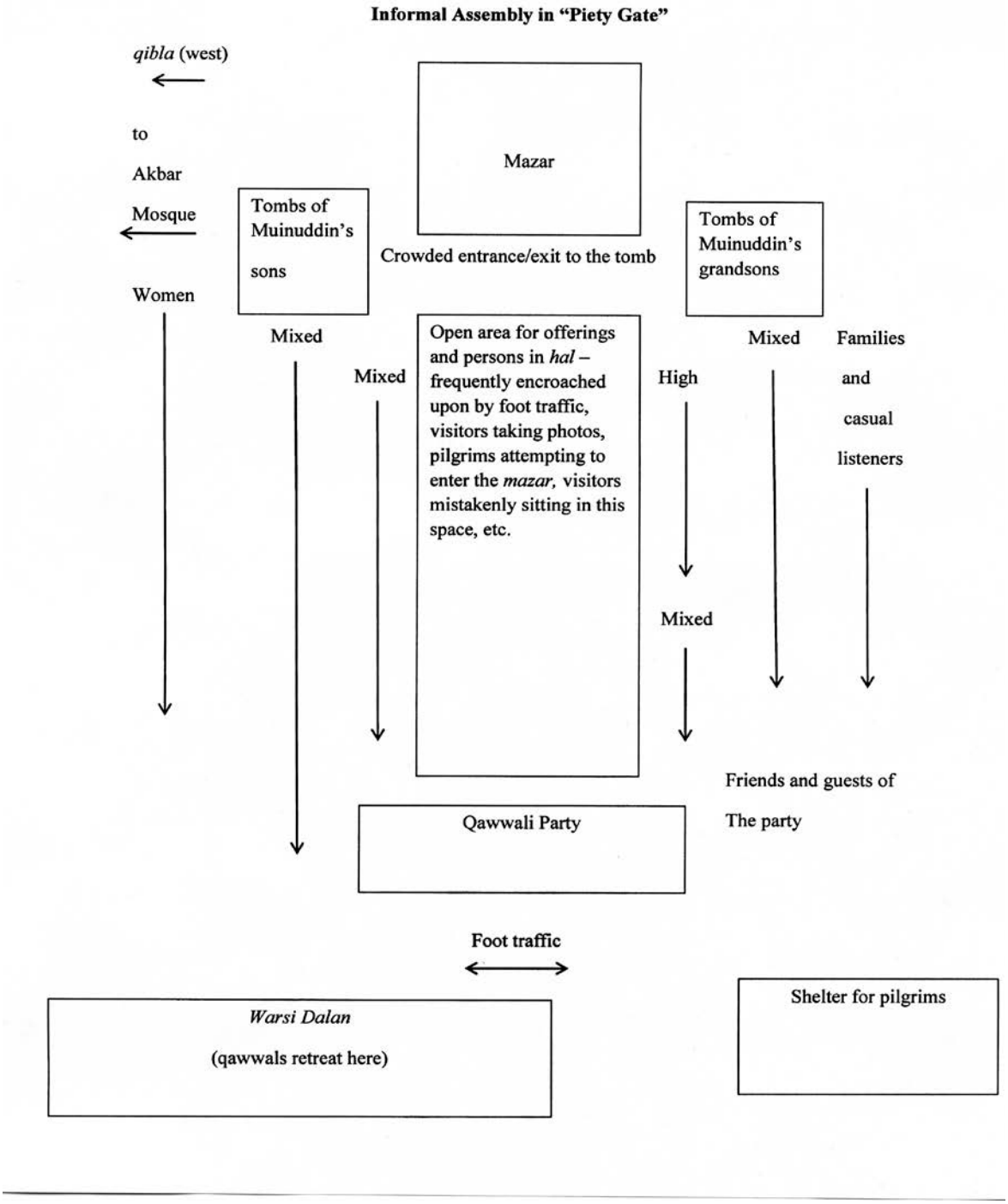
The qawwali on this special occasion was amplified, but only because Mura Alim had arranged it, and partly because this event also featured recitations by a *nāt khwān*, (a specialist in reciting praise poetry - in this case to the Prophet) who stood at a microphone stand to address the *mazār.* After the *nāt,* the *awwal* party launched straight into a qawwali in praise of Muinuddin. On other Thursday nights, when the *awwal* party performed here, they did so without amplification. Asrar and Sadique both told me that it was a matter of pride to be able to generate enough volume for a large gathering only through "chest power."

Compared to the qawwali in the *mahfil khāna,* the *samā* sessions in *atā-e-nūr* tended to be boisterous and loud, with many more shouts and gestures from the audience. Several older Sufis rose to their feet in a state of *hāl* and turned (*raqs*) along with the rhythm of the qawwali. Contrary to the tradition[49] described by Qureshi and others, the party did not always repeat the line that had caused the ecstatic response of the listener until he had recovered. The party's performance elicited a great deal of varied ecstatic responses, including some *raqs* that may have verged upon voluntary "dancing", despite strict Sufi prohibitions against "false *wajd*." Victor Turner (1969:129,139) might recognize elements of "spontaneous communitas" in the process of being incorporated into the dominant, "normative" type, as listeners without clear affiliation to

[49] The person in trance is considered especially vulnerable, and may even die if the musical passage lifting him up ends abruptly (Qureshi 1982:132-3)

the hierarchy of the shrine or the Chishti lineage reached out to participate when moved by the emotional intensity of the event, or following the example of the *khādims* who led the way.

Finally, a performance in the lowest-status (but most frequently used) performance space, the courtyard partly shaded by huge old trees and canopies, outside the southern door of the tomb known to the qawwals as "**piety gate"**, shows the highest degree of lateral mobility and access by both players and audience members. Nearly every account (Johnston 2000; Qureshi 1982, 1986; Sakata 1994; Siddiqi 2005, etc.) of qawwali performance makes a sharp distinction between popular and religious forms of qawwali by stressing that the latter qualifies as *samā* by its strict adherence to rules and leadership by a saint (or his representative) or assembly leader. This leader is meant to control the seating, responses and offerings of the audience members, as well as the repertoire and performance pattern of the qawwals. This is seldom the case during the ordinary night's performances by either the *awwal* party or Sadique's small party in the "piety gate" courtyard:



Between *maghrib* and *ishā* (dusk and night) prayers, eight members of the *awwal* party set up and launch straight into a qawwali performance facing the *mazār.* Taking the lead, Sadique shouts out the "question" verse as an insert (*girah* - "knot") in the middle of a favorite

family qawwali, ("*Chishtiya Gharāne se"*):

Hum gharīb logoṅ kī kyā bisāt hai Khwājā?

"What resting place do we poor people have, O lord?"

The whole party repeats the question for a full minute. Asrar is playing harmonium, gazing

forward at the southern door of the *mazār.* Then, Sadique's solo voice rises in answer:

Āge hī chaukhat par āp ke barlāne se

"Directly before your threshold, because you have made it so"

I should note that in all three locales, the degree of audience attention varies. In the first rows, listeners pay close attention both to the qawwali and to the high-status listeners among them. In the periphery, some audience members appear bored or distracted. Some talk to each other or even engage in mobile phone conversations during *samā.* In the previous two locations described, peripheral party members (Sadaqat is especially good at this) or more senior listeners, or even shrine workers, tend to silence disturbances with a hard glance or gesture. In "piety gate", the atmosphere and seating arrangement are more flexible. For many audience members, "piety gate" is not a place of solemn, concentrated attention. Rather, it is a place where their attention shifts from music to beat (swaying, hand clapping, tapping fingers affectionately on a companion's shoulder) to lyrics (commenting on or mouthing along with the response-chorus parts) to joining in with the qawwals. There is quite a bit of middle ground between the outsider-listener, who sits perpendicular to both the tomb entrance and the qawwali party, and the

qawwals themselves. Some people are relatives and friends who feel comfortable sitting behind or alongside the performers. Some of them occasionally join in, clapping and singing phrases during the choruses. Some of the more serious listeners seem to prefer facing the tomb, so they sit either on the wings of the performance area or in a slightly raised alcove (*warsī dalān*) directly behind them. Some tourists and pilgrims have the audacity to stand in the open space between the qawwals and the door of the tomb in order to take photos or video with their mobile phones. If a sweeping hand gesture to clear the aisle from Asrar or Sadique is not enough, Sadaqat is usually the first to rise to his feet, take the photographer by the arm, and pull him or her aside. However, since most listeners make offerings directly to the qawwals in "piety gate," and because it lies directly between the tomb and the mosque, the open aisle is often a confused, congested, even contested space.

The seating arrangement sometimes includes a place for the *dīwān,* although he does not often attend the Thursday night performances by the *awwal* party, and never those by Sadique's small party, in "piety gate". If a senior Sufi or spiritual guide is present, he sits in the front row to the right of the qawwali area. Unlike the other spaces, the highest status listeners in "piety gate" seat themselves facing the *qibla* (the direction of Mecca, west). The qawwali area in "piety gate" faces the southern door of the tomb, as well as the small enclosures believed to contain the remains of Muinuddin's sons and grandsons. Asrar frequently raises his open hand, palm upward, toward the *mazār,* when singing lines addresses directly to the saint, such as:

Sunno sunno mere hājat rawā Gharīb Nawāz!

"Listen, my fulfiller of needs, protector of the poor"

He points our attention to the grave of the saint, and puts special emphasis on "*sunno*" ("listen") during a phase of the assembly when noise and chatter have become distracting to many audience members. Here, the sense of hearing is the dominant means for directing us in this busy intersection. In this area, the qawwali is never amplified. The purity of the sound is an attraction for many visitors, both Sufis and others, who feel disenchanted with more polished or staged qawwali performance and seek out a more direct listening experience. This means that the most desirable seating positions in this location, after the front row facing the *qibla,* are always those which let the audience hear best. Therefore, I have labelled nearly all the other listening positions in "piety gate" as mixed.

The seating is most mixed here in terms of overt religious affiliation as well, with Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims sitting more intermingled. The listeners in this area get up and move around more than in the other spaces, whether to leave during the performance, change seats to a better vantage point, or stand to present money directly to the qawwals.

Offerings here are always placed either in Asrar or Sadique's hands or on top of the harmonium, although some donors ask the person sitting in the leader's position to touch the money before they present it. Some listeners touch the money to the threshold of the tomb before carrying it to the harmonium, since the saint's body is the true assembly leader at "piety gate". It is most common to see improvised, communal, and lateral passage of money offerings at this locale, a topic I will discuss in detail in chapter five: "giving and receiving".

The gender segregation of audiences in "piety gate" is quite loose, and is always self-directed. No *khādims* or *chobdārs* enforce this in any way. Women tend to sit together to the left of the qawwals, under the massive trees and green canvas canopies that protect them from bird

droppings from the thousands of finches[50] who reside there. Women often sit quite close to the *samā* area, especially if accompanied by small children, who they enlist to carry their money to the qawwals. During Sadique's performances with his small party, women and girls will sometimes approach in pairs to offer money directly to the performers. In performances in "piety gate", men with small children sometimes sit with their wives in the loosely-defined women's area. Family groups of mixed genders tend to sit in the space to the right of the qawwals, several rows back, adjacent to the *begumī dalān* entrance to the tomb, where noise and motion is less disturbing to serious listeners. At one point in the session led by Sadique, a little boy's rubber ball bounces into the *samā* space, landing in Amir's lap. Sadique deftly picks it up, fakes a long throw over the boy's head, and hands it back to him with a stern but indulgent expression, without a pause in his singing. All sorts of "play" occur in this space.

The great mixture in "piety gate": devotees in the company of their *pīrs,* Muslims and non-Muslims who actively engage in states of spiritual arousal and offerings, tourists, casual listeners who experiment with (Islamic) modes of courtly behavior (such as bowing to the *sheikh* - or the person they feel is most spiritually advanced, senior, or elevated in the hierarchy, whether this is the *dīwān,* an elder, or the saint in his tomb), and those who cross boundaries of gender and age restriction suggest a kind of "spontaneous communitas." In other words, there is evidence of both "ritual" and "play." As in Turner's description, we find this form of collective behavior, not in the absence of structure (such as the hierarchy of the Sufi *tarīqa,* which is ever

[50] Audience members often remark that the singing birds fall mysteriously silent when the qawwals begin singing. The appreciation of the dargah birds leads people to accept little "gifts" that land on their heads and shoulders with smiling resignation. The presence of dargah cats who sometimes stroll blithely through the open area between the qawwals and the *mazār* is also affectionately tolerated. A lean tabby who sprawled in the very center of the *samā* space for several minutes before sauntering away was gently stroked by the crowd on his way out.

present) but coexistent with it. When audience members join hands with each other (rather than with a senior representative of the *tarīqa*) in order to make an offering; when women, children, and even (on several occasions) *hijrās*[51] enter the *samā* space to make offerings or in response to a state of *hāl,* we observe a collective response to qawwali, "a direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities...free from the culturally defined encumbrances of [their] role, status, reputation, class, caste, sex or other structural niche" (Turner 1982:47-8). An analysis of qawwali that subsumes the entire meaning and context of qawwali in the service of a saintly hierarchy (Qureshi 1982, 1986) or relegates non-Muslim participation to the periphery (van der Veer 1992, 1994) can only do so by denigrating the less formal performances at locales like "piety gate".

However, for Sadique, Amir, Amjad, and other qawwals of the youngest generation, this performance space is critical. It is where they get a chance to lead the *awwal* party for extended periods. Sadique and Amjad each fill in for Asrar as leader of the party during his visits to his *pīr* in Ahmedabad, and to his doctor in Delhi, respectively. Furthermore, "piety gate" is a space which is available to Sadique and his brothers whenever they wish to conduct a qawwali performance. Their small party does not attract the large crowds that the first party does, but there are always enough listeners to justify calling it a "*mahfil-e-samā,*" if not always a "*darbār-e-auliyā.*"

Sadique always incorporates more *tān* (a wordless improvisational style associated with classical singing) in "piety gate" than in the other dargah areas. "Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is my '*ustād,*' too," he says, smiling, using the reverent term for "teacher" in a half-serious way, since the vocal flourishes he indulges in with his small party come from his CD and cassette collection

[51] Members of a third gender, mostly born male, who dress and act like women

as much as from his Uncle's face-to-face instruction. His brother Saddam prefers the *tablā,* which offers a wider palette of notes and subtle expression than the *dholak* he plays with the *awwal* party. As shown in the beginning of this chapter, Sadique even invites occasional guest performances by amateur singers and qawwals, always maintaining firm and sober control of the proceedings.

Performances at "piety gate", which even take place during more "official" performances by the *doyim* or Qurban's party at *atā-e-nūr,* are taken seriously by the qawwals and the audiences who hear them as "*dargahī" or "sahī"* ("true") qawwali. We should afford them no less legitimacy.

Coda: a closer walk with God

I was sometimes surprised by the emotional presence of audience members who may have only stopped in the courtyard for entertainment (as I did on my first visit in 2000) or out of obligation, like the *khādim* I describe here on an ordinary Thursday night in "piety gate":

This *khādim*, ordinarily so aloof, breaks down in tears during the performance. He had appeared from time to time at the dargah, usually in the most elaborate costume, his two little sons dressed just like miniature versions of himself. The occasion is an ordinary one. No one else around him seems so affected, but he falls to his knees and weeps with unmistakable joy. This administrator who often bustles about making a show of organizing events is deeply affected. The qawwals provide *takrār* repetitions as he is helped to sit back among the listeners.

The very image-conscious *khādim* and patriarch allows himself to be seen as emotionally vulnerable. His children see him weeping. The symbolic act of release of money and

possessions embodied in the stylized act of blessing money and placing it on the harmonium has a more emotionally raw and immediate counterpart in the tears of profound feeling people release during especially effective qawwali.

By contrast, many other audience members seem to be there for the musical or poetic cultural experience – or as heritage tourists. The *khuddām* mainly attend as part of their public, official, or civic responsibility. But the infrequent episodes of raw emotional release in the context of a religious tradition so tightly bound by discipline, ritual, and pattern are remarkable in their intensity. The audience around him seems to focus their attention on the qawwali with more clarity after one of these outbursts. Part of what people at these occasions seem to crave must involve this pure expression of feeling. People would sometimes imitate the turning motion of *raqs*, but the crowd can always tell when someone is faking it. This is real - and it comes from a man who is otherwise very conscious of his public image. When this happens, the qawwals are not the focus of the event. The repeated hand gestures away from themselves, toward the tomb, up to the sky suggest this: Don't look at us! This is not a concert. This is a closer walk with God.

Chapter Four: Learning

“Like the Sufis say, '*naql se asl paidā hotā hai'”* (“From the imitation comes the real thing”)
Sadique

“The child imitates not *models*, but other people's actions.”
Pierre Bourdieu (1977:87)

“The pupil does not only imitate the teacher; but he focuses his spirit upon the spirit of the teacher; and he not only learns, but he inherits from his teacher.”
Hazrat Inayat Khan (1960:102)

Scene one: “piety gate”

On a hot night in July, the recent monsoon downpour having served only to make the air more humid, the audience clammy and uncomfortable sitting on wet, mud-streaked marble, the full *awwal* party works hard to galvanize our attention:

Asrar (forcefully, chin raised, hand extended upward):
Silsilā hamārā hai
Chishtiya gharāne se!

His four sons, three nephews, and two grandsons (in unison):
Silsilā hamārā hai
Chishtiya gharāne se!

“This spiritual lineage is ours
From the 'house' of the Chishtis”

As the men sing, Asrar's harmonium is placed front and center so that the other singers and drummers can hear it and follow his lead, even though the audience is not always able to distinguish it from the ensemble. To his right sits his grandson, Amir, a wiry twelve-year-old with penetrating eyes. He raises his right hand to the side if his face in imitation of his grandfather, joining the chorus of "*chishtiya gharāne se*." He occasionally gets a solo line of his own, and is not expected to control the crowd and sort the money the way his cousin Sadaqat must. Asrar has suggested that Amir is the best of this youngest generation, although no one knows how his voice will sound after it changes at puberty.

The couplet, "*silsilā hamārā hai; chishtiya gharāne se"* refers to the chain of transmission in the Chishti lineage. The chorus asserts that the family of qawwals considers their *gharānā* or musical lineage to be part of the Chishti legacy. The frequently sung couplet in Asrar and Sadique's repertoire: "*chishtiya gharāne se..."* reinterprets "*gharānā",* not as a "musical family" (Neuman 1980) or as a "style" (Roy:1998), but as an affiliation with a larger, transnational Sufi order. In addition to this powerful, repeated assertion of the performers place in the "chain" of transmission through the lyrics, what strikes me most forcefully on this night are the timbral and rhythmic qualities of the qawwali. The sound itself is commanding attention, directing our hearts to God through a particular set of messengers, past and present. This is what *zikr* is intended to do, serve both as "reminder" and "remembrance."

In this chapter, I focus on two sites of learning: the dargah and the home, and describe the binding together of two modes of transmission - hierarchical (*sīna ba sīna*) learning or "vertical transmission" (Neuman 1980, Qureshi 2009), and peer-learning or "horizontal transmission" (Wolf 2009, Groesbeck 2009, Lave and Wenger 1991). I also illustrate the pedagogy that

musicians exert among diverse audiences, much of which occurs in subtle forms of embodied praxis (Bourdieu 1977). The interweaving of hierarchies and mutualities in the social life of the musicians flows from their crucial role as facilitators of ritual and craftsmen engaged in a revitalization of tradition.

The ethnomusicologist and accomplished *sitar* player Brian Silver (1984) describes an aspect of teaching between parents and children intended, in his words, to help the budding musician develop "stage presence." In the context of Hindustani classical music performance, the *Ustād* will sometimes allow a child as young as three or four years old to sit beside him on the dais. Slightly older pupils may be called upon to "take occasional solo or supportive phrases, though always, as ordained by etiquette, in a weaker voice and more subdued style than that of the teacher." (Silver 1984:318). The inclusion of three generations of performers in the same qawwali performance involves more legitimate participation by those on the "periphery" and also a distinct lack of separation between "teacher" and "pupil." The ensemble singing and call-and-response style of the qawwali described above takes place in a flexible and negotiated arrangement of performers' bodies that both reflects the lyrical assertion of the *gharānā* as a community of practice, and highlights key features of the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the learning process.

The seating arrangement of the party shows distinct elements of both hierarchy and mutuality. Asrar, lead qawwal, sits in the center of the front row, directly facing "piety gate" (a side entrance) of the tomb. In the *mahfil khāna*, for special gatherings, the *dīwān* (the genealogical descendant of the Saint) or his son, hold "court" (*darbār)* directly facing the qawwali party. In this courtyard area, he is meant to sit in the front row on the party's right side.

There are a few older men I recognize as *pīrs* in the front row, but this audience is mainly made up of "ordinary" (*ām)* people, myself included.

Front row: Sadaqat, Iqbal (Asrar's son - he sometimes backs up Asrar on Harmonium and fills in for Asrar when he was out of town), Asrar, Asrar's favorite grandson Amir, Izhar (Asrar's youngest nephew), Akhtar (Amir's father)

Second row: Iftekhar (Asrar's elder brother's eldest son - Sadique's eldest brother), Sabir (Asrar's older brother and father of Sadique, Sadaqat, Saddam, and Iftekhar), Shadab Khan (a *dholak* player I have seen with some other parties, although Sadique describes him as a "family servant"), Asrar's three youngest sons: Amjad, Aslam, Anwar, all of whom play supporting roles in the assembly.

Third row: Sadique, Saddam (on the *dholak*), Anis Khan (another occasional drummer with the party), Naim Khan (a young "servant" who carries and maintains instruments for the family)

Sadique's role with the full party is subordinate. Although he is a very good harmonium player and singer, and his knowledge of qawwali verse is evident in his performances with his small party, Asrar does not normally allow him to take more than a chorus part in the first party performances. Safely behind the gaze of their stern, tyrannical uncle, Sadique and his brother Saddam sometimes whisper and exchange ironic glances when some member of the assembly does something especially irregular or foolish, such as when a middle aged couple stands before Asrar's harmonium and attempts to touch his feet (in the manner of a supplicating disciple). Asrar is clearly trying to motion the pair away from the empty space between him and the tomb without losing the tempo or melody while playing. Sadaqat, in his "bouncer" role, has to stand and escort the man and woman back to their seats. The man hands two five rupee notes to him as he turns to go back to his place, as if tipping a servant. Sadaqat's flustered face and the couple's embarrassment make Sadique and Saddam giggle a bit ruefully. Sabir, their father (Asrar's brother), gives Sadique a swat on the knee with the back of his hand. The two brothers refocus

their attention on the qawwali. Saddam increases the tempo of his *dholak* playing slightly. Sadique shifts his hand clapping from four to eight beats per measure. His father Sabir takes up this cue, and soon the whole party is propelling the qawwali forward with greater force, although the change in rhythm leads to some unintentional syncopation.

Asrar lifts an open right hand to quiet the party down a bit. Thrusting his arm toward the door of the tomb, he sings a line that reminds us that we are in "the house of Ali (the friend of God)" (*Ali Ghar* - an epithet of the dargah, reinforcing the ritual's participation in the descent of authority along a chain of transmission). Amir watches Asrar's face and gestures in quick glances, attempting as much as possible to keep his gaze trained on the door of the tomb before them. He takes the lead on a line stating that the blessings of the house of Ali are upon us. His voice is a piercing boy soprano with a prematurely gritty timbre. His grandfather takes the lead back, placing his open hand to the side of his face and thrusting it forward toward the tomb, letting the harmonium run out of sustain. Amir imitates this gesture, using his left hand, although he is not playing a keyboard with his right. One of the smaller children who come and go around the periphery of the party watches the twelve year old qawwal with particular intensity. He also makes the hand-to-the-face gesture, only to have another youngster mockingly push his shoulder. The youngest kids scatter at a withering glance from Asrar. Amir looks down and concentrates on keeping the rhythm.

At this point, the party becomes more unified rhythmically. The force of two hard-hit *dholaks* and thirteen synchronized handclaps rises above all the other sounds. The party members are fond of pointing out that they are Asia's largest party. I have never seen so many qawwals performing together, nor have I heard another party achieve such volume without

amplification. The rhythm itself is a basic qawwali *theka,* an 8/8 rhythm that has been likened both to the human heartbeat (Silver 1984) and to *zikr* in the form of the repetition of God's name as “Allah, Allah...” (Qureshi 1986).

The vertical elements of transmission are in the lyrics of the qawwali, which inform the listeners that what we are all doing here is a continuation of a chain (*silsilā)* that connects back to the foundational transmission of authority from Muhammad to Ali. It also reminds us that Khwājā Sahib himself was part of the “house” of Ali on both his mother's and father's side.

The vertical aspect of transmission is also observable in the arrangement and comportment of members of the party based on age and level of proficiency. The fact that his father and uncle were quarreling may have kept Sadique in the background more than his talent or status would have dictated.

The horizontal dimension of transmission, in the form of legitimate peripheral participation, is on display as well. The smallest children are allowed to come and go at the edges of the party's space. They are encouraged to clap in the distinctive, palms-only style of the qawwals, as long as their attention does not wander. They watch not only the eldest generation (Asrar, Sabir, etc.) but the children slightly older than they are (Amir, Sadaqat). Their participation is often one of playful imitation, yet it does not detract from the overall effectiveness and legitimacy of the gathering. On the contrary, their participation is mirrored in the behavior of the young sons of *khuddām* in the audience. Fathers dress their children in outfits that match their own and allow them to sit in the front rows of the audience, and sometimes to make donations to the qawwals for them as proxies. Smiles of tolerance and encouragement greet these boys as young as four or five as they attempt to imitate their fathers gestures of

authority and stylized humility.

Ideally, the empty aisle between the party and the tomb is for listeners in states of ecstasy to express their spiritual arousal through offerings and *raqs* but this happens only rarely. On this night,

the main task of young Sadaqat is making sure that there is always a clear sightline between the performers and the door of the tomb.

According to the historical accounts documented by Currie (1989), the formal occasions rendered in Qureshi (1982, 1986) and the idealized description in the dargah's own "handbook" in both Urdu and English (2008), the qawwali assembly is conceptualized as *samā* because of the mediating, even controlling presence of either the *sajjādānishīn*, a *khās khādim*, or a *sheikh*. Sadique told me early on in my fieldwork that the *sajjādānishīn* is at all the qawwali performances on Thursdays. In my observation, however, the presence of one or more of these spiritual guides or hereditary saintly representatives was a desirable, but not necessary element. In the absence of such obvious leaders or elders, listeners who wish to donate are supposed to pass the money through the hands of someone more spiritually advanced than themselves. As we shall see in more detail in the chapter on "giving and receiving", this is often established in shifting and contextual relationships between individuals. These transcripts of behavior are also a result of imitative learning by the audience.

One elderly *pīr* who sits in the front row on the night described above refuses to accept offerings on behalf of the qawwali party, instead gesturing for the donors to approach the harmonium directly. Two of his *murīds* sit near him, having cleared a place for him and covered the marble with a square of cloth large enough for him to sit on.

Another *khādim,* occupant of one of the largest, most centrally located offices in the dargah, is there with his son, a toddler outfitted in richly embroidered *shalwār-kamīz* and peaked *topī*. The *khādim* accepts a donation from an older audience member and hands it to the wide-eyed boy, who gets up and haltingly approaches the harmonium. Asrar softens his formidable expression and hold his hand out to the child, who hands over the bills and sprints back to his place at his father's side.

The resident qawwals attached to the dargah occupy a hereditary position of a client dependent on the patronage of a Chishti hierarchy (Qureshi 1986:136), but also must cultivate professional musical ability to perform for a wide audience. The learning that takes place as the youngest qawwals grow to maturity is multidimensional. Their education is formal, informal, hierarchical, peer-focused, Hindu, Muslim, musical, spiritual, traditional, and modern all at once. Their process of learning to integrate all of these elements is visible and audible in the community of practice at the dargah.

As the context of shrine authority has shifted from placing primary emphasis on spiritual lineage to family membership to a contemporary context of negotiation and individuality (in which *khādim*s of the dargah must stand for election, and qawwali performers also pursue careers outside of the dargah), the act of learning to be a qawwal involves two dimensions of transmission: 1. vertical, hierarchical discipleship, and 2. lateral peer-learning and education both in performance and from outside sources, including formal education, mass-media and recordings.[52]

The qawwali performance is a field of practice in which elements of hierarchy, peer-

[52] For other examples of this integration of traditional and modern modes of learning see, for more cases in North India Manuel (1993) and, in Japan, Lande (2007).

learning, and ritual are intertwined. Different forms, modes and media of transmission are the ties that bind these elements together. I see and hear in qawwali an expression of dargah culture in which the multiplicity and heterogeneity of practices constitute, rather than distract from, the effective qawwali experience. In addition, the various ways that young qawwals learn - repertoire, technique, social skills, body posture - challenge some of the established notions about musical apprenticeship in the Subcontinent. In particular, ethnomusicological studies in which the researcher has undertaken a formal discipleship with a master (e.g. Brown 1965; Kippen 1988; Neuman 1990; Powers 1959; Slawek 2000; Weidman 2012; Wolf 1991) have laid an important foundation for participant observation in research and representation of musical culture, but have also set up a paradigm in which formal, sequestered, hierarchical training is often viewed as the primary site of teaching and learning.

Sadique and his brothers have lives in which their education (formal schooling, musical training, religious study with a *pīr*, and the peer-learning that takes place in practice) is more complex than usually assumed for practitioners of "traditional" arts, craft, and culture. In my examination of the process of learning to be a qawwal, I recognize that the young performers have other options, and other ambitions, which sometimes complement, and sometimes restrict, their commitment to qawwali. The musical career of a qawwal like Sadique, for example, should be seen as more voluntary, agentful work than suggested in some classic texts on Indian musicians (Qureshi 1986; Neuman 1980; Slawek 1987; Silver 1984 etc.) Sadique's business card introduces him (in English) as a "stage programmer and singer," and mentions his academic credentials ("MBA - incomplete"). Sadique and Sadaqat both complain that their mother insists on their formal education in school, their pursuit of a "good" job outside the

dargah, and also that they carry on the qawwali tradition as a supplement to their income, or even as a kind of "retirement" plan after they raise children of their own. The pressures of modernity can be heavy.

This outlook of the performers, emphasizing free choice and individuality, mirrors a trend in qawwali performance style that has followed in the wake of the international success of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan - a focus on displays of individual virtuosity and the inclusion of elements of classical and popular musical styles. The attitudes toward this trend seem to follow along generational lines, with several qawwals in their sixties lamenting the showiness or "market" quality of successful studio and "program" performers, and younger singers embracing with respect the more refined and difficult vocal techniques they display. As we shall see, however, this individual choice is possible only in the context of properly observed comportment, repertoire and performance that gives the qawwal access to his livelihood and social position as a member of the party.

Qawwals must learn much more than musical skill. Their craft gives the physical and audible space of the dargah an atmosphere not only of Islam, but of a "Persian" cultural authenticity as well (Mayaram 2005; Silver 1984; Qureshi 1993). In fact, the use of Farsi verse in qawwali may actually enhance the authenticity and antiquity of the ritual even for listeners (and some qawwals) who do not understand the words. One *khādim* I spoke to even claimed that the wide appeal and tolerance the public associates with the dargah is due to its Persian, rather than Arabic roots. The knowledge of the context of performance concerns what Asrar calls the "ups and downs of the gathering" (*mahfil ke nasheb-o-farāz*). This is learned both by participation in formal education with a pīr or spiritual guide and through horizontal learning in

the context of the performance.

Types of knowledge the qawwals learn through actual performance:
Rhythm
Lyrics
Melody
Stamina and “voice power”
Leadership
Control of the pace and progress

During the performance at “piety gate,” there is a break in the singing, drumming, and clapping as Asrar performs a *pakkar* (“catch”) on the harmonium and some vocal improvisation. Both musicians and audience listen and wait for direction from the leader. Sadique had explained that the purpose of the *pakkar* is “to make a show of what they are about to play. The audience will know what's coming. Also for the musicians to understand. To show that I want to play in a particular *rāga*. Musicians know about that, and think, 'Oh so that's it. Oh, this is in *lalit rāga*.'” This is performed too quietly for me to make out the words. But it has the desired effect of quieting the crowd and introducing the ensemble to the next piece they are about to play. With the forceful call and response of “s*ilsilā hamārā,”* the entire party pushes the rhythm forward, even as the words call us back to the ritual's Chishti roots.

The *pakkar* announces the *rāga* and lyrical content in a way that prepares the party and the audience for the piece which is to follow. By setting the spiritual tone, settling the audience

into a finer state of attention, and announcing to all those within audible range that we are undertaking an act of *zikr*, the qawwal "keys" the performance in a way suggested by Bauman (1978). Drawing on insights by Goffman (1974), Bateson (1972), and Burke (1950), Bauman describes the form of metacommunication (Bateson 1972) present in the context of verbal performance as a speech community's "...use of a structured set of distinctive communicative means from among its resources in culturally conventionalized and culture-specific ways to key the performance frame, such that all communication that takes place within that frame is to be understood as performance within that community." The "surrender" that takes place "...fixes the attention of the audience more strongly on the performer, binds the audience to the performer in a relationship of dependence that keeps them caught up in his display" (Bauman 1978:16).

However, the "binding" takes place along horizontal and vertical dimensions, and binds the performers just as tightly to the audience. The position of the qawwal cannot fully be described as one of power and control. They are marginalized in status and excluded from positions of authority, yet they play a vital role in making the *samā* happen as a centerpiece of dargah culture. We must consider how the performer negotiates his own position, spiritual benefit, and livelihood in all of this. The "surrender" Bauman indicates is for everyone there. The submission inherent in transmission is part of what makes the event effective.

Qawwali is much more than "speech." Its literal definition of "utterance" or "saying" refers to Islamic tradition in two ways. In one sense, the "saying" is intended to recall the *hadīs,* or sayings of the Prophet. In another sense, the utterance refers to acts variously translated as "recitation", in which oral transmission, and the links between individuals this implies, are an act of piety. The performance which is to follow may very well contain lyrics that are in languages

such as Farsi or Bhojpuri that many audience members, and even some of the vocalists, do not fully understand. However, as we shall see, this "ignorance" (according to lead qawwal Asrar and others) among listeners does not preclude them from the "keying" that takes place or from absorbing, and helping to create, an emotionally satisfying and properly striving community of practice.

In an interview in his townhouse near the dargah, Asrar talks about the selection of verse and language: "There is no fixed number. It depends on our assessment of the audience. If there seem to be people who know Farsi, we always prefer to sing in Farsi, but if there is no one there to understand, we will sing simpler lines in Urdu or Hindi. Our party generally prefers Farsi. Farsi is for Khwājā Sahib. We play more for him than for the public. However, if the audience requests songs in Hindi or Urdu, we accommodate them. I like Farsi best." Learning to assess audience needs and to balance them with the need to perform "for Khwājā Sahib" are part of the toolkit of skills that the qawwals must learn through legitimate participation.

These types of knowledge are all acquired by qawwals through both formal, hierarchical (vertical) relationships of transmission, and also through the (horizontal) community of practice. In this chapter, I describe the ways that members of Ajmer's largest and most prestigious qawwali party teach and learn in two contexts: one, during performance on an ordinary Thursday night at the dargah of Muinuddin Chishti, a scene with which this chapter opens; two during some of my own lessons in the home of one of its intermediate-level performers.

The qawwali party instructs its audience - horizontal learning and body arrangement

I am a bit late in arriving to the dargah one evening. I like to stake out a space in the

courtyard while *maghrib namāz* is taking place in the mosque. The courtyard tends to empty out as Muslims doing *namāz (*and the ones who do not wish to be observed avoiding it) file out. It is one of the few times one can guess who among the visitors might be non-Muslim, except for those wearing outward signs of membership in another religious tradition. Otherwise, people tend to adopt "Muslim" modes of dress and comportment. But tonight, the qawwali has already begun, and the floor is packed with listeners sitting and pedestrians trying to get through.

I stand on the outskirts of the central area where people are seated, looking out over the crowd of several hundred people pressed closely together. From his usual spot at the far left of the second line of qawwals, Sadique catches my eye. He waves me over to a place beside and perpendicular to him. Only the qawwals and their relatives normally face the *mazār*, although there are, as always, exceptions. He shoots a sharp glance at the guy sitting next to him. Some shuffling and jostling of knees and *shalwār-kamīz* shirt-tails opens a tiny square of marble for me. I balance myself with my hands on people's shoulders as I make my way over to wedge my large American frame into the space. Making space for one more is one of the first rules of Indian public places that the outsider has to get used to. There's *always* room. My neighbors and I smile at the discomfort of it and feel a kind of camaraderie at our shared difficulty.

People talk. People pull out cell phones. It is Sadaqat's job as a junior qawwal to admonish these visitors to act right. He gets up from his spot at the far end of the front row to point at people with phones, to shush the talkers, to chase away careless pedestrians who walk in the empty aisle for any purpose other than to make an offering. He also points at, or occasionally slaps the arm of, people who clap along or engage in movements that look like dancing. The prohibition on "false or feigned" *waqf* (ecstasy) is strict. I have seen audience members roughly

escorted out for dancing, as if the qawwali were mere “music.”

“Don’t clap,” said Sadique.

I had begun to feel special, confident in my place sitting beside the qawwals, knee to knee. Swept up in the powerful current of the rhythm, I clapped along with junior members of the party, boys in their early teens. I was immediately silenced with the rebuke, and some withering looks from the “second line.” Asrar himself, of course, paid me no attention. My status was so low as to be totally outside his concern. However, the message was clear: learning about the ritual takes place during the event itself.

Part of the attraction this place holds for so many visitors is that it is overtly Muslim in style, comportment, dress and reference, but open and available to members of other communities in a way that many Muslim religious spaces are not. We, the audience, all sit the same way, heads covered in similar *topīs*, striving to attain the same kind of spiritual concentration. When a bowl of rosewater makes its way around the gathering, we all sip directly from the silver vessel. At the end of the night, pilgrims get on their knees together to sweep and wash the dargah floors, regardless of caste, religion, or class prohibitions. As Currie reminds us, “At the shrine, pilgrims behave in a way which would be impossible or unacceptable in their homes...[T]he pilgrim lives temporarily in a community governed by the principles of equality and brotherhood. In short, he experiences what Turner has called *communitas*” (Currie 1989:136). It is important to note that this equality and brotherhood is expressed in a ritual and musical medium which is overtly Muslim in its presentation.

***Adāb*: generating and responding to ecstasy**

An old man with a hennaed beard next to me begins to rock back and forth. I expect Sadaqat to still him with a sharp glance, but I notice the tears running down the old man's cheeks. He is in a genuine state of *hāl*. He rises slowly to his feet. The man next to him rises with him to steady him. The second man joins hands with him, clutching a worn five-rupee note. Together, they enter the aisle and approach the harmonium. Asrar lifts his right hand from the keyboard and takes the note, touching it to his forehead before letting it drop into his son's lap. Other audience members begin to rise in pairs, following this example. The money and blessings flow in. At times like this, audience members look to each other to learn proper comportment during *samā.*

An audience member in the vulnerable state of *hāl* requires special care. As the old man begins to turn, the party repeats the simple line "*kh*wājā...*ay* Muinuddin!" The burden of repetition (*takrār*) during an audience member's *hāl* is shared by singers other than Asrar, whose voice is beginning to sound tired, during this episode which lasts several minutes. During this *takrār,* the younger qawwals get an extended chance to sing more prominently. There is some confusion among audience members about how to respond to the *raqs* of the *sheikh* in the courtyard. Some stand. Some gawk. Sadaqat clears a space for the old man. He continues to turn in place with short uneven footsteps, arms outstretched. Many other audience members begin to donate money. Establishing this kind of effective listening experience has obvious material incentives for the qawwals. However, since donations are a relatively small part of their overall livelihood, some of their motivation comes from a desire to maintain their position as the rightful holders of the "first" position among the qawwals of Ajmer.

Later, Sadique and I sit, oddly, in barber chairs just outside the *langar khāna* beyond the high southern wall of the dargah. Our usual *chai* shop is crowded, so we have taken refuge in his cousin's barbershop a few doors down the alley. Sadique orders tea for us from a boy who sat staring. While we wait, Sadaqat slips in, hands Sadique his share from the night's offerings, already changed into a few hundred rupee notes, then dashes off. In this moment of relative privacy, Sadique confesses that he is avoiding his father who is pestering him with yet another unwanted marriage arrangement. I listen to his troubles, wishing I could help him more. Perhaps I am learning, also, of my own limitations, and the limitations of the relationships formed in the course of anthropological fieldwork. Sadique introduces the subject of learning proper behavior during *samā.*

"Many Indians say they are Muslims just because they were born Muslim, but they come to the dargah and don't know how to behave." He refers to my bemused description of pilgrims accepting a smear of the sandalwood paste (used to decorate the tomb) on their hands. I noted several people near me looking furtively around before licking up the stuff and swallowing it. Sadique laughs at this and tells me that being a Muslim means constantly learning and trying to follow the habits of "good Muslims." In this case, good behavior would have meant rubbing the paste into their hands. The fact that the sandalwood is an element incorporated from Hindu temple practice (and in this case, produced and applied by a Hindu family) does not interfere with his suggestion that there is a "right" and "Muslim" way of receiving it. The public space of the dargah is where many such visitors, both Muslim and non-Muslim learn how to comport themselves by referring to living people, rather than abstract ideals or models.

Many older musicians (including Asrar and Sabir) echo a complaint common among

classical musicians, that following the shift from elite patronage to market driven support, “the common man calls the tune” (Neuman 1980:68). However, it is important that in the dargah, the “common man” is learning, in a constant state of “evolution” (Khan 1960:60-1), as are we all.

Learning body posture in practice

Asrar, both Sadique and Sadaqat had warned me, would be difficult to interview. “He is a very angry person. He doesn't like to talk to people,” Sadaqat told me after their uncle had, once again walked past me as if I were not there. Despite his renown, he had never been interviewed by a journalist, as far as either of them could remember. As it turned out, my own clumsiness and ineptitude provided an opening.

No one was ever happy with my feet. Long and bony, they never seemed to obey the commands of my companions or my brain to nest comfortably under my knees. The top sides grew bruised and the whole of my lower legs went numb after a few minutes. Correct posture and breathing are central, and I never quite got it.

One night after I had been at the dargah long enough to be recognized by qawwals, *kh*ādim*s* and other shrine workers, I sat perfectly still and cross-legged on the marble, using my folded handkerchief to cushion the bones of my right foot. I saw two foreign backpackers with a young *kh*ādim (who had been pointed out to me as an “operator” who liked to wheedle money from foreigners) sit down rather arrogantly in the front row across from me after the performance had gotten under way. I wanted to show them that I knew proper comportment, even motioning to the young man in shorts to lower his legs after he failed to notice Asrar's censorious gestures. I had been on the receiving end of this kind of correction before. “*Aisa nahin!*” Sadique had

once hissed as he slapped my thigh. I had been sitting with my legs curled together over to the side.

I took out several ten rupee notes and, as I stood to have the *dīwān* touch them and then to present them bowing to Asrar, one after the other, Sufi style, I discovered that my right foot was completely numb and bloodless. I fell flat onto my chest and hands before him, my glasses sliding from my face and scattering along the holy marble to his side. The party chuckled. I tried to recover as best I could, but only managed to kneel in front of Asrar at the harmonium and dole out the notes. I returned to my seat and tried to change to a position where I could get some blood to my foot. This was not the posture of humility I was striving for, but it worked. Asrar did not smile, but his eyes met mine for a moment. He agreed to our first interview the following week.

Sadique learning to lead his own party

Young qawwals like Sadique experience the vertical dimension of learning both in classical music study and through an ongoing relationship with a *pīr*, but the whole skill set only comes together as qawwali during the *samā* itself. There is no separation between learning and practice. The learning contains elements both vertical and horizontal but is always negotiated and experienced in the practice, process, and ritual itself. It is a kind of liminal practice. It leads to transformation and the acquisition of mastery, even as it conducts the ensemble and audience, and leads to the spiritual uplift of others.

Sadique has started his own satellite party. It consists of Sadique on harmonium and lead vocals, his brother Saddam on *dholak* (and sometimes *tablā*), his little brother Sadaqat clapping

hands and singing the response vocals, and often, their cousin Amir. They are sometimes joined by his Ashraf, Asrar's son, who sings the chorus/response parts and occasionally takes a few lead vocal lines. The first night I saw them Ashraf had joined in on a second *dholak*, making the rhythm of the qawwali complex and powerful. The first thing I noted is that they seem to be struggling. Sadaqat's vocals are flawed. His voice is crackly and adolescent, and frequently off-pitch. But they are loud and forceful, so the power comes through. They seldom make more than a few hundred rupees, and usually perform after the main party has finished, after the last *namāz* of the evening.

Sadique nods at his younger brother. Sadaqat takes a line, then looks at his older brother. Sadique nods again, then puts up his hand, grimacing slightly, stopping the young singer abruptly. Sadaqat looks around. Some teenage girls who have been listening giggle. Sadaqat's fair face blushes a bit around the ears. Nobody listening has given them money for a while. Finally, a middle-aged man and his young son approach Sadique and drop a ten-rupee note on the harmonium. Sadique touches it to his forehead, then tosses it onto the lap of his brother. The "practice" that this small party is engaged in, their training to lead the "first" party one day, is also "practice" in the sense that it enacts the binding facility of *sama*. This form of bodily practice (Bourdieu 1977) acts upon the musicians as they learn their musical and social craft, and also upon the whole assembly as they take part in a traditional structure enacted in a constantly changing present.

All of these elements of learning as a form of transmission are compartmentalized in analysis and representation to outsiders, but in practice they work together to make the qawwali occasion effective pedagogy for all those present. It also makes it function as both *mahfil* and

darbār, the quasi-feudal court elements that both performers and patrons use as sites of public negotiation of religious, community and family identity. These elements of continuity with the past and present engagement with the ephemeral substance of sacred sound are all partial, positioned and imperfect, yet still make up the meaningful and emotionally satisfying pursuit of distinctly Islamic goals: the continual struggle to improve the self (*jihād),* the constant reminder and remembrance of *zikr* to increase mindfulness, and the continuous process of "evolution" (Khan 1960) based on examples of real people, living and dead. At the dargah, we all learn from real life, rather than abstract models.

Learning outside the ritual context

Scene Two: Sadique's room in Zeba Cottage

The place is very much the sloppy young man's room, clothes and books strewn around, unmade pallet on the floor, steel trunk, and bookcase full of cassettes and CDs the only furniture. A leaky old air cooler partly blocked the doorway. On the floor in the corners lie a broken *tānpūrā*[53], *dholak* stashed away in an old cloth sack, and a few mismatched *tablā*. His collection of cassette tapes contains thirty-two tapes of the Quran Sharif, a few classical vocalists (All India Radio performers from an earlier era) and more than thirty tapes of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, including live and studio recordings, several remixes, and his last sessions, recorded by U.S. producer Rick Rubin.

He removes his beat-up harmonium from a cloth bag and sits down next to me beside it, launching right into a lesson. He demonstrates some basic techniques for me, explaining things very patiently for such a young man. We are interrupted by a call to his mobile phone which he

[53] unfretted lute used to provide a drone

leaves the room to continue. I stop the recorder at this point and practiced a bit on my own. He comes back in. I catch a glimpse of his little sister spying on us. We hear some distorted "*filmī"* qawwali blaring from a passing vehicle. Sadique chuckles at the coincidence. "I think any truck driver knows this qawwali." He starts singing an example to contrast the profane we've heard with the sacred:

Man kunto Maulā
Fā Ali-un Maulā
Man kunto Maulā
Maulā Ali Maulā...

"Whoever accepts me as a master
Ali is his master too
Master, Ali, master"

This qawwali line is based on a *hadīs* – a saying of the prophet Muhammad, delivered in the context of the question of succession, of transmission of authority from one generation to the next.

This qawwali is believed to be among the first ever composed by the creator of the genre, Amir Khusrau, who composed it on the occasion of his acceptance as *murīd* (disciple) of Nizamuddin Chishti. (Siddiqi 2005:345) The first "qawwals" in the story are the messengers charged with relaying the composition from the grateful student to his master. The qawwals of Ajmer make frequent use of the name "Ali" to mean "friend" or "companion" of God and of the Prophet. It also serves as an epithet for Khwājā Sahib in qawwali. The emphasis on the chain of transmission, and the link to the past in this epithet is noteworthy, especially since all these

qawwals consider themselves to be Sunni Muslims first and foremost[54]. For me, it is part of the most elementary lesson of all: how to be a student.

When I engaged Sadique as my teacher, I was embracing the fundamental premise of the anthropologist as a student who learns from his informants. However, the first "lesson" I learned was that while Sadique was teaching me about Indian music[55], qawwali was something that could be learned only through the public practice of *samā* at the dargah. Although the performers had recourse to other modes of learning: private lessons, home study with family elders, recordings, and books, the learning that results in becoming a qawwal comes from what Sadique, my teacher, called "childhood life and God" in the dargah. Using terms that echo Bourdieu's (1977) notion of "habitus," he continues, "you must get it in your body...no one can explain it to you." While the concept of "growing into music" is being documented for oral folk music traditions[56], qawwali is generally too rooted in classical music and canonical Sufi poetry to fit in the "folk" category, and too "popular" and vernacular to be considered "classical." Their training reflects this in-between position: qawwals learn poetry and music from a variety of teachers, but the complete learning process also includes the practice and ritual of its performance.

Although he understands my point about participant observation and learning, Sadique sometimes grows impatient with my naive attempts at musical composition. I played him a short Urdu song I had written. He was amused, then frowning, critical of my naiveté: "You need to

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54 The emphasis on Ali, and his line of succession, is often associated with the Shi'a community.

55 He used the English word, as well as the Urdu/Hindi terms *gīt,* "song," or sangīt "music." In other cases, qawwals commonly use the English term "music" to refer to instrumental accompaniment.

56 The current multimedia project undertaken by SOAS, "Growing into Music: Musical Enculturation in Oral Traditions, gives a marvelous cross-cultural perspective. See www.growingintomusic.co.uk

know the connection between the song and the *rāga*." he told me. "There are 36,000 *rāgas*. We can't go beyond the sky. You can go up to the moon, the sun, and so on. But we all must dwell within the sky. In this way music must exist within the *rāgas*. It cannot go beyond them."

In his description of the learning process, two important elements are prominent in Sadique's history: the vertical transmission, what he refers to as "*sīna ba sīna"* ('heart to heart') and the horizontal transmission, *"birādarī"* ('brotherhood' or 'peers'). *sīna ba sīna* describes the intimate bond of learning that takes place between parent and child, and can also be translated as "father-to-son" (see also Qureshi 2009:169). In Sadique's case, this comprises the earliest "lessons" he received from his biological and musical family - his father and uncle. The *birādarī* component of his education takes place in his home, where he frequently plays with his brothers and friends, and in the dargah, where his qawwali skills are learned and performed in the community of practice. The other forms of instruction he has received are formal music lessons ("tuition") in his home by paid teachers, and the informal, peer-influenced "study" he has undertaken as an avid collector and listener of recorded classical, religious, and popular music. He claims that he tries to keep his love of "professional" musicians separate from his work as a qawwal in the dargah, but during his performances with his own small party, the influence of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's classical style and elaborate, wordless improvisation, is hard to mistake. He is not unique in this, the recordings and concert performances of the late master have influenced an entire generation of qawwali singers. (Sakata 1994)

I recall one of my first lessons, learning the y*aman rāga* on the harmonium. Many *rāgas* have specific Hindu connotations and origins, and certainly the Sufis were influenced by lively, even ecstatic temple music (an element of Sufi music only found in South Asia) but the musical

terms and lyrics often invoke Persia and the Middle East. The origins of the musical features of qawwali certainly have have mixed sources. This is another case where the culture of the dargah resembles a crossroads of traditions, communities, and travelers. I recognized the line and melody a basic building block of musical education – the *yaman rāga* is among the first taught to beginning music students in the Hindustani tradition – usually young children. The line – "Ali, my Lord" points us in the direction, not of Muhammad (the perfected human being) but of his son-in-law (the one who struggled with his imperfection.) Ali is often invoked after Quranic verse at the beginning of *samā*. The Chishti path leads back to Ali, the father of the order's lineage. But he is also a central figure for Sufis of all types.

Sadique shows me with great patience how written Hindustani musical notation notation works with commas (the comma after a note indicates a preceding legato phrase) and the full stop, the end of a musical phrase (in the early exercises, the period at the end indicates the separation of the last note (the preceding note is staccato). He makes it clear that what he is showing me is part of classical "music," not qawwali. He also gives me some etiquette instruction about how to sit at the harmonium, how to hold my hand, how to breathe, how to receive instruction. It was a great gift when he pointed out how my loud voice, lively hand gestures, and habit of looking my conversation partners in the eye would read as disrespect by elder persons; but it was also humbling. Clearly, I am getting "tuition" in more than music.

The learning that Sadique has acquired from his cassette and CD collection comes out by way of explanation. "At this stage it's easy but you need to know the importance of learning *sargam - tān* is improvisation on the scale or *rāga* or mode." He tells me about the way Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan introduced a "classical" style to the performance of qawwali. Here he launches

into a hilariously exaggerated imitation of Nusrat doing *tān* in the line about Ali.

He considers the difference in timbre between qawwali and classical singing that I have observed. "Qawwali doesn't depend on *rāga*. Qawwali depends on your voice power. Classical singing is softer, sweeter. In qawwali, its spirituality depends on your breath power and chest power: in one breath, God's gift and practice enables us to sing two or more lines."

Sadique says, "Qawwali is like a plant. You give it water every day. It gets sunshine and earth power. So it grows into a tree. All these things, rhythm, wording, melody, these things. like a plant growing into a tree." His description of the plant nurtured by constant attention which grows up in the place where it is rooted calls to mind the children of the qawwals who get to stay up late, sitting with their older brothers, cousins, fathers and friends. Gradually, they begin participating in performance under the gaze of the public. Becoming a qawwal also involves other modes of transmission, both vertical and horizontal.

Rhythm first, then poetry, then melody

The most noticeable way qawwali differs from other forms of classical and Hindu devotional music is its insistent, visceral rhythm. Qureshi (1986) indicates that the driving, strophic (one-two) beat which gives the lyrical and melodic content its framework makes it distinct from the intricate *tālās* of Hindustani classical music and the melodic complexity of Hindu devotional song. The term Sadique used to describe this rhythm is *zarb*. The *zarb*, or "pulse," of qawwali gives the listener a whole-body experience intended to reach even those who may not grasp the spiritual message of the lyrics. This emphatic, pulsing rhythm struck my naive ears (and body) as distinctive the moment I first heard it in 2000. The fact that the qawwals of

Ajmer achieved this forceful beat without amplification suggests a tremendous amount of power, stamina, and physical training in the craft of qawwali. This is achieved through a combination of training and group cohesion, two aspects of learning that occur simultaneously in practice.

The transmission of qawwali knowledge begins with rhythm and memorization of verse, rather than with melody or instrumental training. Sadique recalls, “At six or seven I remember. I was this small.” He places his hand at his waist. “In just a t shirt – it's ok for childhood. I sat next to the harmonium and started to clap.” He imitates one of the young *qawwali bacche* clapping wildly, out of tempo. “First thing, clapping. In classical music you don't learn the rhythm at the beginning. But in qawwali when you [eventually] start learning the melody you already have a basis in the rhythm.[57]

“After a month or two the clapping became clear to me. Then the wording. My father had me repeat lines to me without melodies, without singing. Just as if he was talking to another. So the first things are clapping power and rhythm power and wording. These things slowly get into your mind.”

I ask him, “Can you teach me to sing the most simple qawwali line?”

“Such a simple thing is not possible. You have to sit with qawwali every day in order to get the idea. In classical music, you can take classes and practice at home. But in qawwali learning takes place at the dargah, a kind of practical class. Not a theoretical one. It's like a stage. You play in front of a big crowd. You think, 'oh my God, everyone's looking at me.' In classical, when you practice at home, you might make a mistake and either not realize it or pass over it without caring. But in the dargah if you make a mistake it's pretty clear! You pay

[57] This is audible in my recordings, in which the youngest, peripheral members often reproduce perfect rhythm and diction, while their attempts at carrying the tune tend to wander.

attention. The most important instrument you train is the mind, your concentration (*dhyān*). All the kids get a chance in their early years, so by age eight or ten they have about sixty percent competence in the basics. With instruments such as *tablā* and harmonium, after twelve years you are asked which instrument you would like to play. You always start with *tablā* or *dholak*, not harmonium.

"Different children have different ideas. My father asked me what I wanted to play. I told him, 'I don't want to play qawwali,' because at that time my thinking was different. My mother told me, 'First you get a good job, and afterwards you can play qawwali. Because it's your birthright.' No one can take it away from us. But the 'outer qawwals,' the professionals who tour full time, have to do a lot of hard work. They don't have a permanent place at the dargah. They play Delhi, Ajmer, then Jaipur, then they return home only briefly. They have no permanent home. No permanent stage. All of India, the whole world is their stage.

"Before I learned harmonium I studied *dholak*. My teacher was strict. He hit me with a stick on the hands. At sixteen or seventeen, I decided harmonium was a must. I studied with a classical teacher, and with a qawwali teacher on alternate days. My *ustād* gave me daily lessons ["tuition"]. At first I had no interest in classical singers or classical music. I was more interested in spiritual things." Nevertheless, Sadique's pursuit of classical vocal and instrumental training along with his enculturation with the family party has allowed him to blend traditional and modern styles within his performance.

This is another aspect of binding I find common among contemporary qawwali musicians: the intersection of hereditary transmission, peer-learning, "tuition," and technology through the widespread listening and sharing of cassettes and CDs of both classical and popular

performers[58]. Qawwals are certainly not unique in this. An exemplary ethnographic account of another case of multiple teaching modes is Liv Lande's (2007) work among traditional Koto musicians in contemporary Japan. She also finds a creative combination of what she calls "vertical/exclusive" and "horizontal/inclusive" at play in the musician's learning process. However, in the case of qawwali, this strategic combination of vertical and horizontal elements of teaching and learning fits into a larger pattern of the musician's social role: the facilitator of cohesion among other hierarchies and mutualities. Sadique's (and the other young qawwals') experience is not totally unique, but is a clear case of using this creative synthesis in a ritual context that overtly seeks to bind the public into a community of practice. Their musical role resonates with their social role.

Riyāz ("practice"[59])

Sadique practices alone, but this he associates with "music," rather than qawwali. "Actually, when there is a new qawwali, we all learn it together. My uncle and my father show us what to do when, and we learn it together. Afterwards, we all practice by ourselves. The *dholak* players practice alone and with others." The most meaningful practice takes place in the context of performance at the dargah.

He continues, "To learn qawwali the only way is to sit every day with the qawwals and begin with clapping." He mentions a classically-trained singer who had sat in with him at the dargah a few nights earlier. "His clapping was wrong. The rhythm isn't right for qawwali. You have to get the clapping right before your mind is open to understanding qawwali. Playing in the

[58] Manuel (1993) offers a thorough discussion of the influence of "cassette culture" on North Indian music.
[59] Literally, and significantly, "hardship"

dargah, night after night, is the only way.”

After our lesson we go downstairs to drink tea with Sadique's father, Sabir. They impress upon me that poetry and music are the building blocks of qawwali, but are not the substance of transmission itself. I ask father and son about new qawwalis – where they come from; how they learn them. Sabir conveys ambivalent feelings about his family's agency in creating or controlling the medium.

"Mostly it's like this: if you are a poet, a good poet. And you approach us and say 'Please, this is my new qawwali. Will you play it?' First we read it and if there are mistakes, we fix them. After that, we practice it. It's written, but we set it to a tune. The poet doesn't write the tunes. If the poet writes the tune, it won't be qawwali. Some poets write songs, but that's different. We make the tune qawwali."

His son chimes in, “This material is not available in the market. The material is one hundred or two hundred years old. It's not new. It's not available 'on the market.' It's only ours from our fathers and forefathers. That's what makes a *shāhī* (top) qawwal. The great qawwali singers like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan or Gulam Fareed, are the famous qawwals. We're not such big qawwals. Well, 'by post' [referring to his families official appointment as the “first” party of Ajmer] we are.” He laughs, finally, at himself, showing the self-effacing quality of the messenger.

The community as learning body

Several recent ethnographies have taken up Bourdieu's (1977:78-95) notion of learning as “em-bodying” ideology (e.g. Marchand 2001; Starret 2005; Groesbeck 2009). When we shift

our focus to the social “body” we see dargahs, in some ways, as institutions of education. Ajmer's famous and popular Muslim saint shrine serves as an important site of ethnic, religious, and class intersubjectivity because it is a crossroads where millions of individuals participate in ritual, exchange, and learning that is available to all, but carefully presented in an Indo-Muslim atmosphere. While there are other public activities at the dargah where attendees learn about each other, the qawwali performance involves a group of specialists (qawwals) whose own learning includes acquiring a body of knowledge and physical skills that establish them as messengers or “go-betweens.” Their message is transmitted in the context of face to face encounters between an astonishing variety of individuals. Qawwals and their audiences make the music happen, but the performers must learn to keep the setting functional and authentic by acquiring a unique set of musical and social skills.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of “legitimate peripheral participation” offers an analytical viewpoint on learning, a way of understanding learning, that has wide potential for understanding the relationship between the self and society beyond the context of education. Ethnographic work among such diverse contexts of pedagogy and transmission as hereditary minaret builders in Yemen (Marchand 2001), Hindu wrestlers in India (Alter 1998), Mayan midwives in Mexico (Jordan 1989), and members of Alcoholics Anonymous in the United States (Cain 1991) have made a point of illustrating how legitimate participation by apprentices shapes not only the skill, but also the identity of the performer. Lave and Wenger situate learning in social co-participation. One of the challenges of their work is to shift our notion of learning as something that takes place within the individual, to a concept of learning grounded in a social, participatory framework. As William Hanks writes in his lucid introduction to their book,

"[Learning] is mediated by the differences of perspective among the participants. It is the community...who *learn* under this definition" (Hanks 1991:14-15). The emphasis on the qawwali party as a "community of practice" suggests that the performance is more than music or ritual. It is, from the qawwals' perspective, also "an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage" (Lave and Wenger 1991:98). The narrative of becoming a musician is told and retold in the subtle interactions that take place among family members.

By taking the community as the learning agent in our analysis, we can see how systems of pedagogy and transmission constitute the very life of the shrine, rather than some qualifying prerequisite for participation as a practitioner or a spiritual seeker. It is important to consider the meaning of this transmission, not only as Islamic practice, but as an exponent of dargah culture more generally, and perhaps of popular religion more universally.

Recent anthropology which has drawn upon Lave and Wenger's insights has been in the fields of education (Bryant 2005; Groesbeck 2009; Henderson 2009; Landry 2009; Starrett 2007) and cognitive science (Downey 2008; Gee 2004; Marchand 2001), doing ethnography in the service of exploring applications in formal teaching or attempting to isolate learning structures in the mind. If we consider the dargah as a center of multiple types of transmission, as a teeming, heterogeneous community of practice, then the importance of peer learning and other horizontal modes of transmission, becomes a necessary component of understanding its ritual life.

Chapter Five: Giving and Receiving

"'*Karkā*[60] means 'no money.' The meaning is that before God, we are all penniless. We are poor. We are all beggars at your gate."

Sadique Hussain

The old banknote clings to the wire cage behind the fan, where it buzzes like a locust, careworn paper and ink a vibrating blur in the wind from the powerful machine. Dozens of other small bills, five and ten rupee notes, fly past it in the gale, some shredded by the fan blades, others swept whole into a whirlwind created by six fans overlooking the crowded courtyard of the tomb. The hot wind blows this volley of donations into the crowd to the left of the qawwals. A great scramble arises in the women's area as some of them put the notes (after kissing or touching them to their foreheads) into the folds of their saris. Men in the qawwali area yell at them to give it back. Most people in the crowd scoop up the notes and pass them forward to the young boys in the rows immediately in front of them. The boys stand or lean forward to give them to the men in front, facing the open aisle between the tomb and the qawwals. These older men pass them side to side until they reach one of Asrar's sons who keeps them stacked next to the harmonium.

A man in a shiny gold *shalwār-kamīz* and tall, silver and gold encrusted *topī* holds his identically-dressed toddler son in his arms as both of them throw bills over the seated qawwals. Gone is the careful and reverent offering pattern of the *'urs mahfil*. This is a shower of small banknotes accompanied by shouts from the audience, hands in the air, and the ever rising tempo of *dholaks* and handclaps from Asrar Hussain's party.

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[60] a ceremony and song that accompanies the closing of the doors of the *mazār* for the night

The lyrics Asrar passionately belts out between his family's choruses of “Mere Khwājā” are obscured by the shouting, the rattling generator used during hot summer nights when the city power supply is skittish, and the buzz of the banknotes trapped in the wire fan. This event, commemorating the “birthday” (one of two disputed dates, both of which are celebrated at the dargah) of the saint, has been organized by Mura Alim, a “*khās khādim*” with a heavy beard, dressed all in red embroidered fabric, a massive rope of hundreds of keys in all shapes and sizes around his neck. “He has the keys to the whole dargah,” Sadique shouts in my ear, leaning over while his hands keep the beat going.

Mura Alim's arms hang loosely at his sides. Each hand clutches a stack of money. These notes had been collected by his sons from devotees sitting near the front. Suddenly, he cries out and launches them with both hands, a gesture meant to suggest a casting off of wealth, a dismissal of worldly concern. The notes fall all around and make their way back to the neat stacks next to Asrar. Sadaqat sorts them into piles. Asrar periodically sweeps his right hand across the keyboard of his instrument when it becomes too thickly covered to play.

People never give up on a banknote. Even the filthiest little things are folded carefully along their creases or meticulously cellotaped and recirculated. In fact, the older notes, in tiny denominations, are the preferred medium of donation. A patron wishing to give 1,000 rupees, for example, will change this into 100 ten-rupee notes for the purpose of laying a long series of bills down on the keyboard, sometimes ending the display with an elaborate toss of the hand, sending the last few papers flying. On this particular night the money is raining everywhere, although in tiny denominations. After their performance, the family party will retire to the room behind the mosque, where they count it out, change it into larger bills, and distribute each member's share.

The buzzing five-rupee note finally loses its grip on the wire and is sucked into the fan blades as a new flurry fills the air. Bits settle around me. An old man near me shakes off the paper, gets up and twirls for several minutes. Another elderly devotee in bright green and red walks into the open space and keeps trying to get up to the tomb. A young shrine worker stops him over and over, then lets him go. He presses his face to the door for a while, then staggers up to the qawwals and stands facing them for a long time. Everyone ignores him for a while. Finally, the *khādim* with the keys takes him by the shoulders and pushes him away. The cash continues to fall around them all.

Sadique is always dismissive of the amount of money they get during a performance at the shrine. On some night he simply goes off to have tea or a snack, waiting for one of his little brothers to hand him a few hundred-rupee notes, maybe a five hundred on a busy night like tonight. However, occupying the well-guarded endpoint of such a long chain of transmission has symbolic capital that far outstrips the exchange value of the notes themselves.

People come to the dargah to give money. They also come to receive blessings. The mode of exchange in shrine worship is characterized in the literature (Khalidi 1989; Qureshi 1993) and in the discourse of visitors I spoke to as one of patronage, in which the powerful institution manages the relationship between the pilgrim and the divine (whether perceived as God directly or the saint's charisma embodied in *barkat*). Visitors petition, make a donation, and expect to receive intervention in their lives, whether in worldly matters such as family or economic success, or in a state of enlightenment or personal improvement bestowed from above. However, a great deal of exchange at the dargah involves the lateral movement of money and blessings among those in attendance at the qawwali occasion. These patterns of giving and

receiving are not motivated by hierarchical relationships emphasized by dargah structure and South Asian religious tradition. Often, they take the form of context-specific, and negotiated, or even improvised acts of giving, sharing, and transmission that obliterate hierarchical distinctions of caste, class, gender, and religious or ethnic affiliation to create a temporary community of practice. These cycles of giving and receiving come to resemble a kind of generalized reciprocity, in which, during the limited period of liminality afforded by the ritual of qawwali audience known as *samā*, the act of transmission of money and *barkat* is more important than the substance (or amount of cash) itself. The act of participating in a chain of transmission of money and blessings involves wider circles of participants than simply the donation's point of origin (the individual who reaches into his pocket) or its final destination (the qawwali performer who draws his payment from the cash that has circulated during the event.) We then find a form of blessing that is not so easily characterized as patronage, and not so easily reduced to individual givers and receivers. In the following examples, I examine specific types of movement of money and *barkat* that emphasize the humility of the donor, his or her submission or *descent* in status, the limitless abundance of resources within the group (as money, for example, may be "given" more than once as it passes from hand to hand), and the use of this exchange as a mode of discourse that serves to create a common community of practice that is both emphatic in its assertion of its Islamic roots, and open and available to all participants, regardless of their personal background or identity. The qawwali performance is a rich context for this analysis, since it is both a deliberate and self-conscious attempt by the musicians to create an atmosphere of selflessness and sharing, and a craft which they practice on order to make a living. The musicians themselves negotiate a temporary, intermediate mode of exchange between patronage

and market, in which their income enriches and legitimizes many members of the group before finally settling in their wallets as money.

This chapter draws on the perspectives of the qawwali musicians both inside and outside the dargah to show how their craft creates a temporary community of practice in which the transmission of money and blessings creates a set of relationships that exists alongside the formal, hierarchical, and segregated. In illustrating how the qawwals' craft facilitates interactions that integrate elements of hierarchy and mutuality, I follow Raheja's (1989) argument that these systems of domination and sharing depend very much on the context of shifting relationships among groups of participants, rather than on an ideology of hierarchy as a single overarching principle (Dumont 1980). The exchanges and the meanings attached to them take place within a performance context in which the musicians exercise a considerable amount of agency, albeit restrained by the bureaucratic, cultural, and spiritual structures in which they operate.

The first section places offering and *barkat* in the context of other exchanges that take place at the dargah. Next, I examine various social relationships pilgrims and other audience members enact through exchange. I then describe the forms of "standard presentation" that take place during *samā.* These formal offerings, and the songs that elicit them, illustrate attempts by attendants at the "spiritual" concert to assert and display their place in a hierarchy of spiritual and bureaucratic authority. These formal offerings are complicated by ethnographic detail and commentary by qawwals, suggesting that a view of exchange during *samā* as "presentation," and the hierarchy that implies, are both incomplete. Following this, I show a myriad of other forms of exchanges qawwals facilitate that are best described, in keeping with their role as

"messengers," as transmission, not only of money and ritual substance (*barkat*), but also of sometimes transgressive social messages which combine elements of mutuality and hierarchy. These transactions include descriptions of qawwals' careers outside of qawwali (in which they challenge the fixity of categories "professional," "amateur," and "traditional"), the process by which the "formal offering" is converted to "payment" for the qawwals' services (in which I see a "recycling" of money and *barkat* in which givers and receivers change roles), the contested form of offering known as *vēl,* the "chains" of transmission that grow far longer and more inclusive than accounts of "standard presentation" suggest, and qawwals' pursuit of income from other forms of offering and payment beyond the presentation that takes place in the *samā* hall.

Exchange in dargah culture

Victor Turner's writing on "liminality and the ritual powers of the weak" (1969:102) is relevant to the scenes on exchange and transmission that take place during qawwali. Turner discusses how the "pedagogies of liminality...represent a condemnation of two kinds of separation from the generic bond of communitas," i.e. punishment of selfish motives and the preoccupation with one's status or office. Sufi saints are selfless in every sense. Like *bhakti* saints, revered Sufis in the subcontinent are either of impure or low origin, or are (like Muinuddin) elites who have forsaken high status for contact with the low, wild and strange. The interactions between the performers and their audiences are not only a reaffirmation of courtly hierarchy. At the level of everyday practice, the mutualities in exchange suggest that the actions of ordinary people help form what is "right practice" (*tarīqat*) in the vernacular Islamic setting.

The scenes where qawwali takes place may be seen not as sites where difference is

suspended or irrelevant, but as crossroads where exchange helps create an authentic spiritual effect on the participants from different backgrounds and communities. I examine some of the patterns and flows of money and blessings as they pass through various hands at the dargah. The focus is once again on transmission. In these exchanges, the original donor of money (for example) and final recipient of payment (the qawwal) are not the only important agents. The many hands that intercede during the qawwali occasion allow participation in the event and its blessings by far wider circles of people in attendance. The amount of money is far less important in these public displays of *barkat* than the acts of transmission from hand to hand to hand. In fact, even the poorest audience members who may have no money of their own to give are drawn into the chains of transmission, and are thereby able to receive the blessings implied by offering.

As Marcel Mauss asserted in 1902, "money is baraka[61] is mana - a substance with power, that is power-endowing, that is active, contagious." (1972 [1902]:135) To push this metaphor a bit further, money in the ritual context can be a link, something that marks and validates the connections between people, not through its material or exchange-value, but through the acts of transmission associated with it. Mauss' use of the term *barkat* is echoed in several important ethnographies highlighting the role of money in sacred exchange. In Deborah Kapchan's (2007) account of the rituals of healing and trance among Moroccan Gnawa musicians and their followers, the exchange of money for blessings is an integral, if sometimes controversial element. Despite cynical complaints about corrupt Gnawa musicians who seek only to "milk" their ecstatic followers for cash, the intimate relationship between listeners and performers is

[61] *Barkat* (Persian: *baraka*): blessing, spiritual benefice. Speakers in the dargah used both *baraka* and *barkat*, although the former usually marked a speaker as attempting a more formal or Persianized Urdu. Currie and Kapchan use *baraka*, while Qureshi and Flueckiger prefer the form more common in vernacular Indian languages, *barkat.* I use *barkat*, unless I am quoting form a source which uses the Persian form.

initiated and maintained through a ritual economy in which blessings (*barkat*) in the form of words, music, and the spiritual state (*hāl*) they create are exchanged for cash. (Kapchan 2007:141-2).

In the ritual exchanges described by Kapchan, "the money...flows only one way, from the host or hostess and his or her guests to the [musicians]" (Kapchan 2007:145). What is remarkable about the giving and receiving in the qawwali assembly is that the flow of money and blessings is multidirectional. Givers are also receivers. Audience members with no money or status are included in the chains of transmission through acts of mutual giving and by acting as "messengers" who hold the money in circulation temporarily increasing its *barkat* before passing it along to others. The hierarchical relationships of worldly status and spiritual rank are leveled by the processes of mutual exchange the abundance of offerings and blessings. As Sadique puts it "before God, we are all beggars." In other words, the "submission" applies to everyone present during *samā.*

Qureshi (1986:137-8) quite rightly points out the unique position of the qawwali musician as a "professional" whose income derives from a pattern of donation for blessing that is outside the typical patronage system of reward for good performance. However, her analysis does not include the entire picture of what happens while the qawwals are playing, especially on nights when there are multiple parties taking turns, on nights when small parties such as Sadique's play ad hoc performances, and in specially commissioned "programs," the large parties perform for hire by well-to-do pilgrims. In all of these cases, the formal patterns of exchange Qureshi illustrates do in fact take place, but it is worth noting that the context of "the royal court of saints" is always in the service of an inclusive community of practice that uses money not

only as a symbol of the links between superior and inferior (such as the presentation of the gift to the "patron saint" at the gathering) but among a temporary, liminal, but significant community of practice. On ordinary nights, this community is approximately half Hindu, often nearly half female, composed of members of multiple castes and economic classes, who by the very nature of the exchange must touch each other and partake in the same expression and consumption of sound, blessings (sometimes represented by cups of tea, *mīthā pānī* - a sugary drink flavored with rose water - sweets, etc.) and cash. Both the musical sounds and the lyrics emphasize these elements of mutual submission and egalitarianism, even as they also remind us of the genealogical and historical hierarchies of the music and message's origin. In other words, the giving and receiving that take place are not without form and hierarchy, but these orders are, at times, quite different from the ones that pertain to life outside the dargah.

The meaning of *baraka*/*barkat* in the context of sainthood

The qualifications for "sainthood" in Islam are diverse and overlapping: "Descent from an established holy founder and ultimately from the Prophet" (Turner 1975:65); extreme asceticism (Currie 1989: 6-7); the ability to perform miracles (*karāmat*) (Begg 1960:44-45); magical powers and healing (Bellamy 2011:69) and a transformative intellectual consciousness (Ewing 1997) are attempts to provide an essential, necessary qualification for "sainthood." However, Currie makes a case for dealing with cause, rather than consequences of the Muslim saint's special status and role: "That which unites wali, pīr, sheikh, and murshid [all potentially glossed as 'saint' in English] is more fundamental; it is their relationship with Allah. They are close to Allah and special recipients of *baraka"* (Currie 1989:11). *Baraka/Barkat* can also be

translated as “beneficent force, of divine origin, which causes superabundance in the physical sphere, and prosperity and happiness in the psychic order”.[62]

According to Currie, a saint is most fundamentally a person with an extraordinarily large amount of *baraka.* This *baraka* is present in the saint even after his death. So, Currie concludes, “the purpose of the saint cult is to mobilize the *baraka* embodied in the saint for either esoteric or mundane purposes” (1989:12). In theory, then, God chooses to bestow *baraka* on those he favors. In practice, the choice is made by people who act as intermediaries, transmitting *baraka* in a negotiated system of exchange. During the *samā* ritual, the exchange of money is an important symbol of the human participation in this system of distributing saintly blessings. By following the course of money and recognition of spiritual worth in others, we can see how *baraka* is not valuable as a commodity that someone may *possess,* but rather as an ephemeral substance which has meaning and power only through the act of transmission[63].

Bellamy (2010:113) expounds on the concept of “infinite abundance” as a symbol of divine love in the context of South Asian religious practice. Symbolized by milk or *lobān* (benzoin incense) smoke, the abundance of ephemeral substance consumed in ritual practice in South Asia is a complement to another element of a shared ritual grammar: asceticism. Many Sufi traditions valorize poverty and self-renunciation, even as poetry and ritual language emphasize the abundance of divine love. The sound of qawwali in the dargah a prime example of abundance, since it is never diminished, no matter how many partake of it. As Sadique points out, if it is to retain its ritual power, it cannot be possessed. It is ephemeral and resistant to commodification. However much qawwali has been commodified as *music*, and the influence of

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[62] G.S. Colin, 'Barakat', Enc. of Islam (new ed.), p. 1032. Cf. D.F. Eickelman. 1976. *Moroccan Islam*

[63] Raheja (1989:83) notes the use of the term *barkat* to describe the “increase” Brahmins add to an offering of grain when they receive it in ritual exchange.

this phenomenon felt in the styles and attitudes of the the performers and audiences, the abundance of its presence in the air in the dargah marks its openness and availability to all who are present. The spatially located and ephemeral, yet infinitely abundant substance of qawwal itself is symbolic of the abundance of *baraka* that endures in the person of the saint, even after his death.

From the qawwals perspective, the transmission of blessings mediated by cash are central, since their route leads to their own pockets, but the qawwali occasion is the site of other forms of *tabarruk* ("blessed substance") as well. During *samā* on special occasions, spiced *chai* is served near the end of the performance. Blue sashed shrine workers carry it in tiny cups balanced on huge silver trays, and fight fiercely to keep audiences from snatching the cups before they can place them on the carpet. The *chai* is intended for the VIPs sitting in the front rows, but often, recipients will sip from their cup and then pass it to others. I often witnessed this kind of impromptu commensality which is rare among the public outside of the dargah. Other forms of *tabarruk* include the small, sugary dough balls (*dalī*) but often simply called *tabarruk* (or *prasād* - a term with a strong Hindu temple connotation that some visitors at the dargah used). These were distributed by shrine workers, first to *khādims,* and then passed from hand to hand throughout the assembly. During the *'urs,* tiny dried *pān* (betel nut, spices, and sometimes tobacco) leaves folded and secured with a little stick also made their way through the crowd. At the end of the performances, a stern, black hatted *khādim* dripped scented water with dirty granules in it (from the bowls used to clean the tomb) from a clay vessel into out outstretched palms. Most significantly, on some special occasions, *khādims* bent and offered large silver bowls of *mīthā pānī* to the assembly. Audience members took turns drinking from

the same bowl, regardless of caste, religion or position in the spiritual hierarchy. The blessing of the substance was in the transmission.

Pilgrimage, exchange and *baraka/barkat*

"Where, then, in the complex large-scale societies and historical religion are we to look for the topography of the inclusive, disinterested, and altruistic domain? The short answer is in their system of pilgrim centres."

Victor Turner (1974:186)

Symbolically, money and *barkat* represent two different value systems that both work simultaneously in the life of the dargah. In the qawwali performance, they have a complex, interdependent relationship. In other forms of exchange at the dargah, the forms of giving and receiving that pilgrims engage in are often more simple - the Islamic injunction to feed the poor, for example. Nevertheless, there are elements of liminality that are worth highlighting in these other modes of exchange that will place the giving and receiving stimulated by the qawwals' performance in a proper context.

Several important ethnographies have described the ways that exchange plays an important role in the symbolic transformations pilgrims undergo at sacred sites. At a Sufi saint's lodge in rural Pakistan, Pnina Werbner illustrates how the act of pilgrimage effects a sacred exchange between two symbolic worlds and mediates the contradictions between them (P. Werbner 2010:177-8). She describes *langar* (the communal meal given away and consumed in a Sufi lodge or dargah) as a "perpetual sacrifice" that "structures both the routine organization of the lodge and the wider organization of the Sufi regional cult focused upon it. In its generative organizing capacity it also structures gender relations and makes women integral to the process

whereby God's blessing is at object at the lodge" (Werbner 2010a:179).

Often, pilgrimage involves "metonymic giving" to the poor at a sacred site, from which pilgrims return bearing sacred substances. Myerhoff's (1974) ethnography of Huichol Indians in Mexico describes an annual pilgrimage to their sacred site in Wirkuta, the offerings they make, and their return reborn, bearing with them the peyote needed to revitalize their world. The Hindu Rajasthani pilgrims with whom Ann Grozdins Gold (1988) travelled emphasized the act of giving itself above any benefit of the rituals they performed. The expense itself "is good for the soul. The effect is one of lightening: the returning pilgrim should be thinner and poorer" (Gold 1988:263).

Offerings in the context of other exchanges at the dargah

By taking part in the circulation of money, food, and blessings, participants at the dargah enact a narrative of the interconnectedness of humanity. The dominant narrative at the shrine of Muinuddin Chishti is one of offerings to the Saint in exchange for intervention with God to affect a positive change in the donor's life: healing, fertility, economic success, etc. Alongside this narrative is a pattern of exchange which is both more generalized and more inclusive: the transmission of money and blessings during qawwali. This has the overt purpose, from the qawwals' perspective, of providing them with some of their income. However, Sadique, Asrar, Sabir, and others indicate that their main sources of livelihood lie elsewhere - mainly in jobs or professions outside of qawwali. The auspiciousness of giving and receiving during the qawwali performance is an important part of the ritual, and serves the purpose of drawing others into the system. These exchanges involve more than money, they serve the important purpose of

establishing face to face and hand to hand contact between individuals during the ritual, compelling the givers and receivers to consider and to renegotiate relationships within the community of practice.

While qawwali is going on, visitors also engage in forms of exchange that are more structured, less spontaneous. One of the most common forms of offering made by visitors takes place during a visit to the tomb (*mazār*), accompanied by a shrine "servant" (*khādim*). One is free to walk into the door of the *mazār* on one's own, of course, but since the process of paying respects to the saint is a large part of the shrine's income, these officials quickly latch onto visitors in order to persuade them to give money, either directly to them, or to the many vendors selling flowers, *challā* (sacred threads), *chādar* (embroidered cloth) and other religious items to mark the visit.

The Government of India's "Dargah Khwaja Sahib Act" of 1955 states that "No person other than the Nazim (manager of the dargah) or any person authorized by him shall receive or be entitled to receive *nazars* or offerings on behalf of the dargah."[64] Official notices exhort pilgrims to place donations in unobtrusive and seldom-used green metal boxes provided for offerings. During my research period (and as of this writing) the position of *nāzim*, a chief officer elected from among the nine-member "dargah Committee" is vacant. Furthermore, the dargah committee itself is widely suspected of corruption and has long been embroiled in legal disputes over the management of shrine income and resources with the *khuddām* and the office of the *dīwān.* (See Currie 1989:168-73). Despite the legal prohibition, and partly because of pilgrim's preference for hand-to-hand transfer of offerings, *khuddām* are seen everywhere in the dargah soliciting offerings from pilgrims.

[64] Act No. 36, 14 October, 1955. Subsection 1. Section 14

In one of our first conversations, Sadique encouraged me to carry an elder, respected *khādim's* business card with me in the dargah in order to fend off other entrepreneurial *khādims* who might try to attach themselves to me. His first misgiving about being seen publicly with me in the dargah area was that "people may think I am trying to make myself into a *khādim.*" There is a great deal of suspicion of corruption and coercion on this group of shrine "servants" who make their living taking donations for the dargah[65]. Asrar told me that his family donates 15,000 rupees annually to the hospital and school that the dargah offers to the poor. They do this directly to the institutions, bypassing the *khuddām.*

Vendors of sacred items have stalls set up along the inner and outer walls of the dargah complex. They pay rent to the dargah and also give a portion of the money they earn from selling these sacred items, as well as pieces that are purchased for ritual use, and also as souvenirs of the visit to the holy site, such as caps, headscarves, candles, postcards, amulets and rings. Most of these vendors are Muslims, but there are a large number of ethnic Sindhis, Hindus whose families migrated to Ajmer from Pakistan following partition, and other non-Muslims who operate stalls in the dargah and outside in the dargah bazaar area. I have seen Hindu shopkeepers begin their day by laying the keys to their stall at the foot of the Muslim saint's tomb. The Sindhi owner of a shoe store in the dargah bazaar, a self-described Hindu, found no contradiction in this. He told me that this is simply a way to ensure the blessings of Khwājā Sahib, describing the act as "just part of everyday life." The trade in the rose petals many visitors buy by the basketful to toss onto the tomb is monopolized by a Hindu family in the neighboring Hindu holy town of Pushkar. The economic interrelation between different religious and ethnic

[65] The dargah Committee officially recognizes 1,000 *khuddām* who must stand for election every five years. However, Sadique and Sabir both claim that there are more than 4,000 who operate in and around the dargah.

groups in the day to day operation of the shrine is an important component in the communal harmony, interdependence, and intersubjectivity we find at the dargah. In some ways the liminal interaction of different groups in *samā* resembles that of the bazaar, in that both are zones of inter-ethnic and cross-religious interaction that is, as Mayaram (2005:149) observes, are "strongly combative of fundamentalisms."

The purchase of a *challā* (a woven string of red and ochre threads) implies a kind of contract with the power of the saint to intervene in worldly affairs. A pilgrim will give a small donation in exchange for the string, appeal to the saint to resolve a problem in his or her life (requests for children by couples having trouble conceiving are very common) with the promise to return when the request has been granted. He or she will then tie the thread to the marble latticework windows or the metal gates outside the *mazār.* These structures are covered with orange and red mottled threads. When the supplicant has been favored with the saint's *barkat,* he or she unties the *challā* and donates the amount of money promised to the saint, through one of his servants, a *khādim*. A ubiquitous sight at the dargah, at all hours, are visitors holding onto the latticework, hanging or untying threads, touching the marble and praying with eyes closed or cast down.

Pilgrims I spoke with often conceive of these requests in legalistic terms. The scholarly conception the dargah as a Islamic "court of saints" (*darbār-e-auliyā*) must be supplemented in a limited way by a conception of the relationship between saint and pilgrim as "court" (*adālat*) in the legal sense. The debts that pilgrims incur by receiving *barkat* must be repaid, a "contract" sealed with the tying of the *challā* on the shrine, the embodiment of the saint's power on earth.

At Hussain Tekri, a much smaller dargah across the border in Madhya Pradesh, pilgrims

use similar legal language to describe the "decision" (*faislā*) they receive during possession by one of the martyrs commemorated there. These decisions are part of a process of healing that involves the exorcism of malevolent spirits through interrogation and physical discipline (Bellamy 2011). Pilgrims, both Muslim and non-Muslim at the dargah in Ajmer use Urdu terms such as *arz* (petition) and *mannat* (vow) to describe the arrangement they have made with the saint and his bureaucratic representatives, the *khuddām*. When speaking English, as many of the visitors who were drawn to the unlikely presence of an *angrez* ("Englishman" - generic term for a white or foreign person) in the dargah at least attempted to do, used the term "case" to refer to their request for blessings and the financial debt they believed it would entail. These terms carry with them the history not only of the dargah as "royal court" (the literal translation of the term *dargah*[66]*)* but also a more recent usage in the courts of litigation under the British administration and in the modern Indian state. It is significant that the modern legal system in India is almost universally discredited by the visitors and qawwals I spoke to as corrupt and ineffectual. The appeal to a more direct and selfless form of "court" is certainly part of the dargah's appeal.

In her assessment of the widespread participation in dargah ritual life by non-Muslims, Bellamy concludes that "patronage of a Muslim saint shrine and participation in its court-tinged rituals and vocabulary gives contemporary pilgrims the in fact quite accurate sense that they are part of a pan-Indian community of dargah patrons, imbuing visits to even the most humble of local dargahs with a sense that the pilgrim is cultivating a portion of his or her identity that transcends local social structures and restrictions" (Bellamy 2011:11). In the context of qawwali performance, the transmission of money and blessings must flow through multiple hands, involving as many as possible in a community of practice that includes participants who would

[66] See Qureshi (1982; 1983) and Ernst (1993).

otherwise avoid contact with one another.

At the dargah in Ajmer, "giving to the poor" takes many forms, from spontaneous handouts to beggars on the streets outside the gate, to the highly structured purchase of food prepared daily in the two massive bronze *degs* (cauldrons) that provide the free, communal, vegetarian (this is a significant gesture to many non-Muslim consumers) meals known as *langar.* I heard visitors refer to this food both as *tabarruk* (something laden with *barkat,* through association with the saint or his shrine) and as *prasād* (something given away at a Hindu temple, a divine gift). Although it was not always possible to determine the religious affiliation of visitors, the terms seemed to be used rather interchangeably, by both Hindus and Muslims. The qawwals and shrine employees universally used the term *tabarruk,* unless they were attempting to "sanskritize" their Urdu speech to me, assuming I would understand it better. Currently, one may even order the *degs* to be filled online via the dargah's website, on which is printed a menu, description of charges, and a link to a *khādim's* bank account for electronic money transfer.[67] When they are not in use, pilgrims whose petitions have been fulfilled drop money, food, jewelry, and sometimes precious stones into the empty *degs.*

The distribution of the food from the *degs* is chaotic and multidimensional. The *khuddām* I spoke to insist that the *langar* is given away on a first come, first served basis to the poor and needy among pilgrims and locals. Curry's (1989:125) colorful description of "a Goyaesque fantasy on the smoldering furnaces of hell," indicates that families from Inderkot (a village of about 5,000 people just northwest of the dargah) work as teams to dive into the cauldrons and sell the contents to the highest bidder, rather than give it away. Shariq, the young proprietor of the Chishti Book Depot, a tiny but thoughtfully stocked bookstall just outside the gates of the

[67] http://www.dargahajmersharif.com/Deg_Lainger_dargah_Gharib_Nawaz_Ajmer.htm

langar khāna (the communal kitchen where the food is prepared and distributed) told me that, indeed, a *birādarī* of very close-knit Inderkotis have the hereditary right to the *degs* and the distribution of the food therein. However, in the scenes of distribution I witnessed, the "*deg*-men" who wrap themselves in cloth to prevent burns (some of them jumping into the cauldron themselves to get what is left at the bottom) and scoop the contents out by the bucketful do not succeed in keeping all of it for sale. Large drums of the food are carried a short distance from the *degs* into the *langar khāna* by menial shrine employees who serve ladlefuls of the sweet-smelling mixture called *kesāria-bhāt* (a kind porridge of rice, *ghee,* dried fruit, nuts, sugar, and spices) to long lines of people (mostly women) waiting with paper plates, styrofoam bowls, bits of cardboard, and the ubiquitous South Asian portable food containers, plastic bags. The Inderkoti *birādarī* ("brotherhood") maintains a kind of secondary economy, selling large buckets of the food to small vendors, who then retail it to pilgrims in small bowls as *tabarruk,* even a tiny portion of the food brings the saint's blessing into the body of the person who consumes it. So the food serves both a nourishing and ritual purpose, depending on who consumes it. Sadique, walking past this scene, clarifies, "actually, we only use the word *langar* for the food which is cooked by the dargah on Thursdays during the day, and twice a day during the *'urs.* Otherwise, when they cook it whenever someone has given enough money or food for the *degs* to be filled[68], it's just *khānā* (food). This is given away free, not sold." I saw such a variety of distribution methods that it is difficult to classify. The combination of structured, profit-driven exchange as the *birādarīs* sell plates of *tabarruk* at market prices, and the generalized, if frenzied, consumption of the nourishing food by the poor is another example of dargah culture as a "bazaar" of multiple modes of transmission.

[68] The smaller of the two *degs* costs a minimum of Rs. 70,000 to fill.

"The most auspicious thing you can do here is feed the poor," says Sadique after I expressed my dismay about passing so many beggars, and my inability to find a useful way to help. Some pilgrims organize informal meals through the operators of "hotels[69]" on the dargah bazaar whereby they pay for a set number of meals to be cooked and offered to the first to arrive. This sometimes leads to chaotic scenes. During one qawwali occasion, a special "program" organized by a visiting *pīr* from Maharashtra, audience members donated not only cash, but also boxes of sweets and huge baskets of *rotis* that were later given to the public outside the dargah gates.

Pilgrims in Benares "unload" their sins in the form of gifts to Brahmins (Parry 1994). Eade and Sallnow discuss Metonymic exchanges at Christian pilgrimage centers, in which the exchanges stand in for "all dealings between human beings and the divine. In many ways, they represent the stock exchanges of the religious economy." (Eade and Sallnow 1991:24) In the case of Shrine exchange in Morocco, Eickelman observes that offerings at the saint's tomb in exchange for *barkat* are modeled on a supplicant's everyday experience of secular power as based on patronage (Eickelman 1976). The patronage and hierarchical structure of the dargah and its tradition are interlaced with elements of mutuality and inclusive participation. The forms of exchange on display during *samā* bear the mark of this complexity.

The above interactions here all have a hierarchical shape. The many types of qawwali performance, and the offerings and blessings they stimulate and profit from, take other forms as well. The emphasis qawwals themselves place on the flows of money that take place during their performances is on the equality of all the participants in the assembly, due to their equal humility and submission in the presence of the "love divine." As in a small Sufi saint's lodge in pakistan

[69] small, casual, often road- or streetside eateries

in which "self-interested discourse," exists alongside a spirit of volunteerism and charity that "reveal[s] the central experience of altruism and humanism which energizes Sufism." (Werbner 2010a:175), the exchanges that take place during qawwali may have a "discourse" of hierarchy associated with them, but take forms that emphasize egalitarianism and access to blessings, even by visitors who lack money, connection to a Sufi order, or even Muslim identity.

Pnina Werbner (2010a:182-3) observes that during the *hajj*, the paramount pilgrimage in the life of Muslims mediation with God is not by a single person, but by a community of believers. A qawwali line that Asrar Hussain often includes in his performances declares that "if we please the Khwājā Sahib, we will go to Medina." The type of giving and receiving stimulated by his and other qawwals' performances elicits an exchange of money and blessings that involves not individuals, but a community of believers, of players and listeners. Giving during qawwali is stimulated in the present by the quality and context-sensitivity of the performance. One person's *hāl* (ecstasy) draws in other participants, creating a temporary chain of transmission. It also draws money from the crowd, passing it through more hands, and also increasing the payment that the musicians receive.

Hierarchies and mutualities in exchange during qawwali performance

"The peculiar situation for the Qawwal - as compared with other Indian musicians or with professional performers generally - is the fact that his remuneration does not come to him as a direct reward for a good performance. Rather, it is the indirect material result of what is essentially a non-material transaction: the symbolic expression of the spiritual link between a Sufi and his spiritual superior - a transaction not involving the performer at all."

Regula Qureshi (1986:137-8)

The patterns of exchange during qawwali fall into three main categories. 1. The audience

member gives directly to the qawwali party by placing (or throwing) cash onto the harmonium. 2. The audience member presents the money to the *dīwān*, or the highest ranked spiritual elder at in attendance – who then sends it to the musicians by way of one of his subordinates, thus transforming the token of spiritual authority into mere "money." 3. The audience member selects a "messenger" or a companion to carry the money, or to join hands (and sometimes money) with him in offering the cash.

Currie and Qureshi emphasize the second type of transaction in their focus on the hierarchical nature of shrine organization and the qawwali performance. The first type of donation is common, and is often the only mode of presentation we find during the performance of qawwali in the courtyard spaces on ordinary nights. The final type is flexible, variable, and improvisational in nature. I encountered variations on the use of "go-betweens" in giving and receiving money. Indirect giving and receiving draws increasing numbers of participants into the qawwali occasion, creating a widening circle of participation that involves physical contact and mutual giving among people who may be segregated outside of the dargah. This pattern of exchange serves to create a community of practice and narrative of harmony that heightens the emotional value of the event for all present. Like pilgrims at other sacred sites (e.g. those described by Werbner 2010, 1989; Gold 1988; Parry 1994) visitors expect a spiritual renewal through contact with the sacred. However, I find that they also experience a spiritual renewal through contact with each other. This contact is established and maintained through a framework (Strathern 1971) of exchange.

Qureshi's (1986:122-31) lucid rendering of the offerings made during a highly structured qawwali occasion shows the physical manifestation of a spiritual and economic hierarchy in

action. I wish to offer a harmonic accompanying voice from qawwali performances that demonstrate the temporary creation of a community of practice. The gift in these cases serves to link audience members and performers in an egalitarian milieu - however temporarily or liminally - and illustrates the co-existence of transgressive lateral transmission along with the well-established hierarchical elements. I use the term counterpoint here to emphasize that I am not pretending to refute Qureshi's seminal work, but to offer a harmonic accompanying voice that may help us understand the value of Sufi practice from the musician's perspective more clearly.

As I review a video of a qawwali performance during the saint's "birthday" [70] on July 18th, 2008, I am struck once again by the mixture of formality, joy, and chaos that is revealed. On this occasion, my qawwal friends invited me to sit with them in the performance area of the *begumī dalān* courtyard, covered with lush carpets and attended by a visiting *pīr* from Hyderabad. In this scene I have the privilege of taking my rhetorical adoption of the musician's "perspective" literally. I am seeing and hearing the occasion as they do, even though I occupy a different role.

Sadaqat often has the job of gathering and sorting the banknotes that come in for the party. There is a large crowd of peripheral listeners standing around the periphery of the main event. During the *'urs*, shrine workers make everyone sit down. Here, this is not possible. During the opening number, describing the lineage of Muinuddin, the repeated *takrār* of

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[70] This was the second night a gathering was held to honor Muinuddin's birthday, owing to a dispute about the actual date. Sadique says, "He is so old that we don't really know for sure when his birthday is, so this *khādim* [the one with the towering red leather *topī*] has called a program tonight." I ask, "There are differing opinions on the date of his birth?" Sadique replies, "Exactly. This *khādim* is very rich. He has organized this event." "I've never seen him here before." "He's very wealthy. He shows himself here very rarely."

“Muinuddin, Khwājā” leads the *khādim* who organized the event to rise, Nadir and Niyazi, two *khādims* who rarely attend qawwali, get up as well, cradling their toddler sons in their arms. The kids are dressed in ornate outfits exactly like their fathers'. One of the kids gets down and runs about, scooping up money that has fallen. He runs up to Asrar's harmonium and drops the banknotes on it, with an expression of great excitement. Soon children are rising up all around, taking donations from the men seated in the first few rows of the audience and presenting them to Asrar at his harmonium. A husband and wife rise together and take a bank note to the *khādim,* Nadir Hussain, he takes it from them. They kiss his ring, he combines the note with a few of his own and tosses the bundle into the air above the qawwals. It settles on us all and on the audience on the periphery. Nadir's and Nizazi's sons begin to imitate their father's display. Bank notes fall all around, passing through many hands as they make their way to their resting place in front of the party. Sadaqat scoops them all up and stores them in an unruly pile, before the party retires the *begumī dalān* enclosure behind the courtyard where they will be distributed among the players as “money.” What began as a set of offerings from devotee to a “spiritual superior” in order to “meet the *sheikh*” (*sheikh se milnā*) and publicly identify with the hierarchy of the formal “court of saints,” gave rise to a joyous, if somewhat unruly, bazaar of exchanges, in which audience members not used to interacting in this ritual (women and children, peripheral listeners who picked up stray notes and passed them forward to the qawwals) transmitted blessings to each other, and rewarded the musicians who had caused so much generosity.

Like the participants in ritual exchange using old, out-of-circulation coins in ritual exchange in Mahajanga, Madagascar documented by Michael Lambek (2001), the members of the qawwali assembly who handle these little, worn banknotes “are concerned less with coins as

commodities or with their buying power per se than with the objectification of the intentionality of donors and recipients" (Lambek 2001:757). Qureshi finds in the offering of money "a generally accepted mode of formal social interaction with superiors which is based to some extent on Islamic precedents, but above all on the Indo-Islamic imperial court tradition"(1986:123-5). The money that changes hands is significant, then, as a token of submission, implying a request for beneficence. The "giver," with his gesture of open palms and bowed head, is also in the position of the supplicant, a "taker." The exchanges Qureshi documents illustrate this process very clearly, but represent only a portion of the total system of transmission of money and blessings that we see in the various forms of qawwali performance.

Hierarchy expressed in exchange

Viewing the donation of money during qawwali performance as "presentation" highlights the quality of money as a material token of status and illustrates the patterns of hierarchy in Sufi practice and Indo-Muslim social organization, as Qureshi (1986 122-130) describes with clarity. During the most formal qawwali performances, such as the *mahfil* during the *'urs* celebration, especially during each party's opening song (usually containing references to the saint's spiritual genealogy), this pattern of donation seems to follow Qureshi's description quite closely. However, on most ordinary nights, the patterns of giving and receiving I witnessed (and took part in) illustrate some other social processes that show the complexities of the exchange as a transmission, a framework for understanding social interaction that is not strictly hierarchical, Sufi, or Indo-Muslim in the same way.

First, let us look at the structural dimension of giving and receiving in the qawwali

assembly, borrowing Qureshi's general categories, through the lens of individual transactions I witnessed at the dargah, and filtered through the individual perspective of the performer himself. In each case I point out the improvisation that accompanies or modifies the formal ideal. Then, I describe and interpret some of the other forms of giving and receiving that take place during the much more variable ordinary performances that, although lower in status for the qawwals' standing relative to the hierarchy of shrine organization and spiritual authority, make up the biggest portion of the money they earn from qawwali, and so must be taken seriously as a part of their craft.

Standard presentation

The donation in this case takes the form of a "gesture of deference to the divine representatives present in the court of saints" (Qureshi 1986:123). During the *'urs,* in an opening performance by the Asrar Hussain's party, during a sung recitation of Muinuddin's spiritual genealogy (*shijrā),* a grey-bearded *pīr* in a conservative white *kurta* with a grey flannel vest rises to his feet from his high status seat in the front row on the right side of the "royal court" area directly across from the qawwals. His younger follower (a pony-tailed Israeli youth) helps him up by his elbow, and remains standing while the *pīr* walks up the seated *dīwān,* holding a single, folded five-rupee note (around ten cents, in U.S. currency) in his open palms (right hand over left.) In this case, the giver (of money) assumes the position of the receiver (of blessing). He pauses before the *dīwān* and reaches the money out to him, bowing with unbent legs. The *dīwān* picks the banknote up with his fingertips and places on the floor by his knee. One of his sons, a

teenaged *chobdār*[71] in training, collects the money and carries it down the length of the *samā* hall, where he deposits it on top of Asrar's harmonium. Asrar's nephew, Sadaqat, plucks it off the keyboard and lets it rest on the cloth covering his lap. This opening gesture of deference made by a visiting *pīr* to the divine representative of the court of saints, the fictive "son" of Muinuddin in the person of the *dīwān,* is accompanied by the qawwali party's repetition of the line:

Chiragh-e-Chisht, Shah-e-Auliyā, Gharīb Nāwāz

("Light of Chisht, king of saints, protector of the poor")

The repetition of the epithets of Muinuddin Chishti increases in tempo as the *pīr* raises his palms to his eyes, in a standard gesture of submission to the spiritual superior, even one who is his junior in age. Helped by the young follower with the pony tail, the elderly *pīr* returns to his seat.

This standard form of presentation is known as "meeting the *sheikh,*" although, as several qawwals point out, the *dīwān* may be more of a representative of bureaucratic authority of the dargah than a spiritual descendant of the lineage. There is dissent surrounding his post. A *khādim* remarked that "some people here don't agree with his status, but they don't say anything." For example, the *dīwān's* decision to allow the Dalai Lama to sit by his side during *samā* in the *mahfil khāna* during the *'urs* caused a ripple of muttering to pass through the crowd ("the seat next to him is only for God, not for any 'politician,'" Sadique muttered into my ear) but no one

[71] "Mace bearer," or guard in the *darbār* of the *dīwān*, one of the subaltern hereditary posts reflecting a re-creation of Mughal court personae.

stopped him, even as a TV camera crew invaded the *mahfil khāna,* totally wrecking the atmosphere the qawwals and audience had worked so hard to create. The tiny amount of the donation in this case highlights the symbolic meaning of the gesture. The material consequence of the sum qawwals receive at the end of this chain is negligible - although, as we shall see, the small notes tend to add up.

Bowing to offer

After the *pīr* returns to his seat, others get up and follow his example. Increasingly, donors indicate deeper levels of submission by kneeling or lying on the floor, forehead resting on the floor in front of the *dīwān.* None of the givers is in a visible state of emotional arousal or *hāl*, the flow of offerings is orderly, slow, and always in the form of a single banknote.

Then, younger, and less spiritually advanced audience members, although still those higher-status persons seated near the front of the audience on either side begin to offer money to the *pīrs,* who place the notes lightly in their laps as they remain seated, sometimes touching the money to their foreheads before they do so, occasioally accepting a kiss on the hand or a touch on the foot by the donor, if he is a personal disciple. An *pīr's* attendant collects these notes, passing them in a wadded mass to one of the boy *chobdārs*-in-training, who would then cross back all the way to the side of the harmonium and present it to one of the qawwals to the leader’s right. As these amassed, the subordinate singer would gather them in the folds of his shirt (an impressive, basketball-sized clump of money) and carry it out with them when they had finished.

Presentation expressing need for spiritual indicator (**offer jointly with senior person)**

This type of formal offering occurs when a junior Sufi initiate wishes to publicly display his affiliation with a *pīr,* and achieve recognition by the *dīwān.* On the second night of the *'urs,* during the opening singing of the *shijrā* (recitation of Sufi genealogy), a slightly-built young follower with a recently shaved head stands as the eldest *murīd (*the white-bearded man Englishman) of the *pīr* Inam Hasan returns to his seat after depositing an offering with the *dīwān.* The young man grasps the elder one's hand and places the bill he held into his palm. The two men hold the little note jointly, with their four hands folded together as they made their way to the "court" (*darbār)* of the *dīwān.* Together they bow, a bit awkwardly, waiting for the *dīwān* to accept the note. The *dīwān* plucks it up and drops it into the waiting hands of one of his *chobdārs* who carries it to the qawwali area, where Sadaqat adds it to the party's growing pile.

In this case, the offering was a token of membership in a hierarchy that is explicitly displayed during this phase of the qawwali event. The young man with the shaved head was aligning himself in an order that extends from himself, to a senior *murshid-bhāī* ("brother," follower of the same *pīr),* to the personal spiritual guide (Inam Hasan), then to the *dīwān,* the earthly representative of the saint at the assembly. The saint himself is connected through his own *pīr,* linked further to Ali, the Prophet Muhammad, and finally to Allah. The token of submission is a public affirmation of the young man's humble place in this hierarchy. However, the fact that these two junior and senior followers approach together, while touching hands, and make an offer of a single note between them suggests another sort of transmission that is taking place. Theirs is also a gesture of levelling before the supreme power of the divine.

Presentation expressing submission, respect ('kiss' or touch feet - *qadambosī*)

During the *awwal* party's courtyard performances, visitors would sometimes approach Asrar while he was singing and attempt to touch his feet, implying submission to his own spiritual superiority. Asrar would scowl and brush them away. Pointing with his left hand, in a modification of the standard Chishti gesture of intensification (palm up, fingers outstretched) toward the door of the *mazār.* He complained to me several times about pilgrims who considered themselves Muslim, but did not know proper behavior, reserving his special ire for those who brought alcoholic drinks into the dargah concealed in water bottles. I never noticed this, although the smell of *chāras* (hashish) burning outside the rear wall of the dargah was sometimes detectible. What is notable is that neither Asrar nor his brother Sabir performed *namāz* at the dargah. Sadique did, as did his younger brother Sadaqat. There is some disarticulation of "proper" or required behavior (*adāb*) in the context of *samā* as opposed to the orthoprax requirements of Muslim life. However, audience members did occasionally kiss the hand and touch the feet of the *dīwān* present on special nights. More common was the emotionally aroused audience member who dashed up to the steps of the *mazār* to kiss or touch his or her forehead to the marble. This was especially common among female audience members and male listeners of lower social status. I never witnessed a *pīr,* spiritual guide, or high status pilgrim or patron doing this. Sadique rolled his eyes as a shabbily dressed man pushed his way past the *khādims* who tried to restrain him to kiss the steps in front of the *mazār.* The man was rather roughly escorted to the back of the audience and told to sit down.

Presentation expressing submission, devotional ('prostrate' - *sajdā*)

During the first night of the *'urs mahfil,* a young initiate performs the act of full prostration before his personal spiritual guide, forehead completely touching the floor, as he presents money. The followers of pīr Inam Hasan Gudri Shahi Panchan ("the fifth") sit to his left in the front row of the audience lined up between the qawwali party and the "court" of the *dīwān*. To his right sits a very elderly man with a long beard dyed jet black ("a *nawāb* ('nobleman') from Barchi" according to Sadique) His youngest initiate sits wedged between an older, bearded disciple visiting from England and another Indian *murīd* who had recently shaved his head (but left his curled mustache in place).[72] Both the younger initiates act as intermediaries in the flow of offerings as they make its way to the *dīwān*, and then to Asrar's party as "payment." The Israeli *murīd* is especially zealous. Each time an audience member deposits a banknote in the folds of his kurta, he springs to his feet, faces his *pīr*, and bows down to touch the floor with his forehead, palms up. The *pīr* drops whatever money has accumulated in his lap into the young man's hands. The *murīd* gets up without lifting his eyes from the floor, crosses to the "court" of the *dīwān,* and deposits it on the floor beside his right knee. The *dīwān* lightly touches the money with his right hand, changing it from offering back into money, to be given to the symbolic "messengers" in the house - the qawwals. Since there is an Islamic tradition of turning religious tributes into charity (see Idris Khan 1973:5), Qureshi has good reason to conclude that "this reward has no relationship to the gift itself" (Qureshi 1989:126). However, this is not the end of the line for the banknotes. The chains of transmission of offerings and blessing bind participants in the assembly in ways that are egalitarian as well as hierarchical.

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[72] The tonsuring of initiates as a rite of purification is another element of Chishti dargah practice that has possible origins in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. (See Currie 1989:53)

The kinds of formal offerings I have described so far take place mainly in the opening number by the opening party on each night of the *'urs.* In this phase of the qawwali occasion, the "host" party sings lyrics emphasizing the spiritual genealogy of Muinuddin, and the hierarchical links to the Chishti *silsilā*. Not surprisingly, the types of giving and receiving people do during this phase of the performance illustrate the role of the offering as a positioning of the self in a spiritual hierarchy - a supplicant who bows or prostrates before an inferior, offering a tiny amount of cash as a token of submission, while at the same time striking a pose (hands open, palms up) of the supplicant, or "taker." In the songs that follow, the forms of offering and blessings become considerably more complex, egalitarian, and emotionally charged, as the lyrics and music of the qawwali which stimulate them build in intensity and rhythmic force.

Presentation expressing aroused mystical love (embrace - *galā milnā*)

In all of these standardized forms of offering, viewing the transaction as "presentation" encourages us to view the actions as signs, essentially as language. However, the view of the act as transmission allows us to see how the flow of substance, money and blessings, creates social connections among people who are not previously integrated along hierarchical lines.

The *dīwān* sits with three other older men in white with black felt *topīs*. The old man to the *dīwān's* left shakes and sobs as the dīwān himself yells out "hey!" several times while making a chopping motion first with his left, then with both hands. Soon the bearded man to his right also begins to shake and weep. He rises and the other men rise to embrace him. Then they embrace the *dīwān,* making offerings at the same time. They all lose their hats, even the older qawwal who is leading the party, with Amir on harmonium and only the regular *dholak* players

and Sadique's brother Saddam. The *wajd* was intense. Two older *hijrās* offered money to the qawwals.[73] A group of Sikh men offer money to the qawwals directly. The *dīwān* is chanting fiercely "hey! hey!" The older man in the black hat next to him vibrates his *topī* off. The dīwān then begins to shake, his hand like a hammer.

Here is a standard offering along hierarchical lines - the embrace of the *dīwān* by subordinate, emotionally aroused Sufis, who make token offerings during the embrace. However, it is accompanied by some non-standard offerings, by the *hijrās* and Sikhs, who, motivated by the emotional arousal of the Sufis, gave money directly to the performers whose skill had given rise to such an emotionally potent atmosphere.

Mutuality expressed in exchange

Doctrine and ideology create virtual or imagined communities of “Hindus” and “Muslims” (i.e. the *ummat*), whereas the exchanges and transmission that occur during the ritual occasion of qawwali create trans-religion, trans-caste, and (sometimes) gender-neutral *actual* communities, even if they are temporary. This interaction, though always framed by a formal resemblance to Islamic courtly practice, is a model of co-existence generated, in part, by the effective craft of qawwali.

During a performance in the courtyard, a woman with red *tikkā* on her forehead (usually signifying Hindu identity) rises to her feet and begina turning in the open space between the qawwals and the *mazār*. She falls to her knees, rolls to her side and appears to lose consciousness. One of her female companions rushes to her side, spins her body a quarter-turn

[73] During the *'urs*, another elderly *hijrā* entered the mahfil khāna and made an offering during the Rampur party's set. The presence of this third gender “Guru” raised a few eyebrows in the audience, but the *dīwān* accepted the offering and touch of the *hijrā* elder with total equanimity.

so that her feet are not pointing toward the door of the tomb (an inauspicious gesture) and waits, kneeling, for her to come to. Slowly she helps the unsteady woman to her feet, wrapping an arm around her waist as she helped her back to her seat. There is no objection to what would seem to have been a violation of a male-only space. The qawwali singing goes on without interruption.

The transgressions of ordinary comportment that take place during the performance of this ecstatic music include the patterns of donation, of giving and receiving, normally restricted by class, caste, and religious barriers. The submission that is symbolized is not only of the individual to his spiritual guide or social superior, but of the entire assembly to the transcendent power of God through his saintly representative, stimulated by the sacred sound that calls it to mind in the present.

In her discussion of money as a means of "opening the door" to the spirits in Gnawa trance ritual in Morocco, Kapchan (2007) find that "money becomes not just currency, a means to an end (buying power), but an actual material symbol in its own right. It is worn, displayed and proffered." This display in the context of different sorts of samā includes the status of the giver and recipient, the reciprocity between equals, and the metaphor of the world-renouncing Sufi. Ann Grodzins Gold (1988) identifies the asceticism of pilgrimage as a temporary condition that pilgrims bring with them into their worldly lives. But the renunciation the Chishtis celebrate does not isolate the practitioner from ties of marriage, kinship, and social affiliation. In qawwali, the money which the musicians receive for "payment" serves mainly as a connective medium of transmission, both of their message to listeners, and of social ties with *pīrs* and other qawwals. These connections may serve hierarchical or bureaucratic needs, as in the party's need to connect with representatives of other shrines (such as the dargah in Sarwar) which are part of a wide

network of Sufi institutions, thus solidifying their legitimacy and place as Ajmer's "first" party. They may also serve as tokens of respect and professional etiquette from one party to another. Money that qawwals earn in outside "programs" does not have this same quality of abundance that provides *barkat* for all those who convey it along its path. On the Gnawa trance music tradition in Morocco, Deborah Kapchan writes, "Spirit propitiations, considered obligatory by the possessed, are also venues for distinction-making and identity building" (Kapchan 2007:144). In the case of *samā*, distinction and identity are often built upon chains (*silsilā*) of transmission. On the more auspicious qawwali occasions, rarely does the *barkat* go straight from the giver to the performer. It passes upward along a chain of blessing, building up power as it goes. To be finally stacked, counted and returned to its original mundane state by Sadaqat when he gives his brothers and uncles their share.

The fact that these exchanges of money and blessings involve physical contact, and the movement of bodies in relations to each other suggests that the qawwali occasion, like much of Sufi practice, directly opposes some of the restrictions on physical contact maintained by caste, gender, age, and social class segregation. However, a closer look at some particular cases of exchange during *samā* compels us to consider this transcendence as something more complex, and more useful, than clichés about Sufism and music bringing people together. They are indeed brought together, but it is in consciously transgressive and individually nuanced ways.

Passing money through others, chains form

In some ways, the formal presentation of offerings during qawwali performance serve to display and reinforce hierarchies of spirituality, and even material wealth, as "patrons" may

display their status by giving larger sums. In practice, however, it is very common for even the penniless audience member to participate, through the formation of chains of transmission. This tends to occur during the latter portion of the qawwali performance, when the repertoire is more freely chosen, and the physical arrangement becomes somewhat loosened. These are the moments when I saw the most intense displays of emotional arousal (*hāl*), including devotees weeping, rising, shouting out, turning (*raqs*) and even losing consciousness.

A donor will pass a note to a person seating near him, who touches it to his forehead and then rise. He will either present the offering to the qawwals directly, or will often pass it in turn to another person seated near the front of the audience, usually a person of low social status: a young person, a child, someone who is perceived as poor (in worn, dirty clothing, for example), or even an ambiguous person such as a foreign ethnographer. I saw beggars*, hijrā*s, Sikhs, women, and young girls included in these chains of transmission. Sometimes a banknote will pass through six or seven hands before it finally comes to rest on the harmonium of the lead qawwal, where it becomes mere money once again. A scene from a specia*l sam*ā celebrating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday *(milād an-Nabī*) shows a widening community of practice in the giving and receiving of money and blessings:

As the next three parties continued, the pattern widened out to include other pīrs seated in the front row (although the cropped one in front of me was by far the most involved - his boy scurrying back and forth with wads or single five rupee notes all night). Sadique himself began making frequent trips with small denominations. Distributing them first to the *pīr,* then directly to the *dīwān,* then to some of the *khādims* around the periphery, then to his little brother, who gave them to the *pīr*. He even gave two fives to me. An older devotee motioned to the pīr, so I

placed them, head bowed, but without getting up, in his hand as the boy was already on his route to gather someone else's donation. Although all the money wound up at the feet of the *dīwān* before getting delivered to the qawwals, the distribution widened until notes were passed among audience members, then to other *pīrs*, then sometimes to *khādims*, sometimes to the pīr in front of me. The donors were driven to include more and more members of the *samā* in distribution and blessing. There was no difference in behavior toward offering of five rupees or of hundreds. A bright-eyed bearded Sufi shouted out "hey!" and threw his hands in the air, kneeling. He did this several times, his eyes blazing. A very old Sufi in long robes was helped to his feet. He donated to the pīr in front of me. Then, crossing back to his place, he began whirling, somewhat unsteadily, but quickly, ecstatic. He went back and gave more money. Whirled again. Again. Again. A middle-aged, stout Sufi rose to help him back to his place, but the old guy dragged himself back to give one more five rupee note to the pīr before allowing himself to be escorted back to his seat. Genuine *wajd.* Sadique smiled and said, “Look, the qawwals have succeeded in lifting him up to God.”

Sadique's location of agency in the musicians is important, since much of the literature on qawwali claims that it is the listener who orients himself through training and mindfulness for the most forceful experience of *zikr.* Since the donations constitute a small portion of the musicians material income, their self-awareness of their role in the success and authenticity of this most important ritual at the dargah is worth taking seriously.

In the passage of notes among listeners, the money takes a kind of temporary “hiatus” (Ansell 2010) from its role as currency and marker or worldly status. Here it indicates the position of all participants as beggars, in a sense. We all partake in the saint's *barkat*, insofar as

we are willing to give up our status and appear as “beggars at [God's] gate.”

Party to party sharing; recipients are also givers

A limited view of formal presentation locates the “patron saint” present at the gathering as the site of ultimate transformation of the offering as symbol of submission into cash as a donation to the performers. This is in keeping with the Muslim tradition of turning religious tributes into charity (See Khan 1960:5). However, during qawwali occasion at which multiple parties take turns performing, I witnessed many occasions of qawwals recirculating some of their earnings into offerings during the performances of the qawwals that follow them.

When I asked Sadique if this was a means by which performers seek some form of recognition by the assembly leader in order to promote themselves. He dismissed my question as if it were too cynical. “All these qawwali parties are here for Khwājā Sahib. They are allowed to perform with my uncle's permission. We give money to each other because it is a blessing.”

After his own family's party has finished performing their opening songs in the *mahfil khāna* on the second night of the *ʿurs*, Sadique joins me in the audience at the back of the hall, behind the qawwals currently performing. The scene behind the qawwals reminds me of nothing so much as an especially amicable “battle of the bands” at a rock club: drums and instruments stacked against the wall, musicians sitting casually, chatting quietly in small clusters. Most qawwals are watching and listening to the performers in the *mahfil khāna* with interest. Taped to the iron gate of the inner portion of the hall is a handwritten sign announcing the night's lineup.

Qawwals await their turn “backstage” during the *ʿurs*

Sadique's brother Sadaqat taps him on the shoulder and handed him his share of the money that has come in during their performance, several hundred rupees in very small denominations, wadded, creased and dirty. Instead of changing them into larger notes, he folds the whole mass up and stuffs it into the side pocket of his *shalwār-kamīz.*

The exiting party gets up in silence and is replaced by the next one up with remarkable speed and efficiency. I count an average of ten to fifteen seconds for the changeover. During that night's performance, Aziz Warsi and party from Deva Sharif have an unexpected windfall. During his introductory verses of a “classic” qawwali song, the *masnavī* (attributed to Amir Khusrau, though derived from verses by Rumi, according to Sadique), he is compelled to repeat these lines as *takrār* because of the overwhelming emotional response.

Aziz (solo, high register):

Kaʿba-e-dil qibla-e-man rūe to
Sajdagā-e-āshiqāṅ abrūe to

Ī'dgah-e-ma gharībāṅ kūe to
Imbisāt-e-ī'd dīdam kūe to!

"The Kaʿba of my heart and the *qibla* [direction of *namāz* toward Mecca] is your face
lovers of god direct their adoration to your presence

For us, the lowly and poor, your gate is the *ī'd* celebration
All the joy of *ī'd* is here at your door"[74]

The *ī'd* the verses refer to is *ī'd al-fitr,* the joyous festival marking the end of the fasting month of *ramzān.* Muslims in South Asia often mark the occasion with the distribution of charity for the poor. In the *mahfil khāna* that night, an elderly Sufi rises slowly to his feet, weeping. He begins a slow, turning movement,walking around the open central area of the gathering. The *dīwān* himself rises to his feet, followed by the whole audience. Although it is only the beginning of their performance, and typically a solo introduction, the qawwali party repeats the last two lines in unison, adding drum beats and handclaps. The formal presentation of offerings is replaced by a more complex array of transmission. People at the front of the audience on all sides give money directly to the qawwals and the *dīwān*. Those in the back pass notes forward through the hands of other audience members. Sadique produces some of the money he had received for his performance and passes it to several *pīrs,* to a couple of young boys sitting near us, and to me. I present Sadique's offering at the feet of the *pīr* Inam Hasan, whose disciple brings it to the *dīwān,* and then back to the qawwals.
Since the unusual emotional response was accompanied by offerings, Sadique refers to the extended portion of the song as *muft*, a "bonus."

Most of the other qawwals share some of their earnings in this way, either directly to the

[74] Translation and transliteration from the Farsi by Sadique from my recording with the help of his father, Sabir Hussain

party leader, or through a number of channels leading to him. Sadique continues to portion out the money he had earned during other parties' performances. In this way, the bonds that form between the qawwali parties are represented by small monetary offerings. The *dīwān'*s role in "managing the transformation of the offering from a token of spiritual deference into a payment for service" (Qureshi 1986:127) is not the ultimate gesture of transmission of money and *barkat.* In many cases, the banknotes are "recycled" through the system of offering and bonding again and again, and along different channels.

The qawwal Aziz Warsi certainly understood that the repetition of the line and the deviation from the "standard" performance of a "standard" qawwali verse was both emotionally necessary (it is believed that the devotee in a state of *hāl* may die if the verse is cut off), and also a financial "bonus" for his party. However, the occasion of high emotional response by such a huge group led to a temporary suspension of the rules, and a more inclusive type of communitas in the assembly. The more open and varied presentation of banknotes along routes that indicated mutuality (qawwals give money to peers, adults to children, high and low status audience members directly to the musicians), caused the audience members to make contact with each other in a new way.

Showers of cash

"The modern-day concert-hall practice of listeners showering *qawwals* (performers of *qawwali*) with heaps of dollars and pounds and sometimes even throwing in the car keys and the wife's jewelery, is both vulgar and demeaning and a far cry from the original purpose of *nazar*."
Jameela Siddiqi (2005:350)

During a performance at *atā-e-nūr,* after the introductory verses, Asrar and party sing

together:

Āj Ali ghar rang barsāt hai bhīj rahī sansār
samgrī par jī araj karat hai bhagto ke sardār

"In Ali's house (the dargah) God's grace is shining down on all the people (the public) in the dargah
The public bows down before the devoted king"[75]

The rhythm accelerates. Asrar emphasizes this by pumping the bellows of the harmonium along with it as his sons, nephews and grandson increase the volume of their handclaps. More audience members stand to make offerings. A *pīr* who has collected banknotes from a number of audience members stands, shouts "hey!" and tosses the bundle into the air.

The first comment I ever heard about qawwali was from a journalist friend who had covered Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's 1991 performance at the Beacon Theater in New York. "People throw money at him!" he exclaimed, eyebrows raised. When I saw this happen in the dargah context I asked one of the qawwals about it. "*Vēl* is given freely and spontaneously by the audience," he told me in a matter-of-fact tone. However, I kept probing for some more cultural meaning behind this "free gift" that audiences bestow, and the specific forms it takes in the context of the qawwali occasion.

There is a lot of behavior at the dargah Sharif that is outside the ideal descriptions of Chishti practice in Currie's, Qureshi's and Ernst's work, of which this practice is only one. My initial response to seeing the flurries of cash released with theatrical flair from the hands of well-

[75] This translation and transliteration is a collaboration between Sadique and I. It may be flawed in style and substance, but it emphasizes the main point - that the musicians themselves place a heavy emphasis on the egalitarian quality of the qawwali gathering. The "grace" and the blessings are both accessible to all who are present, and symbolic of a leveling of worldly hierarchies in the presence of an indisputable superior and moral center: the divine.

to-do qawwali audience members during performance of *samā'* was very much in line with Siddiqi's: this is a showy, vulgar display of status or desire of attention by the listener. Perhaps it is a sign of decadence in the practice of *samā*, a corruption learned from cash-strewn concert stages in the West where qawwali superstars like Nusrat have popularized the genre. Sadique feels differently. He dismissed my suggestion that it looked like a bit of performance on the part of the "donor."

Sadique and I are having a good-natured argument about the meaning of *vēl*. I remarked that I found it strange that a listener would choose to throw down dozens of five or ten-rupee notes rather than simply giving a larger bill. It seemed to me that some of the guests liked to make a show of showering the qawwals with money.

"It's not a show (*tamāshā),"* he says with some agitation as we sit in our booth at the tea shop outside the dargah. "If he is listening properly, and if he feels the presence of God, the Sufi gives everything. You give your money, [he mimes this animatedly] your wallet, your rings, everything. It is a sign of this." To him, it resembles a symbolic enactment of a central theme of Chishti practice: disregard for personal welfare and care for others. For him, the fact that the practice of flinging money rather than letting a *sheikh* or elder devotee pass the money to Asrar's harmonium occurs at performances that are rather chaotic, rowdy and "open" does not diminish the symbolic quality of shedding one's attachments and letting them fly, so to speak.

What I had interpreted as a display of affluence or conspicuous, even competitive generosity may have more meaning as a symbolic descent in status. The patterns of exchange that take place within the qawwali assembly suggest that one of the functions of giving is to draw peripheral members of the audience into a temporary community of practice. Participation in the

gift is not limited to the first donor and the final recipient, but rather includes others in chains of transmission that obliterate differences in purity and status and suggest a model for cooperation and inclusion among members of groups who are often segregated from each other outside of this ritual context.

Counting out the money: "offering" turns into "payment"

Qawwali performance usually ends with stunning abruptness. On ordinary nights, the call to prayer will ring out from the dargah public address system.[76] Asrar will stop, sometimes in mid-verse, rise to his feet, and walk off. Sometimes a devotee or impressed audience member will stop to try to talk with him, but he usually ignores them and heads into the *warsī dalān* behind the courtyard.[77] Asrar, like all other qawwals I observed, rebuffs any attempts by audience members to give money to them after the music has ended. One of his sons or servants packs his harmonium into a worn quilted bag and carries it for him. The *dholak* player who is not part of the family shoulders his drum and waits outside. The rest of the party goes into the marble enclosure to wait for either Iqbal or Sadaqat to count out the money they had made during that session.

Asrar usually has one of his nephews (most often Sadaqat, who also works as the "pick-up man") count the money into equal shares, then takes two for himself. On nights when this party is the only one performing, Asrar's son Anwar (who works in a bank) will generally change the small notes into large bills before giving them to the performers. During "special" occasions,

[76] Qawwali stops during *namāz,* usually resuming again after an hour or so. Sadique and Sadaqat were often the only members of the party who did *namāz* regularly at the Shah Jahani mosque in the dargah.

[77] He did this to me for the first six months I was there. He has refused to talk to journalists, TV reporters, almost everyone.

when other qawwali parties follow Asrar's, the money is distributed in the same small notes in which it was received, allowing the performers to become audience members, donors, and supplicants during other qawwals' sessions.

Musicians' other income: making a living at the intersection of patronage and market

In addition to the small portion of their income they derive from the traditional "patronage" of the shrine (although if one includes the free housing they are entitled to, this is significant), Qawwals perform at the dargah to establish and reaffirm ties with the representatives of the institution (*khuddām* and *dīwān*), to make a name for themselves among pilgrims and visitors, and also to meet devotees wealthy enough to hire them to perform at "programs" outside the dargah.

Sadique's "visiting card", an impressive thing printed on heavy black card stock with a drawing of the dome of the *mazār* printed in gold, lists him (in English) as a "singer and stage programmer." I originally assumed that this had something to do with selecting repertoire for the *awwal* party. However, this means that he is advertising his authority to book the family for private "programs" - the English term used to describe a qawwali performance outside of the designated ritual space of a dargah, whether in a concert hall or a private home. Asrar's visiting card lists only his son Amjad's mobile phone number and the following contact information: "Contact time: *bād namāze maghrib, bād namāze ishā* at dargah Khwaja Sahib (R.A.) Ajmer (Raj.)." Indicating "after prayer" (*bād namāz*) means that the times when he is available for performance are also the times when he conducts business as a performer for hire.

Appearing at the dargah sometimes provided other opportunities for making special

arrangements and transactions. One “ordinary” Thursday night as the party performed between *maghrib* and *ishā* prayers (a time when dargah traffic is heavy) Asrar's son Iqbal (seated on the far right of the party) was approached by two visiting pilgrims, brothers whose shiny gold *shalwār-kamīzes* and sparkly headbands adorning their overweight bodies made quite an astonishing impression. They wanted a special favor for their visit to the *mazār.* Iqbal quickly recruited Sadam (with his *dholak*) Amir as backup singer, and Sadaqat as the “bearer” to carry his harmonium as they walked behind the brothers, playing and singing as they made their way in single file into the door of the tomb. They played, standing behind the brothers as they offered flowers and presented money to the *khādim* inside. Then the bothers circumambulated the *mazār* counterclockwise, with their little qawwali procession following them. They emerged from the door and returned to their places in the party's lineup, after Amir had quickly distributed the several hundred rupees in cash the brothers had paid them surreptitiously, to all four. This belonged only to the four of them, and was not part of the communal pot of offerings for the party.

One night Sadique was approached by a *pīr* from Sarwar Sharif, the dargah in a village some forty miles from Ajmer. The *pīr* hired six members of the *awwal* party to perform at the *'urs* of Muinuddin's son, Khwājā Fakhruddin. The *'urs* there was small, including only twelve *khādims* from Ajmer who chose to attend, and two other qawwali parties. It lasted for five nights and included about two hours of mahfil each night. Sadique said his family made about 5,000 rupees each.

On the second night of the *'urs,* a family of British Gujaratis hired the party to perform a private “program” on the roof of their guesthouse. In addition to a flat fee of 20,000 rupees, paid

in advance, the father had provided each of his sons with a thick stack of crisp ten-rupee notes from a local bank to shower on the musicians during the performance. This performance was lucrative, but marred by poor sound quality from the rented PA system and some overly showy *raqs* and *vēl,* by the family "patrons." The qawwals did not seem to take this performance too seriously.

Money from outside careers

Sadique estimates that the adult members of the party earn, "on average, 20 or 30 thousand rupees without qawwali, and around 40 thousand with qawwali." I find the estimate a bit high for music income, since I rarely see them take in more than a few hundred rupees each in a night. However, the point is valid, that most qawwals have "day jobs." Only the two oldest qawwals rely on qawwali as their sole source of income, now that they have retired from their outside careers. Asrar was a tailor. Sabir was a skilled laborer, making gold and silver embroidery on cloth for "ladies dressing." He also ran a business exporting this cloth from Bombay. Several members of the family still work in the textile trade. Two of Asrar's son's work in banks in Ajmer. One is a "collector." Two others have a small audiocassette shop in the dargah bazaar. Sadique's older brother, Iftekhar is a computer programmer. His little brother Sadaqat is still in school (although while I was there he was expelled for truancy - Sabir, his father, hardly spoke to him while I was around). "As for me, I am free," Sadique told me, laughing. "Dargah life is easy life, sober life. Housing is taken care of. Sometimes there are some bad feelings with the *khādims,* but otherwise life is easy."

One day when I arrived at Zeba Cottage to find him still sleeping in the afternoon, he

walked down to the kitchen with me, saying "It's a good life. A king or a president, his life is never his own, there is so much tension. I play qawwali two or three hours, the whole day is free. My life is for god and Khwājā sahib. But life is changing. People worry about the disasters in the world. I want to preserve this freedom for myself." Some tension resulting from the qawwals' subordinate status was evident one night when he had to restrain me from barking out an angry retort at a young *khādim* who passed us in an alley. "Hey, where did you "catch" (*pakkar*) that one?" he said with a lewd wink at Sadique, assuming I wouldn't understand. Sadique turned to me and said, "be cool, *yār*. In the river, the swimmer must not fight with the crocodile."

Legacy of courtly patronage

One of the privileges enjoyed by the family of qawwals is residency in the two large townhouses in the dargah area: Zeba Cottage (current home of Sabir Hussain and his four sons and two unmarried daughters) and Asrar's townhouse (home of his five sons, their wives, five grandsons and four granddaughters). The buildings are over two hundred years old. The expense of maintaining and adding to them is part of the "income" the family receives from the dargah[78]. There are advantages to this situation for the family. For one thing, Asrar, Sabir and Sadique all tell me that they place a high spiritual value on his living within the dargah area itself, as this is a continual blessing. Plus, although their income is not huge, it is offset by the fact that they live on their property without paying rent or taxes. This is a tenuous kind of ownership. In the absence of any legal deed or title, their residency and income depends on

[78] See Currie, Chapter 9, "the Endowments and Finances of the dargah" (1989:174-184), although Asrar, Sadique and family clearly state that they do not receive any "salary" from the dargah.

maintaining a relationship with the shrine administration. By consent between the family, the *khuddām* and the government-appointed Waqf Board who administers shrine finances, they are the "owners" or proprietors of the houses they live in, but they don't have any legal documentation.[79] Asrar tells me that his ancestor was offered eight villages by the Emperor Akbar, but refused. This property north of the dargah now belongs to the government.

Asrar's granddaughters wave to me from the second story of their townhouse

Coda: the *karkā,* "We are all beggars at your gate"

At the end of every night, at around 1:30 a.m., as the qawwals near the end of their performance, a group of *khādims* usher the last visitors out of the *mazār* and sweep the tomb and steps leading to it with *farāshā* - wooden broom handles fitted with peacock feathers. They then get down on hands and knees to wash the marble floor and steps with buckets of water and rags. When they are finished, all present, qawwals, *khuddām, dīwān,* pilgrims, and other visitors

[79] Asrar claims that there is a letter from entitling the family to this property, but that he was not sure where it is being held

(including this ethnographer - the first night I witnessed it, the qawwal Sabir Hussain tapped my shoulder and brought me into the group) rise to take part in a ritual unique to the dargah of Khwājā Gharīb Nāwāz: the singing of the *karkā.*

All of the qawwals present, accompanied only by a single *dholak* (small, two-headed hand drum) sing a hymn in praise of the saint, and describe the poverty of their own condition, humbly asking for his blessings and for the ability to maintain his *barkat* on earth. Everyone stands in a semicircle facing the door of the tomb, hands up at chest height, palms facing the heart, the traditional Sufi position of *du'ā,* or personal prayer, as opposed to the formal posture of bowing during *namāz.* The qawwals all sing the *karkā* in unison. On nights when multiple parties perform, all those qawwals who know it are expected to join in. The rest of the crowd becomes silent. All present stand shoulder to shoulder and sing in a rapid tempo:

Sahīh Muin la haq abeh sanwārā
Chishtī chirāgh jag meṅ ujārā

"O Muinuddin who has graced us,
Who shines the light of the Chishti lamp over the world"

There is considerable doubt about the possibility of translating, or even transliterating the rest of the verses.[80] My own recording of them is distorted and hard to decipher. When I asked for help from both qawwals and *khādims*, I met with disagreement even over what languages were used in the *karkā.* A *khādim* insisted it was Farsi and Marwari, a local language he confessed he did not understand. Sadique, although he knows the verses by heart, having learned

[80] īA *khādim* has published a version of the *karkā* in a pamphlet on "rituals and customary practices at the holy shrine of Khwaja Gharib Nawaz," but it seems, like many of their documents, to have only a partial correspondence to what is actually performed. (It has recently been posted online at http://khawajagharibnawaz.com/RitualsCustomaryPractices.html)

them phonetically by rote since childhood, admits that there are some phrases he does not know how to translate.

Later, in Sadique's room, when I played back my recording, I confessed that I could not understand the lyrics at all.

“Why is this so difficult?” I ask.

“This is a 725 year old thing. The wording. Four or five lines are mixed," Sadique says.

"What language is it? Is it Bhojpuri?"

“It's Bhojpuri. It's Persian. It's Arabic. It's a little bit of Marwari. A little bit of Urdu. And one other language, I can't think of it now. It's all mixed. When I try to read (or “recite”) it slowly like this I get confused. But its meaning is that we all, the public, must spread this light in the world. We are all the same, all beggars.”

After the *karkā,* the gates to the *mazār* are closed. Then a moment of total silence follows. All the members of the assembly, men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, visitors, workers, and locals stand together in silent prayer. After this powerful moment, most of the visitors leave the dargah. As they file out, some of the visitors pass in front of the *khādims* who are holding the brooms thick with dust from sweeping the *mazār.* They bow their heads slightly to accept a firm blow from a *khādim* who brings the bristles down onto the top of the head of each recipient. The acceptance of such a demeaning gesture as *tabarruk* is a final example of the humility and ritual submission that dargh culture promotes. Outside of this liminal context, hitting someone with a dirty broom head would be more than materially dirty. It would carry powerful notions of ritual pollution and grave insult. But in the abode of the saint's enduring *barkat*, the transgressive can be auspicious, healing, and powerful.

Sadique's definition of *karkā* as a collective admission that we human beings are all "beggars," whatever its direct relationship to the literal meaning of the text of the verses they sing, is our focus here. The act of facing the tomb together, consuming together, and taking part in chains of transmission of money and blessings together involves a collective submission and humbling that facilitates a kind of generalized reciprocity and a community of practice that exists in parallel with the hierarchical and vertical features of dargah culture emphasized by others.

Although the *karkā*, the extinguishing of the lamp, and the exit of the *dīwān* marks the formal conclusion of the ritual activity of the dargah for the day, there were exceptions. I once witnessed an impromptu qawwali performance by a combination of musicians who did not normally appear together *after* the *mazār* was closed for the night:

Immediately, the whole company rose, and Sadiq, Asrar, Sabir, and four or five others joined by the *awwal* party's *dholak wālā* (drummer - a hired musician, not part of the "family") sang the *karkā.* The *dīwān* filed out with his court, lamps extinguished, the main *mahfil* over. Qurban Hussain then set up facing the closed mazār, in the spot directly in front of the place where the *dīwān* had sat earlier. This ad hoc party included Sadique (harmonium and vocals), Saddam (*tablā*) and Sadaqat (handclaps and backing vocals).

Qurban later told me that they had merely been "practicing," (*riyāz*). Indeed, at one point during the performance a laughing Qurban turned to look at Saddam and Sadaqat and "conducted" them with his hands so that they could get the rhythm right. However, the small audience that remained continued to give small amounts of money directly to the party. The relationship between Sadique and Qurban is complex. There is no apparent ill will between them, but Sadique must avoid contact with Qurban when his uncle Asrar is present. Asrar's main

complaint is that Qurban is going behind his back and attempting to establish himself as a *shāhī qawwal* through a lawsuit in the Ajmer courts. Their enmity comes from Asrar's sense that Qurban has betrayed the generosity and training that Asrar's father, the famous qawwal Iqram Hussain, gave to him by taking him in as an orphan in childhood. The surreptitious, "after-hours" performance on this night was a friendly show of solidarity among the younger generation of members of the same lineage and musical *khāndān,* even as Asrar say, "Qurban is no relative of ours."

The surprising amount of variation and deviation from the descriptions of "traditional" qawwali performance and the transmission of money and blessings it stimulates is yet another example of the "Sufi tradition of not conforming with orthodoxy" (Qureshi 1986:114). This non-conformity finds expression in a wide range of behavior at the dargah, including the circulation of money and blessings, about which I am concerned here. The varied and even improvised quality of exchanges in dargah culture does not diminish their power or effectiveness. On the contrary, it is the transgressive nature of dargah culture lies at the heart of its ability to create a community of practice, despite the persistence of disagreement and contestation. "You know how Muslims are," sighs Sadique. "Always fighting among each other."

However, the overall process of music playing and listening dargah culture leads to a remarkable coexistence of different communities and social ranks. This co-existence, symbolized by the pose of "begging" in the *karkā,* occurs within an Islamic frame of submission, a Sufi frame of poverty and asceticism, and is manifested by different types of offerings that integrate hierarchies and mutualities.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

In a recent interview, the renowned female Pakistani qawwal, Abida Parveen said, “The truth doesn't need to be told. It can only be experienced. Remember, I'm not performing. He [God] is singing through me. It is His song, and it sings by itself.” I am immediately reminded of the modesty and truth in a statement the teacher and storyteller, Swamiji, made to my advisor during her own fieldwork, “I don't make anything up. I just tell what's already there...I'm not the one who tells the stories. The teller is Bhagavan” (Narayan 1989:37, 39).

In both qawwali and storytelling, the meaning is achieved through the context of performance and adaptation to the emotional needs of the listeners. We may only come to know these divine or eternal sounds and narratives through the actions of other individuals, in the particular circumstances of time and place. The maintenance and celebration of *silsilā* and the ecstatic experience of *hāl* also generate connections among people in the shrine and between different traditions. Qawwals do not autonomously create these linkages, but by paying attention to the way they work, we see how this musical and poetic tradition implicates many types of people and structures in simultaneous systems of exchange, learning, and ritual.

The power of the dargah emanates from dual aspects of its character: local and cosmopolitan. The visitors who approach the shrine with requests for healing and intercession do not necessarily listen to *samā* with the expectation that they will experience *hāl* or other forms of direct spiritual transformation. However, for all visitors the continuing practice of qawwali in front of the *mazār* is fundamental to the shrine’s power, legitimacy, and connection to the past. The transfer of the Sufi message in live, context-specific spiritual concerts makes the space

sacred, and compels audience members to act and interact with each other as well as with the shrine officials and performers in a specifically Chishti Muslim way. However, the cosmopolitan nature of the dargah derives in part from the great diversity of its visitors. The very nature of qawwali as a sound produced in a live performance setting is fleeting. The ephemeral nature of this ritual space requires constant maintenance, reinvention and reinvigoration. This is accomplished through the continual training and nurturing of qawwali singers in the families resident there.

Through these chapters I have shown how the daily, lived experience of the resident qawwals of Ajmer's venerable and venerated dargah mediate between structure and agency, and between vertical and horizontal relationships and arrangements in three domains of their role as producers of expressive culture. In **learning**, their experiences show a distinct combination of *sīna ba sīna* ("heart to heart" or "father to son") and *birādarī* (peer learning), as well as a dialectic between traditional learning in the "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991) and formal education called "tuition." In the domain of **playing**, we find the same qawwals performing in some contexts that are organized and led by representatives of spiritual and worldly authority (with a focus on the "throne") and others that involve more self-direction, self-expression and heterogeneous group involvement. In the domain of **exchange**, we find qawwals making a living and making sounds that stimulate a variety of forms of giving and receiving that embody forms of hierarchy and community.

I have tried always to respect and listen to the perspective of the hereditary music maker who also negotiates life in an urban, cosmopolitan milieu. In his processes of becoming and being a qawwali, we see elements in which structure and anti-structure, and the relationship of

self and society, and other binaries are integrated through his craft, rather than through an agentless ritual process or in a disembodied oscillation of low and high (Turner 1982; Lewis 2008). I argue instead that we view the "liminal," as both a ritual phase and a position occupied by the hereditary musician, as a domain of craft, the locus of the binding and transmission that they use to facilitate connections between people that both liberate and constrain.

In taking up the conversation begun by Carla Bellamy's (2011) detailed discussion, I have highlighted the role of the day-to-day "workers" at the shrine, the qawwali singers who produce the powerful ephemeral sound that is such an important key to the power and nature of the place. The space is sanctified through sound, maintained through constant improvisation and boundary maintenance, and placed by visitors in a religious landscape that has become increasingly cosmopolitan both through the diversity of its visitors and through the increasing connection between dargahs in the Subcontinent. This "network" formed by pilgrims who travel increasing distances to multiple holy sites throughout the region exists in tandem with older networks such as the Chishti *silsilā*.

In discussions regarding Hindus and Muslims living together, a focus on the lived experience of the musician as intermediary helps frame the issue in terms of constant negotiation between individuals and structures, rather than in terms dictated by political interests (Siddiqi 2005; Mayaram 2005; van der Veer 1994). Qawwali is "utterance," but it is also a chorus, a dialog, a call-and-response, a bond between listener and speaker, between communities, between them and me and you.

The common narrative I hear from *khuddām*, shopkeepers, and visitors in the dargah bazaar area is that Ajmer is a great model of communal harmony. However, those without first-

hand experience of dargah culture tend to express a more negative view. “Don’t leave your cycle near the dargah, Muslims steal, that’s how they are,” said my Christian landlord. “Dargah people are bad people,” he added, trying to discourage me from inviting my qawwal friends over to my second story flat in his house. I assured him that the people I was working with were honest, but he always seemed to close himself up in the “lower portion” of his home when Sadique or his brothers would come over.

Turner, Bourdieu, and Bell all suggest a dichotomy of everyday life and ritual, of structure and anti-structure. These dichotomies are linked in qawwali. From the qawwals' perspective the ritual is their everyday life, the pilgrimage center is their home. The structure and the liminal are woven together in ways that allow for various types of “others” to interact, to learn not only from traditional hierachical chains of transmission, but from each other. The interaction of communities and participants of different backgrounds and status in *samā* suggests a view of dargah culture in South Asia as one in which peaceful co-existence, pluralism and revitalized tradition are products of “the unheroic quality of everyday life.” (Nagaraj 1997, quoted in Mayaram 2005:159)

The central role of hereditary “service” workers in constructing ritual

Through collaboration with the people who make the music, I have shown how these often marginalized figures play a crucial role in facilitating the busy intersection of ritual life at this popular shrine. In chapter two, I point to ways in which the musical craft of the qawwals enacts some of the central aims of dargah culture: the Sufi goal of spreading the message of vernacular Islam, the historical role (since the days of Moghul patronage) of uniting a

heterogenous population within a community of practice, an alternative to a reform-minded modernity. This modernity has disparaged the ecstatic and saint-centered aspects of Muslim practice, and also encouraged an identity politics based on exclusive religious communities. Their craft is a source of emotional and cultural participation in a social form of ritual and performance for a public that is searching for something lost, for a cosmopolitan community of practice. Chapter three illustrates how the multiple venues and variations in the context of ritual performance consistently show the agency of the musicians as social actors who connect different groups and address different "patrons," enabling meaningful participation by members of the public who are relegated to the margins in public life, and on the least common, "closed" *mahfil* occasions. Chapter four shows two important aspects of boundary-crossing in the teaching and learning of the qawwals: first, the legitimate peripheral participation of subordinate musicians and the crossroads of multiple pedagogical methods; and second, the important role of the qawwali musicians in teaching correct comportment (*adāb*) to a variety of audience members. In chapter five, I have argued that the musicians not only benefit from, but also stimulate and facilitate the exchanges that reinforce the intersection of hierarchies and mutualities at this ritual center.

And so, while the position of the hereditary musician is indeed liminal, in the sense employed by Brown (2007), the nature of the liminal time and space that they inhabit requires some reconsideration. The qawwali performance is more than an intersection of different communities, more than a crossroads of multiple traditions, more than a temporary hiatus from the structures of ordinary life, it is a carefully crafted process of binding listeners and participants together into a community. The liminality of the ritual reinforces, rather than subverts the

structure of the community, not through the kind of catharsis indicated by Turner (and hinted at by van Gennep), but because this musical setting is the level at which a heterogeneous society integrates difference and narrates the place of the individual in the whole.

Katherine Butler Brown puts Merriam's (1964) paradox of the low status/high importance of musicians in this way: "Musicians in many societies seem to possess social liminality – unusual cultural sanction to cross ordinarily strict boundaries that are of significance to a particular society." She continues to suggest, along with Turner (1969) and others influenced by him, that their value to the status quo is their ability to voice subversive ideas and act as a "social safety valve" (Brown 2007:3). However, their ritual importance is not in breaking down social structures but in tying individuals to them - structures that integrate elements of hierarchy and mutuality. Raheja (1989) finds this in a rural, Hindu context of exchange. I find a related instance of context-sensitive hierarchies and mutualities in dargah culture in an urban, cosmopolitan setting. But the binding that these liminal craftsmen engage in reinforces the structure of the cultural crossroads not because it is a temporary catharsis and return to order, but because their craft and message is based on the leveling and connecting qualities that make the event emotionally satisfying for such a broad range of participants. However, the ritual connections these hereditary musicians make do not serve as a "safety valve" so much as an enactment of the intersection of hierarchies and mutualities that characterize urban public life, the interactions that take place in a bazaar where different communities share common goals, perform exchanges, depend upon one another and live together. The remarkable ability of qawwali to cross borders and connect stems from its sources as an open, vernacular Islamic message of transcendence. The hereditary qawwals maintain this tradition in an increasingly

globalized and cosmopolitan context. While their status is indeed "low" in that, like other traditional musicians, they are viewed as "servants," qawwals maintain that their patron is the saint, and that all the members of the community of practice take on the position of servitude to him.

Ritual as crossroads

Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger introduces the term *ćaurāstā* ("crossroads") to describe sites "where Hindu and Muslim traditions have traditionally and still do intersect and/or share space" (Flueckiger 2006:15). Apart from the cultural meaning of the "crossroads" in the South Asian context as places that are "not [the] kinds of forlorn or lonely places of personal decision [as the term frequently implies in English[81]]; their corners are bustling" with public life and conversation. These shared social spaces are necessarily temporary, not permanent domestic dwelling spaces. They are useful points of orientation and have the potential to be both dangerous and healing (Flueckiger 2006:14-15). The "healing room" about which Flueckiger writes is a site of practices we can view as "vernacular Islam," where visitors "are not Hindu or Muslim...but patients and/or disciples who have entered into a relationship with [the practitioners]. But this is not a space where they dwell; it is a *ćaurāstā.* When they go home and arrange the marriages of their children or conduct death rituals for their parents, it matters very much whether or not they are Muslim or Hindu." (Flueckiger 2006:15) While the genre of qawwali itself may be seen as a kind of *ćaurāstā* in the sense that in both ritual and secular forms

[81] My favorite American example (which she does not include) is the desolate "crossroads" outside of Rosedale, Mississippi where, according to legend, the young blues man Robert Johnson made his fateful bargain with the devil.

it is a confluence of influences and participation by composers and musicians from Hindu, Muslim, and other traditions, it is in the more immediate sense of the dargah as a crossroads where pilgrims, musicians, and spiritual guides from different locales and backgrounds interact in a temporary community of practice. Like other literal and metaphorical *ćaurāstās,* the courtyards and *samā* halls of the dargah of Muinuddin Chishti are spaces where domestic identities may be suspended, and new forms of interaction and interpersonal orientation are played out.

The intersection is busy, but also "noisy." The qawwal's challenge is to cut through the noise of an urban soundscape (Hirschkind 2006:68) and direct our attention to the divine. This is a form of *zikr.* It is also the point of contact at the crossroads where the transmission (binding, weaving, knot tying and chain forging) takes place. The opening scene of this dissertation is a literal manifestation of the musician's role in guiding the public through chaos and connecting him or her to others: a single voice cuts through the noise of urban life; the chorus joins in; then the people respond through emotion, interaction, movement and exchange.

Rethinking liminality

"Liminality" may seem a dated term, but it delineates experiences that anthropologists should still pay attention to. The term points to observable moments that are highly valued and memorable to participants. It evokes both continuity and change. It becomes especially salient in places where different communities share practices. "Liminality" can be more than a catch-all for everything vague or ambiguous. It identifies moments when people place themselves, and are placed, in relation to hierarchies and mutualities. The *limen* can be a window into the details

of how people are linked and bound together.

Although as a graduate student I was first exposed to his work mainly through the filter of his postmodern critics, I have lately learned to appreciate Victor Turner's contributions to anthropology about the ritual process and the social drama from my students.[82] The enthusiastic flow of examples of the ritual behavior all human beings engage in has led to effervescent classroom revelations of personal adventures in boot camp, courtroom trials, and crisis-redressing "come to Jesus" talks with parents and siblings. The enthusiasm of my students draws me back to Turner's oft-critiqued, and sometimes defended, concepts of communitas and liminality (Turner 1969, 1982). I do not wish to use these terms uncritically. I am aware of valid critiques of Turner's work as being overly systematic and universal (St. John 2008; Foster 1990) and for overemphasizing anti-structure, while downplaying the structural and regulatory force of ritual events (Flanigan 1990). However, when we acknowledge that Turner had in mind a model of social life involving a "dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, communitas and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality" (1969:97) in which liminal experiences helped mediate between constraining structures and liberating communitas, we have a concept which applies very well to the case of qawwali, if we are willing to follow the evidence of the musicians' lived experience, and re-think the liminal as an active field of practice and strategy.

In his appendix to his work on Atjehnese ritual in Indonesia, James Siegel offers a counterpoint to Turner's communitas as structurelessness: "It is the experience of the discovery of something basic and inward in men, which in ritual is expressed in an 'outward and visible

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[82] See (A. Gold 2007) for a similar learning experience as a teacher.

form,' rather than structurelessness, that produces a sense of generic human bonds" (Siegel 2000:282). I suggest that far from demonstrating a lack of or hiatus from structure, the communitas that participants in qawwali encounter depends on the specific structures of Muslim ritual and South Asian Sufi social arrangement. It is the variety of visitors, followers of diverse religious and secular traditions that have all found such emotionally satisfying and effective use of qawwali that suggests to me that qawwals create music that allows all of us to discover (or re-discover) "something basic and inward" (Siegel 2000:283). The qawwal, I argue, is a master manipulator of the liminal, the in-between. The training, craft, and economy in which he lives and works show that their horizontal, lateral, and communal is always in the context of a highly structured, hierarchical, vertically oriented and historically conscious system. The "horizontal" aspects of the qawwal's craft offer the participant not an absence of structure, but rather the potential for an awareness of it, and an opportunity to play with different relationships between the individual and society. This is what leads the eager participants in dargah culture to a consciousness of "their commonness and their potential for union" (Siegel 2000:284).

Drawing inspiration from Qureshi's (1986) intricate performance analysis of the agency of musicians as authors of "sound, context and meaning in qawwali," I have argued that the liminality of these hereditary musicians is more than a position of uncertainty and ambiguity. Their individual skill and hereditary position does indeed allow them to cross boundaries, and temporarily exert power over elite listeners and patrons, as Katherine Butler Brown shows for "institutionally liminal" musicians. However, they also use their liminal status as a means of connecting others to hierarchies (the power of the saint and God, a spiritual lineage, a religious bureaucracy) and to mutualities (the community of practice including members of various

Muslim and non-Muslim communities). Under past systems of state and elite patronage, hereditary musicians' main purpose was the generation of cultural capital for their formal patrons. Since the contemporary dargah is “patronized” by a diverse and cosmopolitan public, their sacred message and emotional impact is evident in the responses of a wide range of listeners. The structuring aspect of their role comes not through catharsis, but from their craft as messengers, teachers and students, and facilitators of multiple modes of ritual and material exchange. Their ambiguity is not a vagueness, but a power (Bellamy 2011:218-9).

My collaboration with the musicians in their ritual performance and in the course of their daily lives has led me to rethink the term “liminal.” As employed by Victor Turner, the term applies not only to the “threshold” phase of the ritual process, but also to “liminal *personae* ('threshold people')...[who] slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions” (Turner 1969:95). These people (including prophets, artists, and musicians) he regards as “edgemen,” who, despite occupying a low or marginal position, enjoy an ambiguity of status that allows them to cross, or temporarily subvert or reverse social boundaries (Turner 1969:128). These “liminars,” in Turner's assessment, are given license to cross social boundaries by elites, who value their ritual role in producing a contained form of communitas, the temporary “anti-structure” that reinforces normative power relations through a combination of a form of catharsis and by making plain, through their temporary suspension, “social categories and forms of grouping that are considered to be axiomatic and unchanging” (Turner 1969:102, 109, 176). The role of the qawwals of Ajmer is indeed structuring as well as liberating. However, this is because their craft takes place in a musical and ritual setting in which a diverse society integrates difference and constructs a narrative of religious co-participation. I find analytical value in

Turner's conception of ritual and performance as the “culture's subjunctive mood” in which “supposition, desire, hypothesis, possibility, etc.” (Turner 1969:101) are acted out. Conceiving of the hereditary musicians at the dargah as “liminars” illustrates an important part of their interstitial quality, their status as “go-betweens.” However, when we place the individual musician's life at the center of our analysis, we see them inhabiting a more active role than “edgemen” or ambiguous crossers of boundaries.

My point is not only that the states of liminality, hierarchy and mutuality are contingent on the formation and negotiation of relationships, but that the forging of these relationships is what these artisans do. It is their vocation to bind together the various strands of social being into a community, however temporary. The ritual and its substance is ephemeral, but the emotional effect, as evidenced by seven centuries of inter-communal exchange and interaction, can endure. I have argued that the liminality these musicians inhabit is not merely a flexible, transgressive, or interstitial borderland, but is the locus of their craft - a space where they make connections between people and between traditions.

Qawwals connect the heart to God. They also connect listeners to structures of Islam, Chishti hierarchy and descent in the form of teaching and learning, processes of exchange, and, most fundamentally, performing. Because these acts are open, public, and constantly reinterpreted and renegotiated in the here and now, they form links among people in the dargah, crossing lines of religion, nationality, caste and community. This is not simply to affirm the cliché that “music brings people together” (no matter how true and important that really is). I have tried to show how the qawwals tie the knots, forge the links, and light the paths for the travelers who meet in this cultural crossroads. I have used the details of how these hereditary

musicians use various modes of transmission as means of connecting people and structures in a ritual which is not an enactment of an ideology, but the fulfillment of desires and vulnerabilities in all of their individuality and variation. The “structure” and “communitas” under construction are not opposites, but interrelated hierarchies and mutualities which the qawwals interweave through the transmission of their sound and message. Artists, musicians, performers, prophets, and other liminal people, even the marginal ones, are often weavers of the fabric of ritual and of the society it serves.

Note on orthography

With a few exceptions, such as proper names, words that have come into English usage, and the frequently used terms “qawwali,” “dargah”, and “Sufi,” or where otherwise noted in the text, Hindi and Urdu words have been italicized and transliterated according to the system employed by John Platts in his *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī, and English.*

Glossary

adāb formalized code of proper conduct, etiquette

Ali son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, titular head of all Sufi lineages, in some qawwali verses an epithet of the saint Muinuddin Chishti

barkat/baraka blessing, divine beneficence

challā a string woven from multicolored threads, purchased by visitors to a dargah to symbolize a bond with the saint

Chishti belonging to the Chishtiya order of Sufis, the earliest and most widespread throughout South Asia

darbār “court” of king or saint

darbār-e-auliyā “royal court of saints,” a term applied to formal qawwali assemblies

dargah Sufi shrine, a structure built around the grave of a saint

dīwān titular leader of the shrine of Muinuddin Chishti

gaḍḍī “throne,” “seat,” applies to the place of the leader of a *samā* assembly, and is also used to indicate the offices of high-ranking *kh*ādims within the *dargah*

galā milnā to embrace

gharānā artistic or musical lineage, family tradition

gharīb nāwāz "protector of the poor", Muinuddin Chishti

hadīs "tradition"; saying or action of the Prophet Muhammad based on the authority of a chain of transmitters

hāl "state; condition" of ecstasy or spiritual arousal

'ishq love

khādim (pl. *khuddām*) "servant", the hereditary guardian and administrator of the dargah of Muinuddin Chishti

khāndān family, family groups

khās "special, distinguished", may imply a social category of high status

mahfil-e-samā gathering or assembly for listening to spiritual music, formal Sufi term for the qawwali listening assembly

mahfil khāna "assembly hall," building in the dargah for special qawwali assemblies

maqām (pl. *maqāmāt*) "stage" of spiritual attainment

mazār tomb of a saint

morūsī "hereditary," among qawwals, refers to rights and privileges associated with shrine affiliation

murīd disciple of a Sufi spiritual guide (*pīr*)

namāz Muslim ritual prayer

nazr "offering" to a superior as a token of allegiance or submission; formal hierarchical offering in the qawwali assembly

pīr Sufi spiritual guide, master

qawwāl performer of qawwali

qawwālī spiritual music of Sufism in South Asia, a group vocal and instrumental genre performed in Sufi assemblies for the purpose of arousing spiritual ecstasy

rāga a consistent melodic pattern systematized in Indian classical music

raqs "dance", the involuntary steps or turning motion that accompany advanced states of spiritual arousal

sajdā prostration

sajjādānishīn the living descendant of the Saint, (the "inheritor of the prayer rug" of Muinuddin Chishti); an office of spiritual authority, by means of kinship with Muinuddin, over the shrine, currently contested.

samā "audition", "listening", the practice of listening to spiritual music in a Sufi assembly

silsilā "chain" of spiritual descent or affiliation

tabarruk "blessed substance", a food offering blessed, dedicated to the saint, then distributed

tarīqa(t) "path", or "way", the mystical path; also a particular school, tradition or order of Sufis.

ʿurs "wedding", the celebration of the anniversary of the Sufi saint's death, i.e. his "union" with God

vēl the audience practice of throwing showers of money over the heads or onto the instruments of qawwali performers

wajd "finding", trance, ecstasy

zikr "remembering", "remembrance", as in the repetition of God's name, a short phrase, or other methods for orienting one's mind to God.

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