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***Unveiling the Spiritual Dynamics of Sufi Devotional Arts: An Exploratory Study of Dance and Song in Islamic Mysticism***

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***Abstract:***

*This qualitative study delves into the mystical realm of Sufi devotional arts, examining the symbiotic relationship between dance, song, and spiritual experiences. Through an in-depth analysis of Sufi texts and ethnographic observations, this research reveals the intricate dynamics of artistic expression in Islamic mysticism. By contextualizing Sufi devotional arts within the framework of Islamic theology and spirituality, this study challenges prevailing narratives surrounding the role of art in Muslim traditions. This research contributes to a nuanced understanding of Islamic aesthetics, highlighting the complex interplay between artistic expression, faith, and spirituality. The permissibility of dance and music in Islam remains a contentious issue, with diverse opinions among Islamic scholars. While some scholars unequivocally condemn all forms of dance and music as haram (prohibited), others adopt a more nuanced stance, distinguishing between permissible and impermissible types. This investigation will elucidate the Islamic guidelines governing Sufi music and dance, distinguishing between permissible and impermissible forms. It will examine the acceptable genres, styles, and contexts for music and dance in Sufi rituals, as informed by Islamic theology and Sharia. Through a critical analysis of Islamic texts and scholarly opinions, this study will provide clarity on the allowable forms of music and dance in Sufi practices.*

***Keywords:*** *Sufi Music, Dance, Islamic Permissibility, Halal, Haram, Islamic Aesthetics.*

***Introduction:***

In Sufism, Sufi saints, immersed in the love of Allah Almighty, engage in various acts, including dance and spiritual music. These acts are performed in a state of spiritual ecstasy. These practices are collectively known as Samā' (meaning "listening"). Sufi saints, in their overwhelming love for Allah, would often engage in involuntary movements interpreted as dance reflecting their elevated spiritual state. This had a significant influence on their followers, who began to emulate these actions, transforming them into an established spiritual practice. Sufi dance and music, particularly in the Chishti and Mevlevi traditions, play a vital and important spiritual role in connecting with Allah. While some Sufis view these practices as permissible within limits, others consider them Harām. Unfortunately, today these performances are often misused in events like weddings in Turkey and Pakistan, leading to concerns about how future generations will perceive Sufism whether as a spiritual path or just a form of entertainment. This paper highlights the need to safeguard the true essence of Sufism. What boundaries did Sufis establish to ensure the spiritual



focus of Music and Dance? What is the perspective of Islamic scholars on Sufi Music and how do their arguments differ from Sufi perspectives? These practices (Dance and Music) have been criticized by some scholars and schools of thought in Islam, who believe it goes against the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. The misuse and false claims attributed to Sufis in today's world are performed in the name of Dance and Sufi Music which is against the rulings of Shariah. This research examines the historical views of Sufi saints on dance and music, alongside the perspectives of scholars who consider them impermissible (Haram). It also contrasts the original Sufi practices with their modern adaptations, particularly addressing their misrepresentation. The study aims to clarify the distinction between genuine Sufi traditions and their contemporary distortions.

### **Definition of Dance:**

The spontaneous movements made in harmony by different parts of the body under the influence of intense emotions are referred to as dancing or Dance. According to Cambridge Dictionary, the definition of dance is given as: "To move the body and feet to music"<sup>1</sup>. As per the Britannica Dictionary, "Dance, is the movement of the body in a rhythmic way, usually to music and within a given space, for the purpose of expressing an idea or emotion, releasing energy, or simply taking delight in the movement itself."<sup>2</sup> The Muslim philosopher Imam Ghazali has provided a comprehensive definition of Dance: "Music creates a state in the heart known as ecstasy, and this ecstasy leads to movement. If the movement is uncoordinated, it is called rapture, but if it is rhythmic, it is referred to as rhythm and Dance."<sup>3</sup>

### **Definition of Music:**

Sufi music literally translates to "**listening**" and holds a special place in Sufism. The roots of Sufi music can be traced back to the Qur'an, where the melodious voice of Prophet Dawood is mentioned.<sup>4</sup> "**Samā**" is an Arabic word meaning "**listening**." Over time, the term **Samā** has evolved, and in its figurative sense, it refers to listening to spiritual music or melodies. In Islamic terminology, **Samā** originally refers to listening to Quranic recitation, but in Sufi traditions, it has come to mean listening to devotional music and poetry. Allah Almighty mentions in the Holy Quran:

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ<sup>5</sup>

*So, when the Qur'an is recited, then listen to it and pay attention that you may receive mercy.*

In Sufi terminology, Music refers to a specific form of worship that includes listening to melodies especially recitation of Quran and Naat etc. This practice is believed to elevate the soul and bring the practitioner closer to the Divine.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dance>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/art/dance>

<sup>3</sup> Imam Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad Al Ghazali, The revival of religious sciences. Lahore: Shakeel Printing Press, 2002. V. 1, p. 464

<sup>4</sup> Hazrat Sheikh Ali Hajveri. Kashf al-Mahjūb, Lahore: Jamia Hanfia Ghausia. 1433 A.H. p. 540

<sup>5</sup> Al Quran. Al.A'raaf. 7. 204

<sup>6</sup> Syed Meer Sadiq Ali Akmal Haidrabadi. Qawwali Ameer Khusrō say Shakeela Bano tak. India: Lahoori Fine Arts Delhi. 1982 A.H. p. 64



## Literature Review:

This is a controversial topic that has been extensively discussed in many books on Sufism, as well as by its opponents. The topic has been addressed by scholars from all sects, each presenting their own perspective on the matter. This topic has been discussed in various books on Sufism including *Ihyā' al-'Ulūm*<sup>7</sup>, *"Risālah Qushayriyyah"*<sup>8</sup>, *"Kīmiyā-yi Sa'ādat"*<sup>9</sup>, *"Kashf al-Mahjūb"*<sup>10</sup>. Also discussed in *"Majmū' al-Fatāwā"*<sup>11</sup> by Ibn Taymiyyah, *"Talbīs Iblīs"*<sup>12</sup> by Ibn al Jawzī, *"Ighāthah al-Lahfān min Maṣāyid al-Shayṭān"*<sup>13</sup> by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. Apart from these books, some articles have also been written on this topic. Dr. Khawar Mansoor explores the Shariah perspective on dance by analyzing the thoughts of jurists in his study, *The Shariah Status of Dance*.<sup>14</sup> What is "Samā"? A research review in the light of Quran, sunnah and Sufism by Muhammad Hashim.<sup>15</sup> In these researches, Sufi scholars argue that if dancing is performed in the remembrance of Allah Almighty, it is not merely a dance but a state of spiritual ecstasy. Additionally, under certain conditions, dance is considered permissible. According to them, the key issue lies in the intention. That is, if the purpose is to seek closeness to Allah, then it becomes different from ordinary dance and if the music is in remembrance of Allah, it is considered recommended (Mustahabb) for those who are deeply close to Him.<sup>16</sup> However, in some research studies, it has not been declared completely non-permissible. Previous research studies have either defended Sufi dance as a spiritual practice or completely opposed it, but they lack a comparative analysis of different viewpoints. Imam Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim, have stated that music is permissible only of the

<sup>7</sup> Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad. *Ihyā' al-'Ulūm*. Karachi: Shakeel printing Press, 2002. V.2. p. 425-485

<sup>8</sup> Imam Kushayri, Abu al Qasim Abd al Karim ibn Hawazin al-kushayri. *Risālah Qushayriyyah*. Lahore: Mushtaq Karnars.2012. p. 705

<sup>9</sup> Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad. *Kīmiyā-yi Sa'ādat*. Lahore: Progressive books. 1999. p. 351.369

<sup>10</sup> Ali Hujwiri, Ali bin Usman Al hujwiri. *Kashf al-Mahjūb*. Lahore: Jamia Hanfia Ghausia. 1433 AH. P.601.239

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Abd al-Halim ibn Abd al-Salam, 1328 AH, *Majmu' al-Fatawa* (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Taymiyyah), vol. 11, pp. 535-536.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn al-Jawzi, Abdur Rahman ibn Abi al-Hasan Ali ibn Muhammad, d. 597 AH, *Talbīs Iblīs* (Lahore, Pakistan: Dar Iblagh Publishers, 2007), p. 323-375.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim, Shams al-Din Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Ayyub ibn Sa'd, 1350 AH, *Ighathat al-Lahfan min Masayid al-Shaytan* (Lahore: Maktabah Islamiya, 2017), pp. 305-339.

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/376846174\\_rqs\\_ky\\_shry\\_hyhtyftqa\\_k\\_afkar\\_ka\\_mtal\\_Shariah\\_Ruling\\_s\\_about\\_Dance\\_A\\_Study\\_of\\_Juristic\\_Approaches?\\_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/376846174_rqs_ky_shry_hyhtyftqa_k_afkar_ka_mtal_Shariah_Ruling_s_about_Dance_A_Study_of_Juristic_Approaches?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.tcais.net/ojs/index.php/alddurar/article/view/106/97>

<sup>16</sup> Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, vol. 2, p. 1102.



Quran. However, an interesting question arises: If sounds from birds are also musical in nature, would they also be considered impermissible? This raises a logical query regarding the nature of sound and its classification.

### **Research Gap:**

The previous research did not explore how various Islamic schools of thought, perceive this practice. This study addresses these gaps by examining both perspectives, analyzing Quranic interpretations, Sufi Dance in Turkey, in Pakistani weddings and assessing the modern transformation of Sufi dance along with the criticisms it faces.

### **Modern Adaptations:**

Current studies do not address the growing trend of Sufi dance in weddings and public events, especially those that involve modern interpretation

### **Cultural Adaptation:**

Studies fail to mention the differences between traditional Sufi dance and its contemporary forms, such as the costumes and performance styles seen in Turkey or Pakistani cultural events. Existing studies explore both Sufi dance and music together, covering their cultural, spiritual, and jurisprudential aspects. However, they do not address to Sufism and its practices, particularly Sufi Saints which holds a special spiritual status in the eyes of Allah fit into today's context and Shariah perspectives.

### **Research Methodology:**

The research methodology of this topic would typically involve a combination of qualitative and historical research.

### **The Prohibition and Sanctity of Dancing:**

The Dancing and Singing of the Sufis are a subject that has always been controversial, and writers have written a lot about its prohibition and sanctity. On the one hand, while some scholars and jurists have declared this practice as an innovation and illegal, other Sufis consider it a means of spiritual progress and closeness to Allah.

### **Dance in view of Sufis:**

#### **The permissibility of Dance:**

- **Dātā Ganj Bakhsh Ali bin Usmān Hājverī perspective:**

The 11th-century Sufi saint Ali Hajveri believed in balance and moderation in Sufism. He said that there is no basis for dancing in either Shariah or the Sufi path (Tariqah), and any person with reason and understanding can recognize this. All wise scholars agree that dance is a form of idle entertainment and falsehood. No great saint has ever approved of it. If someone says that the movements of a person in a state of wajd (spiritual ecstasy) or the actions of those trying to create such feelings (tawajud) are the same as dance, this is wrong. In short, dancing is bad for everyone, both religiously and logically, and it is impossible for true saints to engage in it. However, when a person is deeply absorbed in the love and remembrance of Allah, and their body reacts naturally, this should not be called "dance." Instead, it is an involuntary movement caused by spiritual intensity it is



not dancing or jumping for entertainment. Such a state cannot be fully explained in words.<sup>17</sup>

- **Imam Ghazali's perspective:** Imam Ghazali says that it is permissible for Sufis to dance during the hearing of the Quran, and there is no harm in it. If dancing were forbidden, Hazrat Aisha would not have watched the dancing of the Abyssinians who were performing in the courtyard of the mosque. However, prominent religious scholars and leaders of the community should refrain from such acts, as dancing is generally associated with entertainment. In order to maintain their dignity and their awe and power over the hearts, the great men should avoid all those things that are included in the form of entertainment. Their dignity is the dignity of religion and their awe is the awe of religion.<sup>18</sup> Imam Ghazali says that movement, dance and unity occur in hearing. In this regard, whatever is overwhelmed by this hearing and is done anxiously by it will not be derived from this regard. That is, Imam Ghazali considers dancing permissible under a specific spiritual condition, and not merely for entertainment or sensual desire.<sup>19</sup> Before knowing Imam Ghazali's view on dance, it is important to know what was the importance of this subject in his era (fifth and sixth centuries AH). At that time, this debate was in full swing between Sufis and jurists. Because many Sufis had adopted the method of Sama (Wajd), in which both music and dance were involved. Music was such that love poems were sung on musical instruments, and dance was such that Sufis would start dancing spontaneously to a poem.<sup>20</sup> Imam Ghazali had declared the music and dance of the Sufis to be correct in principle. However, he had fixed some rules and regulations for it. Imam Ghazali had become very inclined towards Sufism and Tariqat in his last years and he knew it was right to give such concessions to Sufis. Therefore, his discussion should be understood as supporting the special occupations of Sufis. The dancing of the common people, which is merely for the entertainment of nature and in which many un-Islamic matters are found, Imam Ghazali considered it as a form of worship. They did not consider it permissible.<sup>21</sup> However, to some extent, they believed that a little dancing by men on occasions of joy and mirth (pleasure) is permissible. In support of this, they describe the dancing of the Abyssinians and the Zangids on occasions of Eid, etc., which the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself witnessed, and Hazrat Aisha Siddiqah رضي الله عنها also saw this game of digging in the courtyard of the Prophet's Mosque (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in the company of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who was still a young woman.<sup>22</sup> With

<sup>17</sup> Ali Hajwayri. Kashf al-Mahjūb.v.2. P.636

<sup>18</sup> Ghazali. Ihya Ulum al-Din.v. 2.p. 418

<sup>19</sup> Ghazali, Imam Muhammad bin Muhammad Ghazali. Kimiya-e-Sa'adat. Delhi: Progressive Books. 2001. P. 399-420

<sup>20</sup> Ghazali. Kimiya-e-Sa'adat. V. 2.p 287-301

<sup>21</sup> Ghazali. Kimiya-e-Sa'adat.p.418

<sup>22</sup> Bukhari, Al-Jami' Al-Sahih, Kitab Al-Manqib, Chapter on the Story of the Abyssinian, Hadith 740, Vol. 2, p. 379





these examples, they prove that the ecstasy and state of the Sufis are also correct. Imam Ghazali, like other Sufis, does not consider ecstasy permissible and useful only for the advanced, but also considers it useful for the beginners. He says that ecstasy is of two types: one that occurs spontaneously and involuntarily, and the other that which is caused by effort. This second form is called tawajud. If there is no hypocrisy in tawajud, it is beneficial because it also helps in absorbing noble states within oneself, as the Prophet ﷺ said, *'Weep while reciting the Holy Quran, and if you can't cry, pretend to cry.'*<sup>23</sup> Imam Ghazali has described the Sufi dance and presence in great detail under the fifth etiquette of listening. He not only supports this dance but also supports it by explaining its etiquette(custom). These etiquettes include having a time, place and audience, the Sheikh understanding the condition and condition of the participants in the gathering, listening to the verses of the Qawwal with full attention and dedication, standing while dancing if there is no hypocrisy, and adapting to the people in standing.<sup>24</sup>

### **The prohibition of dance:**

#### **Imam Ibn al-Jawzi's perspective:**

Among the orthodox scholars who opposed the existence of the Sufis was Imam Al-Jawzi. His famous book Talbis Iblis has dedicated chapters to this, and these occupations have been described as a deception by Satan.<sup>25</sup> Ibn al-Jawzi says that these people clap their hands, ecstasy, make noise and tear their clothes when listening to music. They consider this as a means of approaching Allah, although all this is a deception of the devil. The hadiths and narrations that are used to prove this emotional state of ecstasy are baseless and the people whose incidents are narrated were following the way of the predecessors and there was no one among the companions who did such things. Whoever claims to be ecstatic and tears his clothes and does other such things that are against the Sharia, then surely Satan is playing with him. The hearts of the companions were very pure, but their ecstasy was only that they did nothing but supplication and supplication. They were pure in the fear of Allah and did not fall down. Anas bin Malik was asked that there are some people who, when the Quran is recited in front of them, faint and fall down. He said: This is the way of the Khawarij. Ibn Jawzi says that the Sufis get excited when they hear music and start clapping. In support of their behavior, they also narrate the actions of some elders, which are fabricated. Because clapping is a bad act that causes intoxication and leads a person to deviate from moderation. People of reason stay away from such things. According to the Quran, this action was that of the polytheists or Disbelievers who used to clap and sigh near the House of Allah.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Majah, Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Yazid Ibn Majah al-Rabi al-Qadhwini, d. 273 AH, Sunan Ibn Majah (Urdu Bazaar Lahore, Ishtiaq A. Mushtaq Printers, 2013), Book of Prayer, Chapter on the Good Voice in the Quran, Hadith 1337, Vol. 1, p. 500

<sup>24</sup> Imam Ghazali Kimiya-e-Sa'adat. P. 425-478

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Jawzi, Abdur Rahman bin Abi al-Hasan Ali bin Muhammad. 597 AH, Talbis Iblis (Lahore, Pakistan: Dar Ablab Publisher. 2007) p. 323

<sup>26</sup> -The Quran. Al-Anfal. 8:35



### **Ibn Taymiyyah's perspective:**

One of the ancient scholars who have invalidated the Dancing and listening of the Sufis is Ibn Taymiyyah. Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah has described Dancing and singing as forbidden and reprehensible in response to questions about the gatherings of the people of Sufism and the Tariqah that were held with them. Imam Ibn Taymiyyah was asked about the Shariah status of the gatherings of the Sufis where drums were played with a loud voice and the famous flutes of that era were played and men and women were present. It was claimed that such listening and listening achieves divine knowledge. Ibn Taymiyyah clearly declared this claim false and said that in this way, feelings of closeness to God and obedience to the truth do not develop at all. Rather, the Imams of the Din and the Four Imams are in agreement regarding such matters that they are forbidden. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, these matters are carried out due to amusement and play and not due to closeness to God.<sup>27</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah believes in the prohibition of musical instruments in light of the hadith in Sahih Bukhari, which mentions the punishment of Allah for those who make gold, silk, wine and musical instruments lawful.<sup>28</sup> He says that on this basis, the jurists believe in destroying musical instruments, and if they are destroyed, no one is responsible for them. Just as it is permissible to destroy images of spirits or to break wine and gold vessels, just as Hazrat Musa عليه السلام destroyed the artificial calf.<sup>29</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah describes these occupations of the Sufis as follows: In fact, their condition is that the devils descend upon them and incite them to love falsehood and immorality, and when one of them deviates from reason and religion, he becomes obedient to the devil and disobedient to the Most Gracious. These misguided people make strange and strange sounds like donkeys. Like other jurists, Ibn Taymiyyah has also argued from the Quran for the prohibition of dancing. He cites this fragment of a verse from Surah Luqman as evidence: "*And be gentle and moderate in your gait.*" In this regard, another verse is used in which Allah Almighty says: "*And the servants of the most gracious walk on the earth with gentleness.*"<sup>30</sup> All this After explaining something, they say that Muslim servants bow and prostrate, while Allah and His Messenger did not command us to play the drum and dance. And they say that the books of Sufism are full of weak and ambiguous hadiths.<sup>31</sup>

### **Opinion of Islamic Jurists:**

Islamic scholars have taken a strict stance on dance. Some have even called it disbelief and sin. They say that the dance performed by some Sufis involves body movements and rhythmic motions, which are a result of coordinated physical actions. Allama Shami, quoting Al-Qurtubi, writes in Al-Fatawa Al-Bazzaziyyah: "*There is a consensus among scholars that singing, musical instruments, and dance are forbidden*" Shaykh al-Islam Allama Karmani issued a fatwa stating:

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, Ahmad bin Abdul Halim bin Abdul Islam bin Taymiyyah. d. 728 AH, Majmu' al-Fatawa (Beirut: Dar al-Kutb al-Ilmiyah. 1425 AH). Vol. 11, p. 523-525.

<sup>28</sup> Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Ismail ibn Ibrahim ibn Al-Mughirah ibn bardizbah Al-Bukhari. Al jami' Al- Sahih. Book of Drinks, Chapter: "What has been mentioned about those who consider intoxicants lawful by calling them by other than their (real) name," Hadith 5590. V 6, P 571

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah. Majmu' al-Fatawa. V. 11. P. 535-536

<sup>30</sup> Al-Quran. Luqman. 31:19

<sup>31</sup> Al-Quran. Furqan. 25:63



Anyone who considers this type of dance as halal (permissible) is a disbeliever.. However, Nur al-Ayn states that such a person is not a disbeliever but a sinner.<sup>32</sup>

### **Songs and Music in view of Sufis:**

#### **Singing:**

Singing is a spiritual state that gives a person a feeling of joy, peace and contentment in the love and remembrance of Allah. Linguistically, singing means a state of joy, happiness and ecstasy, which leaves a deep impression on the heart and mind of a person. In Sufism, singing is considered a means of achieving spiritual peace and closeness to Allah. It is a state that frees a person from worldly conflicts and takes him to a higher spiritual level.

In the state of singing, an individual feels a spiritual happiness by being absorbed in the remembrance or worship of Allah. This state is often created through listening.

#### **Listening as a Sufi:**

#### **Literal and figurative meanings of listening:**

Samā is an Arabic word whose literal meaning is to listen. Accordingly, the word Samā' was formed whose figurative meaning is to hear melody.

#### **The term Samā' means:**

In Quranic terminology, "Sima" means listening to the verses of the Quran, and in Sufi terminology, "Sima" is a specific form of worship that includes listening to music.

33 وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

*And when the Qur'an was recited, listen to it and listen so that you may have mercy.*

Allah says:

34 فَبَشِّرْ عِبَادِ ۚ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ

*"So give glad tidings to those servants of mine who listen carefully and follow what is better."*

The state of ecstasy that comes upon those who recite and listen to the Holy Quran, the state of ecstasy that comes upon those who listen to and recite the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the state, ecstasy, and state that one feels upon hearing the true stories of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), his companions, and his saints, all of these are called "Samā'".

**Listening to Sufis:** The great religious leaders had sought various means for purifying the soul and purifying the soul. One of them was listening to poems containing praise and naat with pleasant melodies. A special group of Sufis did not feel any religious prohibition in listening to these poems with the drum, and since this means was related to listening, they adopted it by giving it the term 'listening' and adopting it permanently. The chapter under discussion is about this listening.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn Abidin Shami, Muhammad Amin bin Umar bin Abdul Aziz Abidin (d. 1836), Hashiyah Radd al-Muhtar 'ala al-Durr al-Mukhtar (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1979), Vol. 6, pp. 408-409.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Quran. Al-A'raf. 7:204

<sup>34</sup> Al-Quran. Az-Zumar. 39:17-18





Listening is a behavior for Sufis. In Sufi terminology, behavior is a specific path that connects the servant with his master. That is, listening is a special means of reaching the truth for Sufis. In other words, for the listeners, it is a specific way of worship.<sup>35</sup>

### **Listening to poetry and its related matters:**

Listening to poetry is permissible and the Prophet ﷺ heard it and the Companions (sahaba) رضوان الله عليهم also said and heard it. He ﷺ said:

إِنَّ مِنَ الشَّعْرِ لِحِكْمَةٍ

*"Indeed, there is wisdom in poetry." <sup>36</sup>*

### **The Era of the Invention of Sama:**

Sama is an invention of the era of Imam Shafi, i.e., the second century Hijri.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Opinion of Jurists Regarding Samā:**

The practice of music has sparked debate among Islamic scholars throughout History. Some scholars, like Imam Ghazali<sup>38</sup> and Ali Hajveri,<sup>39</sup> deemed it permissible. As long as it served the purpose of increasing devotion and spiritual focus. They said that if practiced within limits and for remembrance of Allah almighty, it could serve as a means of spiritual elevation.

**On the other hand**, some scholars strongly opposed it. Qazi Abu al-Tayyib Tabari has quoted Imam Shafi'i, Imam Malik, Imam Abu Hanifa, Sufyan Thawri, and several other scholars, stating that these figures were of the opinion that listening to music (Sama') was prohibited. Except for Ibrahim ibn Sa'd, this was the stance of all the people of Madinah.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Imam Ibn Taymiyyah, Imam Ibn Qayyim, and Imam Ibn al-Jawzi also took a strict stance against Sama' and declared it impermissible. Meanwhile, Abu Talib Maki holds the view that Sama' is permissible.

### **Imam Ghazali condition of Samā:**

Imam Ghazali has established the etiquettes (Adab) and obstacles of Sama'.

#### **First Condition:**

Consideration of time, place, and the presence of one's companions.

#### **Second Condition:**

The Sheikh (spiritual guide) should consider the state of the disciples and avoid presenting Sama' in front of those disciples who may be harmed by it or those for whom there is a concern that it may negatively affect them.

#### **Third Condition:**

One should listen with full attention, keeping the ears open and without looking around.

<sup>35</sup> Akmal Haider Abadi, Syed Mir Sadiq Ali Akmal Haiderabadi. 1982AH. Qawwali Ameer Khusrau say Shakila Bano Tak (Bhopal India: Lahoti Fine Art Press Delhi, 1982) p. 64

<sup>36</sup> Hajveri. Kashf al-Mahjub. p. 612

<sup>37</sup> Akmal Haider Abadi, Syed Mir Sadiq Ali Akmal Haider Abadi. Qawwali from Amir Khusrau say Shakila Bano Tak. p. 77

<sup>38</sup> Ghazali. Ihya Ulum al-Din. V. 2. P. 1066-1188

<sup>39</sup> Hajveri. Kashf al-Mahjub. p. 601-639

<sup>40</sup> Ghazali, Ihya' Ulum al-Din, Vol. 2, pp. 1069-1070.



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#### **Fourth Condition:**

One should not stand or raise their voice loudly unless they are able to maintain control.

#### **Fifth Condition:**

If a person who is truly in a state of spiritual sincerity stands up, everyone should follow his example, as it is important to respect the companions and friends.<sup>41</sup>

#### **Etiquettes and Precautions to Sufi music according to Imam Ghazali:**

- If the singer is a woman or a young handsome boy, there is a possibility of corruption.
- The instrument used in Music should not be associated with corruption or immorality.
- The poetry recited should not include reference to metaphorical beauty or worldly desires.
- The listener should not be overwhelmed by sexual desires or passions.<sup>42</sup>

#### **Influential Sufi figures who practice Dance and Songs**

##### **Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi:**

One of the most prominent figures linked to Sufi Dance is Rumi. His assemblies of Samā played a key role in his teachings, inspiring his followers to develop the “whirling dervish” dance. In this meditative practice, participants spin as a means of seeking spiritual closeness to Allah. Often referred to as “Rumi’s dance,” this form of Samā is celebrated as a profound expression of spirituality.

##### **Hazrat Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti:**

In the Chishti tradition (although some scholars differ), music holds a central place in spiritual practices. It is regarded as a method for achieving spiritual ecstasy and awakening. This practice involves engaging with mystical poetry and Qawwali, where the harmonious blend of music and lyrics draws listeners into a profound state of meditation and closeness to the Divine.

##### **Sama and Dance in Modern turkey**

Today, Rumi’s legacy continues to inspire the Mevlevi Sufi order in Turkey. In particular, the city of Konya where Rumi is buried-has become a center for annual Samā ceremonies.

#### **The dance and music of Sufi saints in present age:**

Allama Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ahmad Qurtubi writes:

The Quran has condemned actions like whistling and clapping, which serves as a refutation of those ignorant Sufis who engage in dancing, clapping, and pretending unconsciousness.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ghazali. Ihya Ulum al-Din. V. 2. P. 1175

<sup>42</sup> Akmal Haider Abadi, Syed Mir Sadiq Ali Akmal Haider Abadi. Qawwali Ameer Khusrau say Shakila Bano Tak. p. 71-72

<sup>43</sup> Qurtubi, Allama Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ahmad Qurtubi. 1273 AH. Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1415 AH), Vol. 7, p. 359.



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### **Sufi Dance and music in present age:**

Sufi Dance in the present age: In Turkey, gatherings are held where people wear a specific outfit, consisting of a white robe and a cap on top, and perform the whirling dance, which is officially recorded. Similarly, this dance is now also practiced in Pakistan, and it has even started being performed at Pakistani weddings. In light of this situation, we should think about how we are mocking the revered figures of Sufism. Seeing this, our younger generation, who are distant from Islam and unaware of the concepts in Sufi literature, may interpret this as a part of Islam and consider it a spiritual practice. Fake Sufis perform qawwali and dance in ways that are entirely contrary to the authentic practices of ancient Sufism. In Pakistan, qawwalis and dance (once a spiritual form of Samā) are now performed as part of weddings ceremonies.

### **Conclusion:**

The dance and music of Sufi saints is a controversial issue that is not established by definitive evidence (dalil qat'i) but rather based on speculative evidence (dalil zanni). This is why there is a difference of opinion between jurists and Sufis regarding this matter. On one side, there are scholars and Sufis who consider Sama' and Wajd (spiritual ecstasy) to be permissible, while on the other side, some jurists declare it impermissible and present their arguments against it. However, all scholars agree that if music or Sama' contains obscenity, sensuality, or unlawful acts, then it is undoubtedly prohibited and forbidden. As for the type of Sama' that is free from obscenity, there is a difference of opinion. Some scholars consider it permissible, while others regard it as an innovation (bid'ah) and impermissible, and both sides have their respective arguments. A group of Sufi saints considers it a means of attaining spiritual states, purifying the heart, and engaging in the remembrance of Allah, provided that it is free from pretense, ostentation, or heedlessness. They cite examples from the lives of the Companions (Sahaba) and statements of great scholars such as Imam Ghazali, who permitted it under certain conditions. On the other hand, some jurists emphasize that dance and music generally lead to carelessness and disrupt sincerity in worship, which is why they strictly prohibit it. Over time, the nature of this practice has changed. In ancient times, Sama' and dance were expressions of spiritual ecstasy, but today, they have mostly become a source of entertainment, worldly pleasure, and heedlessness. This is why Sufi masters imposed strict conditions, stating that it should be performed only in the context of worship, jihad, lawful love, and occasions of joy, with pure intentions. Among Hanafi jurists, some accepted it under specific conditions, while other jurists strongly opposed it. In the modern era, the form of dance and music has changed even further, and in most places, it has become a part of entertainment and gatherings of heedlessness, which has diminished its original spiritual essence. For example, in Turkey, the well-known Sufi dance performed in special attire (a long robe and a woolen hat) was originally done in remembrance of Allah as a tribute to Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi. Initially, this dance was a spiritual practice, but today, it has turned into a tourist attraction and entertainment activity, with hour-long performances and large audiences gathering just to watch. Similarly, in Pakistan, the same Sufi outfit is now worn at weddings for dance performances, which have become merely a cultural tradition and a form of entertainment. As a result, the true spiritual



teachings of the Sufis and the original purpose of Wajd and Sama' have been forgotten, and its real essence no longer remains. The early Sufis' Wajd and Sama' were purely for the remembrance of Allah, but today, it has largely turned into a form of entertainment, spectacle, and mere dance practice. As we have studied, pretense, ostentation, and turning any act into a mere habit are not permissible. Therefore, such practices contradict the true teachings of the Sufi saints and amount to a distortion of their legacy.

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