Unseen Power: Aesthetic Dimensions of Symbolic Healing in *Qawwālī*

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Thursday evenings at *Tajbagh*, the tomb shrine, or *dargah* of Tajuddin Baba (d. AH 1344/1925) of Nagpur, India, are punctuated by milling crowds of worshippers, the sweet smell of burning incense, and the sounds of *Qawwālī* music. What is it that draws these men and women, old and young, rich and poor, to enter into this impoverished neighborhood with their families, contend with the persistent beggars and other inconveniences, simply for the privilege of paying their respects at the tomb of a man who died over eighty years ago? What role, if any, does *Qawwālī* play in drawing them here? This article approaches *Qawwālī* from the disciplines of ethnomusicology and the history of religions. My primary interest is in the coextensive nature of music and religion, exploring different understandings of their nearly universal appearance together in human culture. Due to the historically controversial place of music in Islam, I find *Qawwālī* a particularly interesting topic in this regard. While individual Muslim thinkers draw differing conclusions regarding the place of music in Islam, virtually all writers on music in Islam regard music as a powerful force which has the potential to impact human behavior, either for good or ill.

In this article I consider *Qawwālī* as a case study in the broader issue of music and religion cross-culturally. I make the claim that *Qawwālī* is one element of an everyday aesthetic that informs and contributes to the symbolic healing experienced by worshippers at *Tajbagh* and in other *dargahs* across South Asia. This symbolic healing, of which the performance of *Qawwālī* is one element, is an affirmation of collective memory which asserts for the worshipper the importance of their Islamic heritage, Sufi ideology, and belief in the unseen, as it contributes to the individual's formation of a symbolic cultural self. I suggest this analysis as neither reductive nor essentialist, but,

rather, as a heuristic approach to understanding one aspect of the significance of the coextensive nature of music and religion cross-culturally, and, specifically, in the practice of *Qawwālī* in South Asia.

I begin with a case study describing a *Qawwālī* performance at *Tajbagh*, the *dargah*, or tomb-shrine, of Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur, India. In support of my argument I draw on anthropological theory, employing elements of James Dow's[1] articulation of the idea of symbolic healing, expanding the concept to include religious behavior in general, not simply religious or spiritual healing. Dow suggests that a common, universal structure can be discerned cross-culturally in religious healing, shamanism, and Western psychotherapy. What he refers to as symbolic healing might well be discussed through the lens of psychological theory. Dow's anthropological approach is preferable, however, to psychological theory because the concept of symbolic healing works well within cross-cultural applications and avoids much of the jargon commonly found in psychological theory, while at the same time retaining the sense of individual transformation effected through specific healing practices. Essentially, this approach suggests that healing occurs when a symbolic narrative of illness or suffering is persuasively rewritten in a way that positively affects and transforms the individual's experience of suffering into constructive, life affirming expressions of thought and behavior. In order to adapt Dow's ideas on symbolic healing to my analysis of *Qawwālī*, I incorporate anthropologist Jacob Pandian's[2] ideas regarding the symbolic cultural self and its role in establishing religious and social identity. In addition, I apply Robert Dejarlais'[3] understanding of what he calls the aesthetic of everyday life as the basis for approaching the contextual influences within which *Qawwālī* performance takes place, and use this concept to contextualize the role of *Qawwālī* in symbolic healing at *Tajbagh*. I identify three key values that I see as being important themes in the aesthetics of everyday life at *Tajbagh*. These are: performance, memory, and belief in the unseen. I elaborate on my understanding of how these values relate to the role of *Qawwālī* in symbolic healing at *Tajbagh*, and close with a discussion of my conclusions.

Tajbagh: The Dargah of Tajuddin Baba

Tajbagh is situated on the outskirts of the city of Nagpur, which is located in the northeastern corner of the state of Maharashtra, India. The *dargah* is approximately fifteen kilometers from the city center (Figure 1). *Tajbagh* is the name given to both the *dargah* of Tajuddin Baba, and to as to the general vicinity of the *dargah*. The surrounding area is quite poor and underdeveloped, with a series of small shops lining the final kilometer or so stretch of the approach road to leading to the shrine.

Figure 1. Tajbagh, the* dargah *of Tajuddin Baba (d. AH 1344/1925) of Nagpur, MS, India.

Although I had already visited the *dargah* several times previously, this was to be my first visit at night. As I bumped along the road in a hired black and yellow scooter-rickshaw, the gathering darkness obscured some of the worst squalor and dilapidation of the hutments and shops surrounding the main compound of the *dargah*. The night air carried a variety of competing scents, which were punctuated by a sooty mixture of smoke and diesel exhaust. The colorful lights hanging from countless stalls selling *chadars* (tomb cloths or shrouds), *prasad* (sweets), flowers, pictures of Tajuddin Baba, and a host of other devotional knick-knacks that the visiting pilgrim might find appealing provided the eye with a welcoming array of color.

The population of visitors on this evening was very different from the smaller crowds of mainly lower income pilgrims that I had seen on my earlier visits. Although there may have been just as many beggars and poor people there now as there had been previously, their numbers seemed less significant now, as I looked out upon the milling Thursday night throngs of middle and upper class Muslims who had come to observe the traditional Thursday evening festivities in remembrance of the dead. My visit on this evening was in the hope of making recordings of some of the local musicians. Such

festivities at a *dargah* usually include the presence of *Qawwāls*, and the performance of *Qawwālī*, and I had been assured that, as usual, *Qawwālī* music would be performed on this occasion.

As I entered the large marble tiled verandah, I saw a much larger crowd there than I had seen on any of my previous visits, several hundred people at least. The entire atmosphere was more like that of a carnival than anything else, multiple layers of social interaction taking place, not all of it religious in nature, yet, at the same time, the powerful presence of the saint and the proximity of religious and institutional symbols were ever present in the background. It seemed that for many of the attendees this was primarily a social occasion, in the same way that taking in a sermon at church on Sunday morning might be as much a social occasion as a religious one. There were families with children, older people, and people from all walks of life mingling, shouting greetings, laughing, kissing and comforting a crying child, other children running and laughing among those who were simply seated on the verandah and drinking in the powerful presence of the saint. Small cliques of three or four same-gender teenagers could be seen from time to time, milling about and talking in much the same way teenagers in shopping malls in the US can be seen on weekend evenings. All of these activities, however, have very different social structures governing their enactment. The spiritual presence of the saint on the one hand, and the institutional presence of Islamic religious observance on the other, provide both an implicit and an explicit sub-text to the proceedings, ensuring that all behaviors fall within certain acceptable guidelines. Amid the many social activities there were individuals who obviously regarded the occasion with more seriousness, some seated or kneeling in prayer or quiet meditation, others crowding into the inner confines of the tomb itself in order to make a flower offering to the saint, place a *chadar* or other offering on the tomb, say a prayer, and receive the blessings of the saint.

Before long I encountered a friend from an earlier visit, and he introduced me to a young man named Niyaz Rangeel. Niyaz is a resident of the nearby low-income section of *Tajbagh*. He was the singer scheduled to lead the *Qawwālī* program on this evening. Niyaz and I chatted for awhile, I took his photograph and received his permission to record his performance. Before long he rushed off to make preparations for the program.

After some time had passed, one of my friends said, "Look, it is beginning! If you want to record him you'd better come quickly!" I was then nearly dragged to the front of the verandah, near the doorway of the tomb, and instructed to sit almost immediately adjacent to Niyaz, who sat facing the doorway of the tomb, so that he would in effect be singing directly to the saint. This I did gladly, and as Niyaz began to sing and the crowd became focused

Figure 2. Niyaz Rangeel,* Qawwal *singing at the* dargah *of Tajuddin Baba, Nagpur, MS India.

on his performance, I turned on my tape recorder and began recording his performance, occasionally taking photographs of the singer and his small *Qawwālī* party (Figure 2).

Symbolic Healing

The idea of *Qawwālī* having a healing aspect is not a new concept in Sufi music studies. In his study of *Qawwālī*, Adam Nayyar[4] observes that *Qawwālī* has long been understood by participants and observers as contributing to psychological well-being.

> The therapeutic effects of *Qawwālī* were always generally known and indigenous doctors often told mentally disturbed individuals to attend *Qawwālī* sessions. Spiritual leaders even today often take their mentally disturbed followers to a *Qawwālī* session with the object of exposing them to the harmony and therapeutic powers of the music and words.
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> Aware of this effect of *Qawwālī* and himself deeply interested in it, an eminent Pakistani psychiatrist is using '*Qawwālī* therapy' on some of his patients with marked success. While still in an experimental stage, this powerful medium can surely provide an effective indigenization of occidental therapeutic techniques (14).

Not just *Qawwālī*, but music itself is often understood to have therapeutic qualities. Moreno,[5] Steekler,[6] Cook,[7] Winkelman,[8] and many others have spoken to the positive effects of music on both psychological and

physiological health, and Rouget[9] has explored the use of music cross-culturally in healing practices involving trance states. These studies, however, do not speak to the element of religious narrative combined with music. Benjamin Koen,[10] in his study of devotional music and healing in Tajikistan, moves closer to the element of religious narrative in healing practices, proposing the term "music-prayer dynamics" for cross-cultural explorations of the relationship between prayer, meditation, and music. While *Qawwālī* can and often does include prayer and meditation, it is also much more. *Qawwālī* itself is a religious practice, and while, due to the controversial status of music in Islam, the musical element is often said to be secondary to the sung texts, in *Qawwālī*, religion and music become *coextensive*. In *Qawwālī*, we reach the nodal point where it becomes impossible to separate music from religion, religion from music. As such, we find that we have encountered a third phenomenon, a phenomenon which is neither music nor religion alone, but inextricably both simultaneously. No single theory of music or of religion, then, can fully describe nor account for the popularity nor the perceived benefits of *Qawwālī* in South Asian Islamic religious practice. I suggest symbolic healing as one way of approaching an understanding of the coextensive nature of music and religion in *Qawwālī* performance.

James Dow borrows the term "symbolic healing" from Daniel Moerman.[11] Dow suggests that a common, universal structure can be discerned cross-culturally in religious healing, shamanism, and Western psychotherapy. In Dow's words, "The structure proposed is as follows":

1. The experience of healers and healed are generalized with culture-specific symbols in cultural myth.
2. A suffering patient comes to a healer who persuades the patient that the problem can be defined in terms of the myth.
3. The healer attaches the patient's emotions to transactional symbols particularized from the general myth.
4. The healer manipulates the transactional symbols to help the patient transact his or her own emotions.[12]

I suggest that, with some adaptation, Dow's proposed universal structure for symbolic healing can be a useful way to understand patterns in religious behavior in general, not just healing practices. In taking this position, I am adapting Dow's model beyond his original intention. Even in its more formal *maḥfil-i-samāʿ* (assembly for listening) form, *Qawwālī* performance does not precisely parallel Dow's proposed universal structure for symbolic healing. In order to make a better fit, I incorporate some of the ideas of Jacob Pandian.

Pandian sees religious behaviors in relation to culturally formulated concepts of identity and self. According to Pandian, an individual attempts to formulate a symbolic cultural self through the integration of sacred beings and powers. Pandian builds upon the concepts of symbolic interactionist theory.

As he puts it, "Symbolic interactionist theory posits that one's own self is a symbolic representation, an object in relation to the selves (objects) of others, and in this manner the self is created and re-created in the processes of human interaction."[13] When the symbolic self interacts with the sacred self, the individual incorporates new ways of coping with a threatening world. As Pandian says,

> Religion does not eliminate suffering or death, but it eliminates the contradictions between cultural formulations of suffering, death, and the symbolic self by constituting and maintaining the symbolic self as sacred, rendering the symbolic self into a coherent, meaningful system of action despite the existence of 'natural' inconsistencies and problems.[14]
>
> Symbols of the self (the symbolic self) signify the characteristics and meanings of what it is to be human. Symbols of the sacred other signify the existence and characteristics of supernatural beings, entities, and powers; linkages between the symbolic self and the sacred other occur in different ways in different domains.[15]

While there is no one explicitly assigned the role of healer in a *Qawwālī* program, it is possible to interpret the sheikh, the saint, anyone associated with the lineage of the shrine, or even *Allah* as healer, the worshipper understood as the one seeking to be healed. The ailment, in this case, is consciousness of separateness from the beloved, from the lineage of the shrine, from Islam, from God. When understood in Pandian's terms as symbols of the sacred other, these figures represent sacred values, characteristics, and ways of being in the world, the integration of which heals the subjective experience of separation from God and community and creates a coherent social identity for the individual through the formulation of a symbolic cultural self.

Aesthetics of Everyday Life

Anthropologist Robert Dejarlais[16] sees concepts of well being as flowing from local cultural understandings of everyday values and social tastes. In Dejarlais' view, the specifics of what constitutes health or illness are culturally determined by what he calls "an aesthetics of everyday life." He states,

> Loss, darkness, and a downhill descent: in my estimation, the way in which Mingma evaluated his pain, the way in which he gave form and meaning to his malaise and experienced the healing process, was patterned by an implicit, politically driven 'aesthetics' of everyday life . . . I use the term 'aesthetics' in a slightly irregular fashion, not to define any overt artistry or performative genres — art, music, poetry — but rather to grasp (and tie together) the tacit leitmotivs that shape cultural constructions of bodily and social interactions. I see such aesthetic

> forms. . . . as embodied through the visceral experience of cultural actors rather than articulated through concrete artistic or philosophic tenets. With the term 'aesthetics of experience,' then, I refer to the tacit cultural forms, values, and sensibilities — local ways of being and doing — that lend specific styles, configurations, and felt qualities to local experiences.[17]

In applying Dejarlais' approach to my approach to understanding the role of *Qawwālī* in symbolic healing at *Tajbagh*, I use the concept of "the aesthetics of everyday life" as a way to contextualize *Qawwālī* performance locally, and in the broader context of Islam. To do this I identify some of the ". . . the tacit leitmotivs that shape cultural constructions of bodily and social interactions . . ." and the ". . . tacit cultural forms, values, and sensibilities — local ways of being and doing — that lend specific styles, configurations, and felt qualities to local experiences . . ." at *Tajbagh*. There are countless ways to quantify these leitmotivs. Dejarlais lists and elaborates upon a series of broad cultural values that his field experience suggested to him were key in understanding the healing practices of the Yolmo people of Nepal. For this article I have chosen a less ambitious list of three key values which I see as useful in understanding the role of *Qawwālī* performance in symbolic healing at *Tajbagh*. The values I have chosen are performance, memory, and belief in the unseen.

Performance

The subject of performance and aesthetics is broad. Before discussing the specifics of the importance of performance at *Tajbagh*, it will be helpful to look at performance issues in general. Thomas Csordas[18] identifies four main streams of performance theory and relates them to the performance of healing rituals. The first stream sees performance as a specific *event*, the second sees performance as taking place within certain *genres*, the third sees performance as specific performative *acts*, and the fourth sees performance as an articulation of a certain *rhetoric* which persuades the participant to adapt in some way to a different point of view. This last point corresponds directly to Csordas' view that the ". . . effectivity of ritual healing is constituted by distinctly definable rhetorical devices that 'persuade' the patient to attend to his intrapsychic and interpersonal environment in a new and coherent way."[19] This corresponds to Dow's assertion that "A suffering patient comes to a healer who persuades the patient that the problem can be defined in terms of a myth," cited earlier.

Csordas sees performance events as large public healing services, analogous to the Thursday night gatherings at *Tajbagh*. He sees the genres of performance relating to the three levels of healing body, mind and spirit. In this sense one can see the kind of worship experience at *Tajbagh* which I am

describing as symbolic healing as most closely related to healing of mind and spirit. Csordas sees performative acts in healing as relating to ". . . discrete gestures or verbal formulae construed primarily as acts of empowerment, protection, revelation, and deliverance."[20] In the context of *Tajbagh*, such acts can be understood both as acts performed by worship participants, or as acts performed by the *Qawwals* in their performance duties, or acts performed by any number of other institutional figures operating in some official capacity at the shrine. Simply visiting the *dargah* is in itself a performative act which brings the devotee into the aura of the saint's *baraka*, or spiritual power. This sense is demonstrably acted out by the participants, who invariably approach the tomb of the saint in some explicitly reverential way: kissing the threshold, bowing the head, covering the head, touching the tomb and then the area of the heart repeatedly, making an offering of flowers, etc. For Csordas the rhetoric of performance is represented by the doctrinal specifics articulated in the verbal formulae. The sung *Qawwālī* texts themselves represent verbal formulae that explicitly empower the individual worshipper to participate in the traditions of Sufism and Islam, and specifically the traditions of the saint, and to grow nearer and nearer in proximity to *Allah*. All of these activities imply the tacit protection offered by the *baraka* of the saint, and of *Allah*.

In addition to the performative actions and rhetorical functions already discussed, the *Qawwals* provide an aural sub-text to the entire proceedings, enlivening the atmosphere and moving the hearts and minds of the participants on many levels, not just through the communication of religious ideology and doctrine. This is the juncture where music and religion become coextensive. The insistent emotionality of the singer's delivery, the repetitive rhythm of the *dholak* (hand drum), and the response of the accompanying vocalists communicate the immediacy of the present moment experience of worship and the proximity and accessibility of the *baraka* of the saint. Ethnomusicologist John Blacking observes that "As a metaphor of feeling, [music] can both reflect and generate a special kind of social experience."[21] This is true of the *Qawwālī* performance, which articulates a religious feeling that is often lost when one attempts to clothe it in words. Serious religious feeling, however, is not the only emotion communicated through *Qawwālī* performance. Donald Brenneis[22] describes the importance of playfulness in the performance of *bhajan kavvali* in Indian Fiji communities. This light-hearted attitude can often be seen in performance of South Asian *Qawwālī* and helps to balance the supremely serious topics that are expressed in the *Qawwālī* texts, which so often emphasize the pain of separation and longing. Some of these texts parallel very closely what Marina Roseman[23] describes as "the aesthetics of longing" among the Temiar people of the Malaysian rain forests. In the *Qawwālī* texts the longing is not for a healing spirit guide, but for God

as the divine beloved. Such texts articulate the individual's subjective experience of separation from the sacred other, as well as affirming the immediacy of the accessibility of the sacred other. Through the combination of music and text, the worshipper experiences a subjective sense of symbolic healing through the linkage of the symbolic cultural self with the sacred other.

Memory

Central in importance to the aesthetics of performance is the ability of the performer to evoke in the participant this longing for a profound experience of communion with the divine. Another way to understand the evocation of this longing is as the activation of memory. Most Sufi orders practice some form of ritualized remembrance of God through the repetition of divine names and formulas, known as *dhikr* (literally, remembering). When the *Qawwālī* performance is understood as an extension and elaboration of *dhikr*, it can be seen as an explicitly proactive form of remembrance. In addition, the *Qawwālī* performance can be understood as a process of social identity creation through the activation of the socio-cultural memory of the spiritual lineage of the shrine. Although this activation of memory is a looking back in order to establish present time identity, it is also a vision of the future made present by bridging the phenomenal world through entering into the possibility of imminent communion with the Divine Beloved. Thus, by remembering the deceased saint, the *Qawwālī* performance invokes the memory of the entire lineage of spiritual leaders back to the founder of Islam, and beyond. The performance of memory enacted in the *Qawwālī* ritual, then, establishes a social identity that is supported by both the immediate community, and that community's spiritual ancestors. The fulfillment of this vision is expressed by the medieval Chishti poet Amir Khusro (d. AH 725/1325), often considered to be the founding father of *Qawwālī*, and composer of some of the most famous *Qawwālī* texts; the following Persian poem is called *nimi danam koja raftam* ("I do not know where I vanished"):

> I know not in what state and in what wondrous place I found myself last night. Victims of love ecstatic danced all around me where I found myself last night, God himself was Lord of this assembly — O Khusro, partaker of the infinite Muḥammad was the Beloved illuminating that wondrous place where I found myself last night.[24]

Although the presence of *Qawwals* at *Tajbagh* is a reminder to the worshipper of the general accessibility of the lineage of Islamic holy men and women back to the Prophet, and to *Allah*, it is specifically a reminder of the presence of the saint, Tajuddin Baba. Although the only accounts that we have of Tajuddin Baba's life are hagiographic, the story that emerges is an interesting one and is well known to all of those pilgrims who have more than just a passing

interest in the shrine. For us, his story is an essential element in understanding the every day aesthetics of *Tajbagh*.

Tajuddin is associated with two Sufi sheikhs, the Quadiri sheikh Hazrat Abdulla Shah (late 19th century) of Nagpur and Hazrat Daood Chishti (late 19th century) of Sagar. His first contact with a Sufi *pir* was at the tender age of six, when the local saint Hazrat Abdulla Shah visited Tajuddin's school in Nagpur. One account reports that the saint,

> . . . gazed at Tajuddin, took out a piece of sweetmeat from his bag, chewed a bit of it and thrust the rest into Tajuddin's mouth. He then told one of the teachers standing by: 'What can you teach him? He is already well taught in his previous life.' And, addressing the young Tajuddin, he said: 'Eat little, Sleep little, and Talk little. While reading Qur'ān, read as though the holy Prophet Mohammed has descended upon you.'
>
> This strange incident effected a profound change in Tajuddin. Tears flowed from his eyes continuously for three days and he lost all interest in play and childish pranks. He sought solitude and was always found reading the works of great Sufi Saints and reflecting upon their profound significance.[25]

Later in life, in his late teens, Tajuddin began visiting Hazrat Daood Chishti in Sagar and began following his instructions. He soon fell into a state of *majdhubyat* (intense attraction to God) and was taken for a madman by most who encountered him. Taunted by children, rejected by his family and friends, he was eventually committed for life to the Nagpur insane asylum by British officials who had been offended by his bizarre behavior. Some time prior to being committed, however, he had already begun to attract a following of local people who understood his condition very differently from the way the British authorities understood it.

The idea of the individual who is so absorbed with thoughts of God that he or she does not function well in the physical world is not uncommon in Islam. As Carl Ernst points out, "Collections of Sufi biographies sometimes contain appendices giving the lives of intoxicated saints, who have been attracted (*majdhub*) to God with such force that their intellects have been overpowered."[26] Michael Dols has compiled a study of attitudes towards madness and sanctity in medieval Islam, surveying the history of Islamic medicine and its response to mental illness, with interesting sections on the idea of the "holy fool" and the *majdhub*. In this work he summarizes one writer's understanding of the *majdhub*.

> . . . the mystical call of the Sufi or dervish may be so sudden and the person may follow it so quickly that he is believed to have become mentally deranged. In fact, this state, being *majdhub*, was believed to

> be the normal beginning in the careers of many dervishes. The *majdhub* forgets all earthly things and follows only the internal call, living — so to speak — with his Caller. Being completely absorbed by his inner life, his outer existence is characterized by disconnected speech, repeating one and the same sentence, and roaming aimlessly in the streets or fields . . .[27]

The preceding paragraph captures nicely the way in which many of the local people of Nagpur understood the state of Tajuddin Baba. As time went on, miraculous powers were attributed to the saint, and soon literally thousands of people were coming to visit him in the mental hospital. Eventually, a new gate had to be built on the grounds in order to accommodate the throngs. It is reported that the head of the hospital himself eventually became a devotee, and frequently went to his patient for advice. He would have preferred to release his patient but British authorities refused to allow it (Figure 3).

It is the memory of this man, his historical relationship with the British authorities, and the general local understanding of his spiritual status, that is called to mind by the pilgrims to *Tajbagh*. The understanding is that Taj Baba, as he is affectionately known, spent much of his life in a state of divine absorption, in communion with the divine, that he was a *wali* (friend) of *Allah*. As a friend of God, the saint is understood to have the 'ear' of God, and, much like the Virgin Mother in Christianity, has the ability to intercede for the devotee and bring him or her into the kind of close communion with God that Taj Baba himself enjoyed. The texts that are sung during the *Qawwālī* programs are often chosen with the intention of affirming this understanding. To deliberately align oneself with these ideas and values serves to assist the worshipper in developing an internalized sense of the symbolic cultural self discussed earlier. This alignment facilitates a healing of the separation between the individual's symbolic cultural self and the sacred other.

Belief in the Unseen

Belief in the unseen is an implicit element of virtually all religious practice. Rarely, however, is it so explicitly stated as in the following verses of the Qur'ān.

> This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah.
>
> Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them;
>
> And who believe in the Revelation sent to thee, and sent before thy time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the Hereafter — Sura 2:3–4.[28]

Figure 3. **Dargah** ***of Tajuddin Baba, at the Nagpur Regional Mental Hospital, Nagpur, MS, India.***

This passage explicitly promises divine guidance to those who "believe in the Unseen." Such belief is an important sub-text to all of the activities at *Tajbagh*, and undergirds and informs the *Qawwālī* performance, the message of the sung texts, and the activation of collective memory. Although by no means an exclusively Islamic or Sufi belief, it is precisely this imperative to believe in the unseen that makes the deliberate acts of remembrance essential.

In Sufi poetry and ideology, a common way to represent the unseen is through the idea of the 'two worlds,' this world, and the 'other world,' the unseen world. It is in the other world that communion with God takes place.

This is the realm towards which Tajuddin Baba's consciousness was drawn, which absorbed his concentration so much that he appeared to be mad to the uninformed observer. This is the world which is symbolized by the *dargah* and the presence of the saint. One gains access to this world through communion with the *wali*, the friend of God, and through the *wali* one gains access to communion with *Allah*. Thus, the *dargah* itself, and the activities that take place there, take place, as it were, in both worlds. Each action in this world, bowing to the tomb, placing a flower, performing or listening to *Qawwālī*, etc., has its parallel activity reflected in the other world, and it is through the activities in this world that one participates in the reality of the other world. It is precisely because the other world is unseen that one must engage in specific activities of remembrance, activities that remind one of the supreme reality and of the importance of the other world. This other world, then, is the world of the sacred other. Linkage of the individual's symbolic cultural self with the sacred other provides the worshipper with a subjective sense of a cohesive cultural identity, as well as with a sense of continuity between the phenomenal world of suffering and death, and the world of the symbolic sacred other.

Ethnomusicologist John Blacking defines music as "humanly organized sound."[29] Elsewhere he has observed that:

> Man makes music as a patterned event in a system of social interaction, as a part of a process of conscious decision making; but there is also a sense in which music makes man, releasing creative energy, expanding consciousness and influencing subsequent decision-making and cultural invention.[30]

Something very similar might be said of religious practice, that religious practice is "humanly organized" interaction with the sacred other, perhaps, or that religious practice "makes man," that it releases creative energy, expands consciousness and influences "subsequent decision-making and cultural invention." There are many parallels between music and religion as cultural artifacts. Both music and religion go against the grain of rational, linear thought. Both have survived the enlightenment and the modern era, and both appear poised to survive the post-modern era, and whatever may come next. There appears to be something unstoppable about music and religion. One would be hard pressed to find a society on earth today in which one segment or the other does not use some form of music (or "humanly organized sound") in religious practice. Why should this be so?

Blacking concludes that "The value of music lies in its power to restore and develop man's sense of being and to close the gap that the acquisition of culture has made between the inner and outer man."[31] He sees music as an evolutionary adaptation which functions to compensate for the demands of

culture on the developing individual. One might conclude, then, that as modern culture develops more and more, humankind will require music more and more, not less. Jacob Pandian suggests that

> . . . the roots of religion are in symbolizing human identity as having 'super-natural' characteristics, that is, in having qualities that are not confined to the physical/natural world . . . Symbols of the self (the symbolic self) signify the characteristics and meanings of what it is to be human. Symbols of the sacred other signify the existence and characteristics of supernatural beings, entities, and powers, and they connote the linkages between the symbolic self and the sacred other.[32]

This linkage between the symbolic self and the sacred other, which Pandian sees as being at the "root" of religion, has its parallel in Blacking's articulation of music functioning to restore the link between the inner and outer man, thus healing the gap between them that has been created by the acquisition of culture. When music and religion are coextensive, as in *Qawwālī*, these two linkages accomplish the symbolic healing described by Dow. According to Dow

> . . . symbolic healing exists, in part, because humans developed their capacity to communicate with each other from an earlier capacity to communicate with themselves through emotions. Awareness of personal biological survival at the level of emotional thinking is primarily adaptive; as culture and language have developed, the capacity to communicate has been extended to symbols within social systems. Symbolic healing exists, therefore, because of the way in which social communication has drawn with it the structure of emotional communication.[33]

As cited earlier, Blacking sees music as a metaphor for feeling, thus making music an ideal complement for the transaction of emotions Dow sees occurring in symbolic healing. In Pandian's terms, music helps to dramatize communication between the symbols of the self and symbols of the sacred other in ritual practice. This is one of the things that I see happening in *Qawwālī* which, with some adjustment to Dow's proposal, I am suggesting can be understood as an aspect of symbolic healing. As I have already stated, I do not suggest this analysis as a reductive, or essentialist claim, but rather as a heuristic approach to understanding one aspect of the significance of the coextensive nature of music and religion cross-culturally, and, specifically, in the practice of *Qawwālī* in South Asia.

One of Dejarlais' points in articulating an aesthetic of everyday life is to correct a tendency on the part of some writers to attempt to evaluate performance by a set of aesthetic values that are removed from the cultural context of the given performance. He emphasizes that the aesthetics of

performance flow from cultural values, not the other way around, and that even what constitutes health or illness flows from these values. In this sense, and according to my analysis, a worshipper at *Tajbagh* can be said to have been restored to health, i.e., to have regained a strong sense of a symbolic cultural self, when he or she has performed certain actions which activate the collective memory of a symbolic, unseen reality. The activation of such memories empowers the individual to feel confident in their connection to and communion with these unseen forces, which grounds them in a sense of connection to and identification with a symbolic cultural self. In this regard, *Qawwālī* at *Tajbagh* plays an important role in the activation of collective memory, and in the restoration of a sense of physical, emotional and spiritual well being in the worshipper. This sense of a restoration of well being will be a reflection of the degree to which the individual has identified with the cultural and religious narrative as represented by the song texts, the daily life of the *dargah*, the life of the saint, and the lineage of the shrine.

Endnotes

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