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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF QAWWALI AND ASSAMESE ZIKIR AND ZARI WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AMIR KHUSROW AND AZAN FAKIR

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ABSTRACT

The Chief aim of this paper is an attempt to illuminate a comparison between the Assamese Zikir and Zari that has been invented by Azan Fakir along with the Qawwali, is believed to have been invented by the multifaceted poet musician Amir Khusrau who has been acclaimed as the 'Parrot of India'. "Zikr" is the religious ceremony or an act of devotion practiced by the various religious orders of "Fakirs" and "Dervishes." "Zikrs" are either recited aloud or in a low voice or mentally. The most common form of "Zikr" is a recital of the ninety-nine names of God, and for those who recite them have their reward in paradise. Zikirs may be a religious or philosophical poem centering on some extent of religion or of philosophy. In several of the songs of this variety a story centering surround the lifetime of Azan Pir or Shah Miran (Milan) to whom these songs are sometimes ascribed is told. On the other hand, Zari is elegiac in character and it can be called a kind of marshiya and typically relates itself to the tragic tale of Karbala. A number of the Assamese Zaris could also be called independent ballads. The language of Zikirs and Zaris songs are very simple and direct through archaic for modern readers but addressed as it was intelligible to them, making a direct appeal to their hearts as do the Dahas of Kabir or champions of Tulsidas etc. in northern India during the middle age. On the other hand, Qawwali is a form of devotional music that expresses the mystical Sufi practice of Islam. The term qawwali comes from the Arabic word "qaul," meaning "to speak" or "to say," and its main function is to make the listeners understand the words or message of the songs. However, both the form is the Sufi-Islamic devotional music that is practiced outside the Dargahs or any topographic point.

KEYWORDS: *Peace, Solace, Reverence, Kind, Mystical, Music, Message, Function, Harmony*

INTRODUCTION

Hakim AbulHasan Yaminuddin bin Saifuddin Mahmud who is popularly known as Amir Khusraw Dehlavi took his birth in 651 at Patiala, India and adieu from this world in 725 AH in Delhi, was an Indo-Persian Sufi singer,

musician, poet and scholar who lived under the Delhi Sultanate. He is an iconic figure in the cultural history of the Indian subcontinent. He was a mystic and a spiritual disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi, India. He wrote poetry primarily in Persian, but also in Hindavi. Khusrau is sometimes referred to as the "*Voice of India*" or "*Parrot of India*" (*Tuti-e-Hind*), and has been called the "father of Urdu literature. Khusrau is regarded as the "*Father of Qawwali*" (a devotional form of singing of the Sufis in the Indian subcontinent), and introduced the Ghazal style of song into India, both of which still exist widely in India and Pakistan. Khusrau was an expert in many styles of Persian poetry which were developed in medieval Persia, from Khaqani's *qasidas* to Nizami's *Khamasa*. He used 11 metrical schemes with 35 distinct divisions. He wrote in many verse forms including *Ghazal*, *Masnavi*, *Qita*, *Rubai*, *Do-Baiti* and *Tarkib-Band*. His contribution for the development of Ghazal writing is in point to ponder.

He is most famously associated with the court of Sultan Alauddin Khalji. Khusrau's literary and musical talents found patronage and appreciation in Alauddin Khalji's court, where he composed many of his famous works and became one of the most celebrated poets of his time. He was given the title of '*Tuti-e-Hind*' or *Parrot* (Voice) of Hindustan for his influence on Urdu-Persian-Hindvi poetry, as well as his contribution in Hindustani classical music; composition of *Khayal*, *Tarana*, *Qawwali*, and the invention of *tabla*. He is a pioneer of Indo-Persian literature and a great exponent of music and became favorites of both Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya and the Sultans of Delhi. After Sultan Alluaddin Khalji's conquest of Deccan, many distinguished musicians from that region moved to Delhi. Amir Khusrau is credited to have created '*Qawwali*' a form of Sufi devotional music, by fusing the Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Indian Musical traditions in the late 13th Century. A well-punctuated chorus emphasizing the theme and devotional refrain coupled with a lead singer utilizing an ornate style and difficult Sara combinations are the distinguishing characteristics of a *Qawwali*. But his chief fame rests upon *Ghurratul*, which are preserved in five voluminous poetic collections namely *Tohfatus Sighar*, *Wastul Hayat*; *Ghurratul Kamal*; *Nihayatul Kamal* and *Baqiyah Naqiyah*. The ghazals of Khusrau are full of artistic merits and are finely tuned to the sound of music. They are adapted to Indian geo-social conditions and they have been sung by the *qawwals* right from the time of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya down to this days and one can enjoy the everlasting freshness of his *Ghazal*, which over centuries has become Indian heritage.

Shah Miran, also known as Ajan Pir, Hazrat Shah Miran, and Shah Milan (presumably from Miran), was a Sufi poet, Muslim preacher and saint from the 17th century who came from Baghdad or as per some family sources, Badaun in western UP and finally settled in the Sibsagar area of Assam in the north-eastern part of India, where he helped to unify the people of the Brahmaputra valley and to reform, reinforce and stabilize Islam in the region of Assam. The nickname Azan came from his habit of calling Azan. He came to Assam in about 1630 from Iraq, that is, approximately 200 years after the birth of Srimanta Sankardev. According to one version his name was "Hazrat Shah Syed Mainuddin". He is particularly known for his *Zikr* and *Zari*, two forms of devotional songs, that draw from local musical traditions and have striking similarities with *Borgeets* of Srimanta Sankardeva, the 16th-century saint-scholar from Assam. In addition, the late renowned author and Sahitya Akademi award winner Syed Abdul Malik states that Azan Fakir was a preacher with profound mastery over the Qur'an, the Hadith and Islamic philosophy.

The most celebrated and well-known Sufistic poet of Assam, whose name is found on the tongue of not only every Assamese Muslim but also Assamese Hindus and who is paid much honor, was Hazrat Azan Faqir. He flourished in the middle of the seventeenth century and it is said to have entered the Ahom kingdom with his

brother HazratNabiPir from certain place in the west Asia and started to live in the land of Assam and used to learn their local language. He not only learns their languages but also adopted their cultural life as a part of his livelihood. Certain information regarding his life history and other activities is very meager. MohibulHussain has collected some materials regarding the life of Azan Faqir and published it by the title of Hazrat Azan PirSibsagar in 1972 in Assamese language. Syed Abdul Malik has also collected Azan Pir and edited his Zikir and Zari and published it by Gauhati University we know this very much that his original name was Shah Miran. Azan was his nick name. It is also mentioned in the history that as he used to call the people to offer prayer by calling Azan (Prayer call) the people of Assam started to call him by the name of Azan Faqir or Azan Pir. But we came to know his name in his verses as beggar. Some of the opinion is that his original name was Mohiud - Din. It is very difficult to say about his native land. According to some he migrated from Baghdad. We come to know just a little about him from his Zikirs which are, even today, on the tongue of the people. He came to Assam in 1045 A.H. /1635 A.D during the reign of Raja Pratap Singh, whose real name was Susengpha.

With a view to preaching the teaching of Islam, Azan Faqir had composed a large number of *Zikirs* and *Zaris* in Assamese language because by that time (1045 -1052 A.H. /1635-1642 A.D.), he had not only established himself but also had become well versed in Assamese folk songs and other religious literature . The reason of his composing Zikirs were only that before his arrival in Assam the people had already been influenced by the literary works of Sankardeva (1449-1568 A.D) He propagated the teaching of Islam by name *Kalama*, *Namaj*, *Roza*, *Haj* and *Zakat* and the main principles of *Sharait and Tariqat* through Assamese language and assumes folk songs.

Ajan Fakir was a disciple of KhwajaNizamuddinAuliya in Baghdad. He married an Ahom woman of high social stature and settled at Gorgaon, near modern Sibsagartown.As a Pir he composed Zikirs (a type of spiritual song). Originally he spoke Arabic, but he completely mastered the language (Assamese) of the land he adopted, permitting comparison of his songs to those of his Vaishnava contemporaries. In course of time his influence spread, he acquired a good number of followers and earned the enmity of a Muslim official, RupaiDadhora, who by conspiracy convinced the Ahom king that Ajan Fakir was a Mughal spy and had orders passed for plucking out the Pir's eyes. The Pir, according to some songs, had two earthen pots brought into which he let his "two eyes drop".

The king was alarmed and for atonement made land grants to Ajan Fakir at SovaguriChapari, near Sibsagar and had a matha built for him. This place on the bank ofBrahmaputra has become a holy place with AjanPir'sDargah where an annual urs is held. His dargah is at SahaguriChapari near Sibsagar town.HazratAjanPir never discriminated people on the basis of religion. He declared that he had no feeling of discrimination in his mind as a Hindu or a Muslim is the creation of the same Allah and every human being irrespective of religion radiates the glory of Allah.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on Sufism in India is said to have taken place in the eleventh and twelfth centuries through mystics who reached via Afghanistan on their own free will. One of the early Sufis of eminence, who settled in India, was Al-Hujwari is popularly known as Data GanjBaksh and later on, one of the prominent Sufi by name Hazrat Shah Miran popularly known as Azan Fakir used to arrive in the land of Assam with his brother HazratNabiPir and

permanently settled herein and propagate the Assamese culture and ritual being accompanied with Srimanta Sankardeva, founder of *Ek Sarana Nama Dharma* (means *complete self-surrender to one God or to the Almighty*) from whom he used to learn the Assamese language and all its traditional systems and promote and encourage to Assamese Muslim community to pray and to rectify the almighty God being called Azan and teach them to live a harmonious life. Both Amir Khusrau and Azan Fakir have expanded the repertoire of Sufi verses and music either on *Qawwali* mode or *Zikir and Zari* by giving different names in some languages of the Indian subcontinent, namely Assamese, Urdu or Persian. However, the only notable academic work on the subject is about Amir Khusrau and his creation *Qawwali* and Assamese *Zikir and Zari* that has been created by Azan Fakir. The focus of this work is tracing the evolution of *Qawwali*, that has become an inner part of Indian culture and Assamese *Zikir and Zari* which is a popular form for the people of Assamese in equal to *Borgeet* created by Sankardev from its advent to current times and tracing the cultural exchange influences during its course.

A Comparative Discussion between Qawwali and Assamese Zikir and Zari

Qawwali, a form of Sufi Islamic devotional singing, as an expression of devotion and spirituality, finds its lyrical foundation in the rich tradition of Sufi poetry. The lyrical compositions in *Qawwali* encompass a vast array of themes and convey profound spiritual messages, drawing inspiration from the experiences and teachings of Sufi saints and poets. Sufi poetry, characterized by its deep metaphorical language and allegorical expressions, serves as a vehicle for exploring the mystical dimensions of love, longing, and spiritual enlightenment. The verses of Sufi poets find resonance in *qawwali*, as they express the deep yearning for a union with the divine and the ultimate quest for transcendence. *Qawwali* is the rendition of Sufi music in the Indian subcontinent, presently encompassing Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, usually at a *khanqah* (hospice) or a place sacred to Sufis. It is the rendition of philosophic verses in several languages by a lead male singer, accompanied by a few accompanying singers/chorus, embellished with clapping of hands and some musical instruments. The roots of *qawwali* can be traced back to eighth century Persia—today's Iran and Afghanistan. *Qaul* is an 'utterance (of the prophet)', *Qawwal* is someone who often repeats (sings) a *Qaul* and *Qawwali* is what a *Qawwal* sings.

The spiritual essence of *qawwali* has touched the hearts and souls of listeners worldwide. Its ability to evoke a sense of devotion, longing, and transcendence has made it a cherished form of music for people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. *Qawwali* performances and recordings have garnered acclaim and reverence in various countries, spreading the spiritual messages of love, unity, and divine connection. *Qawwali*, in the form of Sufi music and song, is like Sama a spiritual awakening. The Sufi's beloved, even her single glance, delivers the lover at once from the agony and he enters the world of eternal peace. *Qawwali* in Sufism play a hypnotic function to facilitate the union with the beloved. In the context of Indian subcontinent, *Qawwali* uses verses from Persian, Urdu, and Hindi and Punjabi literatures. This amalgamation of languages makes *Qawwali* to have an equal effect on non-Muslims and as well as Muslims. And Khusrau's dexterity of using Hindavi and Persian in poems like *zihālaymiskeenmakuntagaful* is a great achievement. *Qawwali*, with its roots deeply embedded in the Indian subcontinent, has a fascinating origin and a rich evolutionary journey. Its development is closely intertwined with the mystical tradition of Sufism, which profoundly influenced its lyrical and musical elements.

The roots of *Qawwali* can be traced back to the 13th century, during the reign of Amir Khusrau Dehlavi, a renowned Sufi poet, musician, and scholar. Khusrau is often credited as the founding figure of *Qawwali*, as he

introduced innovative musical and poetic elements that formed the foundation of the genre. His deep spiritual devotion and expressive musical compositions set the stage for the flourishing of *Qawwali*. The essence of *Qawwali* lies in its connection to Sufism, a mystical branch of Islam that emphasizes the inward journey of the soul toward divine union. Sufi saints and poets, through their profound spiritual experiences and poetic expressions, greatly influenced the lyrical themes and messages in *qawwali*. Their poetry, infused with metaphorical and allegorical language, speaks of divine love, spiritual longing, and the quest for enlightenment. *Qawwali* underwent significant evolution over time, adapting to the changing socio-cultural landscape of the region. As Islam spread throughout the Indian subcontinent, *qawwali* absorbed influences from diverse linguistic and cultural traditions. Persian, Urdu, Punjabi, and Hindi became prominent languages through which *qawwali* lyrics were composed and sung, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the region. During the Mughal era, *qawwali* experienced a surge in patronage and royal support. The Mughal emperors, including Akbar the Great and his successors, embraced *qawwali* as a cherished art form and promoted its development. *Qawwali* found a place in the Mughal courts, with the emperors themselves fostering the growth of *qawwali* ensembles and nurturing talented *qawwals*. The evolutionary journey of *qawwali* is a testament to its enduring appeal and cultural significance. It continues to thrive as a vibrant form of devotional music, embracing its historical roots while adapting to contemporary contexts. Music has always been an integral component of Sufism. *Qawwali*, as a distinct genre of music, possesses a unique set of musical characteristics that contribute to its enchanting and captivating nature. From its soul-stirring vocal style to the rhythmic interplay of accompanying instruments, *qawwali* creates a mesmerizing sonic experience for its listeners. At the heart of *qawwali* lies the captivating vocal style of the *qawwal*, the lead vocalist. The *qawwal's* voice is imbued with passion, emotion, and a deep sense of spirituality. Their melodic improvisations, known as "sargam," allow them to explore and embellish the melodic structure of the composition, infusing it with personal expression and creativity.

Zikir and Zari is a song that is sung by the Muslim community in Assam. It is part of a collection of songs that contain philosophical overtones with literal meanings that take the body into consideration. They have an Islamic counterpart which is known as *dehbi chargeet*. These songs are accompanied by a handclapping dance with string instruments. The language of Zikirs and Zaris songs are very simple and direct through archaic for modern readers but addressed as it was intelligible to them, making a direct appeal to their hearts as do the Dahas of Kabir or champions of Tulsidas etc. in northern India during the middle age. As the author are greatly influenced by Islamic thought at which they have deeply drunk, they express the same contents in their native speech and have absorbed quite a large number of Arabic and Persian words, as will be pointed out from time to time. For which they could not find any native words and which not appropriately expressed and conveyed their thought. It is said to be noted that since these Faqirs were simple man and only in rare cases might have been man of formal education, hence simplicity is the very hall mark of their Poetical Utterance, for they wrote or better to say song for the common man. They did not worry to embellish their language nor did they care to make a show of their learning Sufis by persuasion they preached the religion of heart, which shared of literary embellishment stuck in the heart. It will not be in appropriate to compare them with religious Poetries composed by the Arab Sufis like Rabia of Basarah Abu-al-Atahiyah and quataries of Abu Syed AbulKhayr Sadi and Sarmad etc. with poetical compositions of authors under their discussions. It will be seen that common feature and characteristics of all of them is simplicity, sincerity and earnestness just as the Arab or Persian poets preferred to above have nothing to do with the highly artificial poetry class, the work of these, Asamese Faqirs have nothing to do with the mundane literature of the period.

Whatsoever, the cause behind the composition of Zikir and Zari has a significant role in popularizing and propagating Islam in Assam through his compositions and teaching and his Zikir songs focus on the teachings of Islam, emphasizing the remembrance of Allah's name, while Zari songs narrate the tragic events of the Karbala tragedy. The Zikir specially involve devotional assemblies rooted in Islamic mysticism or Sufism became an integral part of Assam's socio-cultural fabric, particularly under the patronage of the Ahom kings who ruled Assam from the 13th to the 19th century. We may get more relevant that Zikir and Zari songs not only served as a means of religious reformation among the indigenous Muslim community in Assam but also fostered harmonious relationships between Muslims, Hindus, and Vaisnavites. AjanPir's respect for all castes, creeds, and religions is evident in his compositions, reflecting his assimilation into Assamese culture despite his foreign origins.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it can be accepted that both Qawwali and Assamese Zikir and Zari's main motive are to embrace and portray of love, devotion and longing for the Divine for the benefit of the common masses. *Qawwali*, the soul-stirring music of devotion and transcendence, holds a significant place in the realm of Indian classical music. With its rich heritage, profound spiritual themes, and captivating melodies, qawwali has captivated audiences' worldwide, transcending cultural and linguistic boundaries. Whatever AjanPir preached was rooted in the prevailing culture of Assam. The great Vaishnavite Saint SrimantaSankardeva (1449-1569) had left behind a rich legacy of devotional performing Art forms that included Borgeet, Bhaona (traditional religious drama) and *Sattriya* dance. Ajan Fakir composed his Zikirs based mostly on *Borgeet* and used the same genre of devotional lyrics and music. The songs were glorification of God or Allah but aimed at inculcation of those human attributes which bring peace to the soul and establish harmony between man and man. It is not for nothing that Assam is called '*Sankar-Ajanordesh*' or the land of Sankardeva and AjanPir. The communal harmony preached in the 17th century Assam has its bearing even today.

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