

Development of Qawwali in Awadh Region of India

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Abstract

Qawwali, a group song performance that inspires and elevates the Sufis in their mystical experiences is unique to South Asia, sung in a variety of languages and dialects. Awadh, a cultural region in the heart of Uttar Pradesh in north India has had a rich history of literature, music and performing arts that evolved over centuries through the meeting of many civilizations. Qawwali is one such rich tradition that evolved in Awadh region in many khaneqahs or Sufi hospices all over the region, which were established by Sufis who arrived from Central Asia to settle here. This paper explores some centres of qawwali and Sufi poetry in Awadh region, such as Ayodhya, Kichhauchha, Dewa, Jaunpur, Lucknow and Bahraich etc., besides Rohilkhand, that still boast of many Sufi masters who promoted qawwali and allowed a unique regional style to emerge here.

Keywords

Qawwali, Urdu, Uttar Pradesh, Awadh, Sufi, North India

Qawwali, a passionate form of vocal musical form is popular among the Sufis or mystics all over South Asia, featuring lyrics by a number of well-known poets who composed in various languages from Urdu and Hindi to Persian, Bengali and Punjabi among others. Much of the base for a qawwali rendition is north India's classical music, although some *talas* (rhythmic time-cycles) are specific only to qawwali and not commonly used in Hindustani music. Some elements of north India's folk music can also be found in many performances.

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It is popularly assumed that qawwali was innovated by Delhi's poet-composer Amir Khusrau (b. 1253) to be performed at the *sama* (listening) gatherings of saint Nizamuddin Aulia (d. 1352) (Saeed 220-232). However, historians today believe that musical forms named *qaul* and *qawwali* existed in India as well as Arabia and the larger Persianate world since at least a couple of centuries before Amir Khusrau, although their styles or musical modes might have been very different from what we witness today. In India, the growth of qawwali or other musical and poetic forms among Sufis was prerequisite not only for their spiritual salvation but also as a medium to attract local populace who were already entrenched in the use of pietistic music, as has been acknowledged by saints like Moinuddin Chishti who encouraged the use of music. Undoubtedly, the music and poetry in local dialects were probably the most important vehicles for the popularity and expansion of Islam via the Chishti Sufi order in South Asia in general and the Awadh region in particular. Saiyid Zaheer Husain Jafri asserted that

In the spread of sufic ideology, specially of the Chishtis, the Sufi music (*sama*), which had been a contentious issue from quite early times—the orthodox section has never reconciled with the whole idea, while the Chishti Sufis never gave up the practice—has played an extremely important role (276).

Although the region of Lucknow and Awadh is traditionally associated with musical forms such as *thumri*, *dadra*, *tappa*, *mujra*, *kathak*, and other forms of classical arts and courtesan culture, mostly patronised by the aristocratic nawabs and provincial taluqedars of the yesteryears, qawwali has also been nurtured here abundantly. The devotional arts of shi'as, such as the recitation of *marsiya*s and *nauhas*, associated with the memory of Karbala battle, were also developed significantly in the region (Trivedi 41-71).

The history and richness of Awadh's musical past has been well documented by many authors (Sharar 1994).²

However, what has not been explored in detail is the practice of qawwali and Sufi music or literature that thrived in the region in equal terms. For instance, one does not hear of Lucknow region producing any qawwali 'maestros' and grooming schools, at least in the 19th and 20th centuries, just as one finds them in the nearby Rohilkhand region, Delhi, Punjab, or Hyderabad. Such mystic culture of Awadh did not come into limelight probably because its patronage was limited mainly in the popular and rural domain rather than the ruling elite which largely followed the shi'a ideology, although one may find exceptions, such as in Rampur. This short essay tries to survey the spaces and institutions that nurtured qawwali and Sufi music in Lucknow and its environs, knowing that more research work is still required to ascertain its larger impact in the past and present.

The Arrival of Islam and Sufis in Awadh

Islam and Muslims had arrived in the Awadh region much before the typical nawabi era of 18th and 19th centuries that saw the pinnacle of the Indo-Muslim cultural practices in Lucknow. In fact, many Muslims believe that some pre-Islamic prophets (mentioned in the Quran and Bible) like Hazrat Yaqub (Jacob), Hazrat Shees, and Hazrat Nooh (Noah) are actually buried in Ayodhya – a fact that has been mentioned by several mediaeval commentators including the Mughal courtier Abul Fazl in *Ain-e Akbari*, although unconfirmed by historians. Ayodhya in any case has been a place of great spiritual importance for Hindus and Buddhists since millennia. Muslims and Islam may have arrived in the Awadh region in the last quarter of 12th century when Mohammad Ghauri

² The History is elaborately discussed in Abdul Halim Sharar's *Lucknow The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, edited and translated from Urdu by E. S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994

established his rule over Delhi and north India after defeating the local rulers. Though he returned to central Asia after handing over the rule to Qutbuddin, this is the first time when governors were appointed by a central government for local regions under their control. Thus, Bakhtiyar Khalji was sent to govern the Awadh region, although he did not sustain his rule for long due to constant changes within the government. For several reasons, the Awadh region, which constituted not only the town of Ayodhya but also Kara, Qannauj, Dalmau, Sandila, Behraich and Jaunpur, was considered very strategic for all kings and dynasties of Delhi. Hence, almost all famous rulers, such as from among the Tughlaqs, the Sayyads, the Mughals, and even the British paid visits here and ensured strong governance which benefited their own rule in the centre.

Many scholars and Sufis arrived at various locations of Awadh along with the Muslim rulers. One of the earliest-known Muslim saints in the region is a warrior named Salar Masud Ghazi who came with the army of Mehmud of Ghazna at the age of 16, and was martyred in a battle by the local Hindu rulers in Behraich in 1032 AD. He is buried at Behraich and his shrine is a centre of pilgrimage for thousands of Hindus and Muslims every year, especially due to its supposed healing powers. Since Ghazi was unmarried before he died, an annual memorial at his shrine, just outside the Behraich town, is supposed to celebrate his post-mortem wedding with one Zohra Bibi. “Thousands of pilgrims visited their graves expecting to be freed from illness and suffering” (Schwerin 143). Even today, many young unmarried women dressed like a bride visit the shrine for Ghazi’s blessings and recite traditional poetry. Even a khadim or caretaker of the shrine sings verses in the local dialect.

*Miyan ka puja chala sevakia garh Behraich naagari
Chhod chhad ke baal bachche taj ke ghar aur baakri,
Miyan ka puja [...] (Azeez 418)*

(To worship Miyan, the devotee embarks on a pilgrimage to Behraich town, Leaving his children, and giving up his home and wife. To worship Miyan...)³

There are also popular music videos and audio cassettes available outside the shrine, featuring devotional songs in praise of the warrior-saint.⁴ However, it is not known as to what formal Sufi order Salar Masud belonged and what were his mystic inclinations. It is noted that,

The Sufi shrines are well maintained by the people and are visited by persons belonging to all communities, including many people from the majority community. Ayodhya is also called '*Khurd Mecca*' or the '*Small Mecca*' because of the presence of several tombs or dargahs of Sufi saints (Rajalakshmi)⁵.

Among other early Sufis to have arrived in Awadh was one Qazi Qidwat ud-Din, who came from central Asia on the behest of Usman Haruni (the Sufi master of Moinuddin Chishti who settled in Ajmer). Considered an ancestor of the famed Qidwais of Lucknow, Qazi Qidwat died in 1208 and "His grave, often referred to as 'Qazi Qudwat's Tomb' is still visible on the paved platform in front of the Babri Mosque on the east side" (Kamal 30).⁶ Many of these early Sufis were scholars of Islam, philosophy and mysticism, and some also practiced the listening of sermons, *sama* or poetry for their mystic or devotional experiences. Some information about their lives can be gleaned from the *malfuzat* or hagiographical accounts available in old manuscripts. Shaikh Badruddin Wa'iz, an orator par excellence from Ayodhya, lived in

³ Author's own translation from Urdu text.

⁴ A video CD titled *Ghazi ka Karam* (Blessings of the Warrior-Saint), artists: Neha Mehmood Khan, Asif Saidpur, produced by Golden Eye Films.

⁵ "Ayodhya, a picture of diversity - Frontline." by T.K. Rajalakshmi *Frontline*, 7 November 2003,

⁶ The extract is translated from original Urdu text.

the period of Alauddin Khalji (13th-14th c.). His spirited sermon gatherings were attended by all, and made much of the audience to faint with crying (Kamal 33). The early Sufis may not have strictly followed the doctrine of any one particular Sufi order such as Chishti, Qadiri, Suhrawardi, Qalandari, or Naqshbandi that came into India, although the Chishti silsila was definitely one of the most popular orders whose members were appointed by their shaikhs into small and large towns of Awadh region.

Syed Ashraf Jahangir Samnani, buried in Kichhaucha, a small town near Lucknow, came from Samnan in Iran where he was born in 1308 in a ruling family. He was a Sufi of both the Chishti as well as Qadiri orders, and naturally listened to *sama* and qawwali. Before coming to Awadh region he had already stayed for some years in Uchch town (now in Pakistan, near Multan) and Bengal. It is said that when his time of death came, at the ripe age of 120 years, Ashraf Jahangir asked for a mehfil of sama to be arranged, and died trembling like an injured bird (*murgh-e bismil*) while listening to a particular verse of poet Sa'di⁷. Even today, his shrine gets thousands of devotees for its supposed healing powers, especially during his urs when qawwalis are performed (Ashrafi 132-135).

Chishti Sufi Linkages between Delhi and Awadh

Many disciples of Chishti saint Nizamuddin Aulia of Delhi (or others in his lineage) were appointed the spiritual heirs in Awadh, Qazi Mohiuddin Kashani being one of the important ones. He left his courtly job of a *qazi* (judge) in Awadh during Alauddin Khalji's rein to follow the mystic path taught by Nizamuddin Aulia – often disappearing into forests with his book of prayers to meditate. Similarly, Nasiruddin Chiragh Dehlavi, the most famous disciple of Nizamuddin Aulia, himself was born in Ayodhya

⁷ Quoted by Razi Ahmed Kamal in Makhdum Ashraf Samnani's *Lataif-e Ashrafi* [Urdu], vol. 2, pp. 406-12.

around 1274, and his descendents till today have connections with Awadh. There are many others such as Shaikh Shamsuddin Awadhi, Jalaluddin Awadhi (d. 1337); “As Nizamuddin Auliya's disciple, Shaykh Jalaluddin Awadhi was a profound scholar of syntax, jurisprudence, and principles of jurisprudence as well as a saint distinguished by asceticism and piety” (Kamal 47).⁸ Jamaluddin Awadhi, Qiwanuddin Awadhi, and Kamaluddin, who were either direct or hereditary disciples of Nizamuddin Aulia, and practiced the listening of *sama* and *qawwali* in their spiritual experiences.

Another disciple of Nizamuddin Aulia based in Awadh was Maulana Alauddin Neli (d. 1360), popular for giving powerful *wa'z* or sermons about mysticism. His Friday sermons were even attended by the famous Arab traveller Ibn Batuta (born 1304) who describes these as full of ecstasy with regard to the listeners. In this regard Razi Ahmed Kamal stated Ibn Batuta's experiences

During one of Neli's sermons, when a particular *ayat* (passage) of Quran was recited, a restless listener in the mosque reacted with a loud scream. When the passage was repeated during the session, the person screamed with ecstasy again and ultimately died on the spot (Kamal 61).

Ibn Batuta also claimed to have attended his funeral too. One can find many other accounts about the early Sufis of Awadh where their deep interest in poetry and music are apparent. For instance, Syed Ali of Jaunpur (1423-1500) was never particular about any specific song or style of music for *sama*, “I can get *wajd* (ecstasy) with any ghazal or verse being recited”, he would say (Dehlvi 481). Similarly, Shaikh Adhan Jaunpuri (born 1452) lived for over 100 years and used to get so mesmerized by listening to *qawwali* that “he had to be controlled by over 10 people even in his old age” (Dehlvi 481). Shaikh Adhan may have also been an important person for the Mughal ruler Babur in Delhi since he is said to have

⁸ The extract is translated from original Urdu text.

organised mehfiles of *sama* in the latter's court, along with another courtier, Shaikh Dhoran. Moreover, Adhan's disciple, Shaikh Banjhu, a 'very sweet singer' from Jaunpur, got employed with King Akbar and was rewarded suitably for his music performances. (Brahaspati)⁹

Lucknow's most prominent Sufi shrine today (near the present Medical College) is that of Hazrat Shah Mina Chishti (d. 1479) who was the son of another Sufi Shaikh Qiawamuddin and a disciple of Shaikh Sarang. Being initiated into not only Chishtiya but also Qadiria, Suhrawardiya and Qalandaria, Shah Mina is also attributed with many miracles which he is supposed to have conducted since his childhood.

Shah Mina is important also for another reason: The line from Shah Mina resurfaces in the nineteenth century in the figure of Hafiz Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali Khayrabadi, marking the expansion of the Nizami branch of Chishti Sufism through disciples of Shaykh Sulayman Taunsawi in the upper Punjab. Khayrabadi, a native of the same suburb of Lucknow as his spiritual predecessor, became one of the major successors of Shaykh Sulayman (Lawrence 57).

Mehfiles of *qawwali* and *sama* are still held at his shrine which is also famous for its healing powers. But it is difficult to say if such an institution nurtured any robust schools or gharanas of *qawwali* in the town. Among other Sufis of this region, Alauddin Husaini Awadhi (died 1560) was not only a Persian poet par excellence but also an expert in Hindustani music. He is buried in the *Khurd Mecca* cemetery of many other Sufi shrines of Awadh from the medieval period which have remained centres that promote *qawwali* during the *urs* ceremonies.

The Emergence of Lucknow and its Musical Heritage

⁹ Kailash Chandra Brahhaspati's *Muslims and Indian Music*, Delhi, Rajkamal, 1974.

When nawab Asaf-ud-Daula shifted his capital from Faizabad to Lucknow in 1775, he and the later nawabs nurtured all kinds of cultural and literary activities and talent in the new capital. The convergence of great artists and musicians from nearby areas in Lucknow allowed the growth of rich traditions of music and performative arts. Husain Shah Sharqi, the ruler of nearby Jaunpur (r. 1458–1479) had already played an important role in the evolution of several forms of classical music, especially *khayal* (slow and elaborate rendition of vocal music). According to some, Sharqi's court had benefitted and influenced from the experiments in music carried out by composers like Amir Khusrau in Delhi via the blending of Indian and Central Asian musical forms and instruments. There was also a constant give and take between the musicians and patrons between Delhi and Awadh. With the decline of the Mughal Empire in 18th century, many of the talented musicians and artists started migrating to Awadh. Hence, Lucknow slowly became a platform where the best talent of north India was gathering and entertaining the nawabs and courtiers with their fine art. "Despite the influx of musicians from Delhi, it is interesting to note that no *sitar* player is mention for this period in Lucknow" (Miner 97). However, while we know about the nawabs' patronage and special interest in classical dance and vocal music, instruments like *sitar* and *tabla*, and the Shi'a-oriented devotional arts, there is very little information available about how much the Awadh's court patronised *qawwali*.

Among the unique institutions of Lucknow that did support Sufi ideology and *qawwali*, albeit indirectly, is one known as Firangi mahal. Although Firangi mahal (literally meaning a 'foreigner's palace' which was indeed inhabited in Lucknow by a European trader in 17th century) refers to one of earliest Muslim families migrating into Awadh from the Afghanistan region, it is more popular as a madrasa or educational institution that this family of great scholars established centuries ago. "[...] the Farangi Mahall

family have good claim to have been the leading learned family of Muslim India for much of the past 300 years” (Robinson 70). Mullah Nizamuddin, a prominent member of this family from 17th century compiled an elaborate syllabus for the study of Arabic and Persian that is still taught in some madrasas of India, and known as the *Dars-e Nizami* (Nizam’s syllabus). Besides being authors of hundreds of books (and exegesis of older works) on philosophy, jurisprudence, religion, literature and mysticism, the members of Firangi Mahal family were also Sufis themselves (Ansari 40-52). Many family members not only composed mystical poetry but also listened to Sufi *sama* and qawwali. According to Maulana Azad, several members of Firangi Mahal were well versed in music.¹⁰

One of the last well-known Sufis and scholars of the family was Maulana Abdul Bari (d. 1926) also known as Bari Miyan, whose *urs* (death anniversary) is still celebrated at the *bagh* or cemetery where most luminaries of Firangi Mahal are buried. Scholar Salim Kidwai of Lucknow (whose father and grandfather were *mureed* or disciples of Bari Miyan) still remembers attending Firangi mahal’s qawwali performances in his childhood with his father. According to him, ‘until the mid seventies, any qawwal worth his *qaul* would have paid tribute at the *urs*’. Until recently, the last surviving good qawwals such as *murli* performed at the *bagh* in Firangi mahal. The *urs* is still held but it doesn't have the same cultural significance it seems. This obviously has to do with the decline of Firangi Mahal both in terms of spiritual authority as well as the physical decline of Firangi Mahal into a ruin/slum.¹¹

Saints and Qawwali in Lucknow’s Vicinity

While many Sufi saints lived and practiced their mysticism in the Awadh region throughout the last one millennium, very few

¹⁰ Abul Kalam Azad’s *Ghubar-e Khatir*, edited by Malik Ram published by Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, 1967.

¹¹ The author would like to thank Salim Kidwai for providing help in this matter.

may have matched the popularity of Haji Waris Ali Shah of the 19th century. Waris Ali was born in Dewa town of Barabanki district (near Lucknow) around 1809 and travelled extensively, all over the country as well as other parts of the world, especially on his pilgrimages to Mecca, as a barefoot fakir wearing an *ihram* (two unstitched pieces of white cloth worn by Hajj pilgrims) throughout his life. Waris Ali was fond of listening to poetry and sama, and one of his most favourite disciple was Avghat Shah Warsi, a poet from Bachhraon (near Moradabad) who composed mystic poetry, especially *dohas* (couplets) in Awadhi, Braj and Urdu languages, for his Sufi master.¹² Some of Avghat Shah's poetry is still sung by qawwals, such as Meraj Nizami of Delhi who featured at least one such verse in his collection – a song in Braj in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (Qawwal 342)¹³.

The mystics at the shrine of Haji Waris Ali still follow the tradition of wearing a light yellow-coloured *ihram* or unstitched cloth, attending ceremonies like qawwali *mehfils*. Most followers of Haji Waris, including qawwals, use *Warsi* as their title, and are spread out outside the Awadh region too – as far as Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh), Karachi (Pakistan) and even some western countries. A well-known follower of the saint was poet Bedam Shah Warsi (d. 1936) whose poetry is regularly performed by qawwals in India and Pakistan. At least seven of Bedam Shah's poems are documented by Meraj Ahmed Qawwal for the purpose of qawwali performance. For instance, these verses describing the Chishti saints celebrating the festival of Holi in Braj dialect:

*Ganj-e Shakar ke lal Nizamudeen Chisht nagar mein phaag rachayo,
Khaja Moinudeen aur Qutub ke prem ke rang ki raini chadhayo.*
(Nizamuddin, the favourite of Baba Farid, plays the Holi in the town of Chisht,
Fills the water fountain with the colour of love for Khwaja Moinuddin and Qutbuddin Ka'ki)

¹² Avghat Shah Warsi's Faizan-e Warsi [Also known as Zamzama-e Qawwali] compiled by Anis Ahmed Warsi, Delhi: S.A. Publications, 2006.

¹³ Meraj Ahmed Qawwal's *Surood-e Ruhani, Qawwali ke Rang*, Delhi, 1998, p. 342.

There are many other poets of the region such as Aarzoo Lakhnawi, Behzad Lakhnawi, Shakeel Bayuni, Majnun Lakhnawi, Nadir Kakorvi and others whose devotional verses are part of the qawwals' repertoire¹⁴. Several rural areas on the outskirts of Lucknow nurtured literature and performative traditions related to devotional Islam and Sufism that carry strong bonds of pluralism. One of them is Kakori, a small historic town outside Lucknow that has been famous for the scholars, poets and Sufis it produced. One of its poets, Mohsin Kakorvi (died 1905), not only wrote *na'tiya qaseedas* (long poems in praise of the Prophet Mohammad), but also syncretic Urdu songs like *Simt-e Kashi se chala janib-e Mathura badal* (a cloud from Kashi sailed towards Mathura...) that is full of devotion for lord Krishna. Kakori is also famous for Sufis Shah Muhammad Kazim Qalandar and Shah Turab Ali Qalandar whose poetry is full of mystic philosophy bearing Indian symbols of bhakti and references to lord Krishna (Tariq)¹⁵. These poet-mystics were also well versed in music and "their poetry is filled with *shanta rasa* (the emotion of tranquillity)" (Tariq 118) one of the nine *rasas* of Indian aesthetics. Poet Hasrat Mohani, born in 1875 at Unnao near Lucknow, was also a great admirer of Krishna and wrote several Urdu verses celebrating the romantic lore of Krishna and Radha as Sufi symbols of love.

Qawwali and Sufi Saints in Rohilkhand

While exploring the *qawwali* and Sufi literature in Awadh, one cannot ignore the nearby, smaller provincial centres such as Rohilkhand which comprise towns like Rampur, Bareilly, Badaun and others, and had their own unique centres of Sufi culture, especially the shrines of several important saints. Nizamuddin Aulia himself was born in Badaun in 1238; the tomb of his father,

¹⁴ Anwar Kamal Hussaini's *Mehfil-e Qawwali*, [Urdu], Delhi: Farid Book Depot, 2004.

¹⁵ Shamim Tariq's *Sufia ki She'ri Basirat mein Shri Krishn*, Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2009.

Syed Ahmad Bukhari, in the town is still visited by a large number of devotees. Many poets from Badaun (such as Fani Badayuni and Babu Haya Badayuni) wrote mystical and romantic poetry that is used by the qawwals. Bareilly is known for the Islamic scholar Ahmed Raza Khan (b.1856), whose followers have over the years inculcated a more syncretic and pantheistic Islam, involving ‘innovations’ or local religio-cultural practices, especially the listening of sama. Another Sufi, Shah Niyaz Barelvi (d. 1834), wrote hundreds of devotional and mystic poems in Persian and Urdu, that are sung by qawwals all over South Asia. For instance, the following is one of his Urdu ghazals that have been sung by the famous Pakistani vocalist Abida Parveen:

Ishq mein tere koh-e gham sar pe liya j oho so ho

Aish-o nishat-e zindagi chhod diya j oho so ho

(In your love, I took a mountain of woes on my head, let whatever happens, happen. I abandoned the luxuries and pleasures of life, let whatever happens, happen).¹⁶

While many of Shah Niyaz Barelvi’s poems sung by qawwals such as his *maquebats* (praise) for personalities like Imam Ali (Raziallahu Ta’ala), saint Abdul Qadir Jeelani, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, and saint Nizamuddin Aulia are in Persian, some are also in Hindi or its local Bhojpuri dialect, such as the following verse:

Rooth gaye mose pritam pyare, kaho ri mein kaise mana’un re

Birha ki aag jarawat jiyara, un bin kaise bujhaun re

(My pretty beloved is angry with me, how do I please him now, The fire of separation burns my heart, how do I put it out without him) (Qawwal 375).

The region is named Rohil-khand due to the Rohilla pathans who came from Afghanistan and settled here in 18th century. Among other towns, Rampur was probably one of the strongest

¹⁶ Abida Parveen’s *Raqs-e Bismil*, (audio cassette), Music Today, New Delhi, 2000. The English translation is author’s own.

and culturally richest provincial regions after Lucknow, whose nawab's patronised music and literary traditions so much so that an entire *gharana* or school of classical music known as Rampur-Sahaswan *gharana* evolved, its many well known exponents having been active until today. While Nisar Husain Khan, Ghulam Mustafa Khan, Hafeez Ahmed Khan of this *gharana* regaled the audiences with their finest renditions of *khayal* and *tarana* throughout the 20th century, its most famous maestro today is Rashid Khan – representing one of the greatest *khayal* and *tarana* singers in India today. Besides the practice of classical music forms, the Rohilkhand region had a rich tradition of qawwali performance and learning, with many famous qawwal families active even in the 20th century. While Rampur still has north India's finest qawwals, such as Mohammad Ahmed Warsi (whose father performed in the court of the erstwhile nawab of Rampur), one of the best qawwals of 20th century was undoubtedly Jafar Husain of Badaun. The biggest reason for this region nurturing the qawwali tradition is the presence of a large number of tombs of different saints where *sama* is held. Besides the Sufi shrines, qawwali was/is also performed in this region at public venues such as during annual *melas* or fetes, which originally started as cattle fairs. Such venues promoted qawwali and poetry sessions in other nearby towns as well, such as in Aligarh, where 20th century's famed qawwals like Habib Painter had a great following. Habib Painter's qawwali had an emphasis on powerful lyrics rather than music and instrumentation – he often wrote his own poetry and also used verses from bhakti poets like *mirabai* and *kabir*.

What could be the reasons why qawwali thrived much more in the Rohilkhand region of north India than in Awadh, at least in the 19th and 20th centuries? Some of the reasons are certainly the Rampur nawabs' preferences for Shi'a-related liturgical music and the classical entertainment forms. But another factor could be the presence of a large number of Rohilla pathans who migrated from

Afghanistan into the Rampur-Bareilly region and brought with them their own rustic musical forms, especially a song type known as *chahar bayt*, literally meaning a quartet or ‘four lines’. Although *chahar bayt* sounds very little like other Indo-Muslim musical forms such as qawwali, *ghazal* or any classical vocal form, but qawwali of Rohilkhand region, it seems, may have been influenced slightly by this high energy singing style of the *pathans*, especially in the delivery of its lyrics. The *dafs* (a large-sized frame drums) are the main instruments of *chahar bayt* singing that are not only played by a couple of group members, but also used to improvise the dance-like actions of the singers. A solo recitation of the main poem in moderate or slow tempo is interspersed by vigorous repetitions or refrains of the first line. There is no clapping involved, but the singers do raise or wave their hands towards the audience to stress on certain words. A direct and frank addressing of the lyrics to the audience and the refrains in a chorus are at least some of the elements that can be found common between *qawwali* and *chahar bayt*.

Contemporary Situation of Qawwali in Awadh

Despite Lucknow’s meagre heritage of contemporary qawwali, one cannot ignore the few qawwals from the town that did perform in 20th century. Artists such as Agghan Qawwal, Asif Ali, Faruq, Patrick Qawwal, Raju and Sarvar Husain performed both at the shrines as well as concerts. The town of Kakori itself boasted of many qawwals in 20th century, such as Ali Waris, Azimullah, Jaffar Husain, Kalam, Mohammad Umar, Nusrat, and Rais whereas M. Zahir Khan came from the town of Malihabad and Murli qawwal from Shahjahanpur.¹⁷ Interestingly, Murli’s father was called Kanhai Qawwal and his son performs with the name Raju, even though they are Muslim. Much of their repertoire carries lyrics in local Bhojpuri or Awadhi dialect. Sadly, many of

¹⁷ Regula B Qureshi’s *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 261.

these qawwals could not find larger popularity, probably because they were not promoted either by the recording industry or the Bombay cinema, which incidentally brought many other qawwals such as Ismail Azad, Jani Babu, or Shankar-Shambhu into limelight. But at least one important qawwali group hailing from Lucknow, whose live concert recording was released in 1983 by the Gramophone Company of India Ltd. (EMI), is Afsar Husain Khan and party. Afsar's rustic and seasoned voice reveals the traditional style of qawwali that was common in north India in much of early part of 20th century. He not only sings a traditional *Basant* composition (normally performed at Chishti shrines) but also several contemporary Urdu compositions such as Bedam Shah Warsi's *Be khud kiye dete hain* or one of Jigar Muradabadi's popular ghazals *Yeh hai maikada yaha rind hain*.¹⁸

A question that one may ask is whether the qawwali of Awadh region (or north-central India) is any different from the qawwali style of Punjab region or Pakistan where it is equally (or probably more) active. One of the important differences is that Punjabi or Pakistani *qawwals* are characterized by a vigorous and powerful folksy style of singing in which rhythm and vocal intonation play a significant role (for instance in the case of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan or Abida Parveen), whereas the qawwals of Awadh/Uttar Pradesh or Delhi often give more stress on the lyrics to inspire the Sufis in their spiritual quest. For instance, Jaffar Hussain qawwal of Badaun uses a subtle and comparatively slow style of singing Urdu poetry without using too much vocal dramatics. The repertoire of north India's qawwals features nuances of Urdu/Persian poetry and literary idiom, often combining the bhakti of Krishna-Radha and other local lore whereas the Punjabi musicians use their own regional legends like Bulleh Shah, Heer-Ranjha and others.

¹⁸ *In Concert... The famous qawwal of Lucknow*, Afsar Husain Khan with Kafeel Husain Khan, EMI, ECSD 2922, 1983. (Features 6 songs)

Conclusion

Lucknow, which evolved between 18th and 20th centuries as one of the most important centres for the promotion of music and devotional arts in north India, is sadly losing much of its cultural sheen today. Besides *thumri* and *kathak* which still survive, there is hardly any other form whose practitioners can still be proud of their current state of the arts. According to the late Naushad - one of Lucknow's best known imports in the field of Indian cinema - 'Lucknow's *gayeki gharana* (vocal music school) could not survive the way other *gharanas* such as those from Gwalior or Kirana, even though the city produced great maestros of music in the past.' One of the reasons for this, according to Naushad, is that the writers who compiled history did not think of documenting the lives of musicians and other traditional performers, assuming them to be of 'low' strata of the society (Naushad 20). Abbas (2006) expressed that "Naushad moved from Lucknow to Mumbai in the late 1930s to try his luck in films. Initially, he had to struggle and even had to spend nights on the footpath."¹⁹ Naushad himself worked hard through several decades to become one of the greatest music composers of Indian cinema, often using devotional and mystic music in his scores. While the still-surviving qawwals in Awadh, especially those connected with the Sufi shrines like *Dewa sharif*, try hard to make a living, they do remember music directors like Naushad with nostalgia for the old times that may seem difficult to come back now.

¹⁹ Abbas Shirin's "Naushad passes away in Mumbai; from Barabanki, qawwal mourning," *Indian Express*, Lucknow, May 06, 2006.

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