

Female sufism in Central Asia: from poetry to music

by Razia Sultanova* (Uzbekistan/UK)

The aim of this paper is to trace the influence of Islam and sufism on female poetry and music in Central Asia. For that we need first of all to focus on definitions of Islam and sufism going back to historical times.

1. sufism

The Muslims first entered Central Asia in the middle of the seventh century through raids during their conquest of Persia. The new way of life brought by the Muslims spread throughout the region. In the ensuing centuries native cultures were replaced or transformed as Islam moulded the people into a single community – the Islamic *ummah*. During the height of the Abbasid Caliphate in the eighth and the ninth centuries, Central Asia and Mawarannahr experienced a blossom, Bukhara became one of the leading centres of learning, culture, and art in the Muslim world, its magnificence rivalling contemporaneous cultural centres such as Baghdad, Cairo, and Cordoba. Some of the greatest historians, scientists, and geographers in the history of Islamic culture were natives of the region.

Our understanding of Islam in Central Asia will not be complete without considering the Islamic teaching called sufism. The word *sufism* (originally – *tasavvuf*), which is probably, according to one broadly spread explanation, derived from the Arabic *suf* ("wool"; hence *sufi*, "a person wearing an ascetic's woollen garment"), denotes Islamic mysticism. Although outside movements have had some influence on sufi terminology, sufism is definitely rooted in Islam itself. During the early years of development of the religion of Islam (under the Prophet Muhammad, and later Abu Bakr, Omar, Usman and Ali) there was no state based on the rule of law. A source for the solution of every single problem which occurred in social life had to be found. The Holy Qur'an, as the revelation of Allah, was the first book used as such, and later the Hadith – the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad – were added. The profession of Muhaddith – collectors and interpreters of the Hadithes – was developed at that time. As the French scholar Louis Massignon has pointed out, to follow Hadith meant to follow in every single step of private life the life style of the founder of Islam, Prophet Muhammad, i.e. an ascetic life style full of trembling admiration for Allah.

This ascetic development within the Muhaddith is considered to *be the embryo of sufism*. Consequently, within the first century of Islam, for every Muslim believer the image of God (Allah) appeared mixed with threats and admonishments concerning every single step of his life. Allah warned everyone that there was no escape from payment, and every single matter would be questioned in the other world. At a time of internecine strife, when everyone was involved in a struggle for power, the fear of the

* Fellow researcher at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

Day of Judgment dominated, leading to the rejection of enjoyment in this world for the sake of future life in the next.

The constant thoughts of Allah, the sense of the eyes of the Almighty watching you everywhere, and the readiness to sacrifice all enjoyment in this life for the pleasure of life in another world all lead to the exaltation and excitement which are the foundation of the mystical dimension of Tasawwuf or sufism¹.

The sufi path leading to God and the higher mysteries of human "self" is based on the doctrine of "stations" (*maqamat*) and "states" (*hal* or *ahwal*), which still have not lost their importance for the Muslim mysteries, and is considered to be *the corner stone of sufism*. It may therefore serve as an apt introduction to its fundamentals.

The "way" (the form of mystical perfection) suggests at least three different stages: *shari'a*, *tariqa*, and *hakika*. *Shari'a* means to follow the public law. After learning *shari'a* one can reach the *tariqa* (the way). This term *maqams* (Stations) of the *tariqa* (way) are:

<i>Tawbah</i>	confession
<i>Wara</i>	circumspection/caution
<i>Zuhd</i>	temperance
<i>Faqr</i>	poverty
<i>Sabr</i>	tolerance
<i>Tawakkul</i>	hope, prospect of God ²

maqams (Stations) are stable but there are other sudden outpourings of divine grace which are *Hal* (or plural- *Ahwal*) i.e. instant States of the soul. They could be different introducing various emotional feelings and sentiments:

<i>Qurb</i>	closeness;
<i>Mahabbah</i>	love;
<i>Khawf</i>	fear;
<i>Raja</i>	hope;
<i>Shawq</i>	passion;
<i>Uns</i>	friendship;
<i>Tumaninah</i>	peace of mind;
<i>Ta'ammul</i>	contemplation;
<i>Yaqin</i>	confidence.

After achieving all these states the Traveller approaches the last stage, which is *hakika*, meaning the "true being".

Sufis strive to "constantly be aware of God's presence", stressing "*contemplation over action*", spiritual development over legalism. Popular participation in sufi gatherings and support for various types of *tariqas* remains high throughout the Muslim world, emphasizing communal activities such as *zikr* (also known as *dhikr* – RS). Sufism depends on emotion and imagination in the divine-human relationship. Sufism is unrelated to the Sunni/Shii split, schools of jurisprudence, social class, gender, geography, or family connections. It is closely associated with both popular religion and

¹ Bertels Eugenyi. *sufii. Voshoghdenie k istine* (sufi: an assessment to the true) Moscow, EKSMO-Press, 2002, p. 482.

³ Ibid, p. 510.

orthodox expression of Islamic teachings. It has been both opposed and supported by the state. Sufi rituals consist of the recitation of prayers, poems, and selections from the Qur'an, and methodical repetitions of divine names (*zikr*) or Qur'anic formulas, such as *shahadah*. In communal gatherings, Sufis perform *zikr* aloud, often with musical accompaniment. The specific structure and format of the daily devotional exercises and activities were set by each order's founders as a special spiritual path. The founder was the spiritual guide for all followers, who swore a special oath of obedience to him as their teacher, their *shaykh* (or *sheikh* – RS). The record of the transmission of the rituals was preserved in a formal chain of spiritual descent (*silsilah*) extending back to the founder and then usually to Muhammad. Leadership was passed down either within a family line or on the basis of spiritual seniority within the *tariqa* (order). The typical initiation rite transmits a blessing (*tarakah*) to the disciple, transforming his or her soul.³

So the main features of Sufism are:

1. *Communities meeting* regularly in certain places for religious purposes;
2. *A hierarchy within a constant number of members of the congregation*, which is supposed to have a leader (*sheikh*, *pir* or *imam*) and his subordinates, and to include two or three generations;
3. The presence of a *succession*, called *silsilah* (chain), aimed at the transmission of sacred knowledge from older to younger members of the congregation;
4. The performance of *zikr* ("remembrance of God"), an act of devotion during and after a prayer.

2. Central Asia as a Centre of Sufism

Historically, Central Asia played an extremely important role in the development of Islamic thought and culture. One can mention that the author of "*Hadisi Sahih*" (*The True Collection of Sayings and Actions of the Prophet Muhammad*) – the second most important book in Islam after the Holy Qur'an – is Imam Al-Buhari, who was born in Bukhara – the fourth holiest place in Islam after Mekka, Medina and Jerusalem. The names of Tirmizi, Marginani, Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Al-Biruni, Ulughbek and others are well-known not just in the realm of the Islamic world.

Alongside provision of its invaluable input into mainstream Islamic thought, philosophy and science, Central Asia was the place where at least four out of twelve main orders of Sufism (a mystical teaching of seeking spiritual perfection and unification with God) were founded. The names of Central Asian Masters Ahmad Yassavi (Yassaviyya order), Abdulqadir Gilani (Qadiriyya), Najmiddin Kubra (Kubraviyya), Bahautdin Naqshband (Naqshbandiyya) and Mavlana Rumi – who was born in Balkh – (Mavlaviyya) are among the holiest names of Sufism.

Even at the beginning of the 20th century in Tashkent Sufi *zikrs* were widely carried out in two ways: "*jaharyia*" (aloud, "open") and "*hufiyya*" (in silence) (Lykoshin, 1916). Though Sufism is mostly associated with male activity, women in Tashkent performed hidden Sufi *zikr* in the Hadra district until the 1970s, according to an elderly informant (Munira Alimatova, born 1920).

³ "Sufism" in *The Oxford dictionary of Islam*, John L. Esposito (ed), Oxford Univ. Press, pp. 302-303.

3. Ghazal

Historically in sufism as the best way to achieve spiritual ecstasy was used love poetry with symbolic meaning. The demand for such poetry from the 9th century stimulated the flow of lyrics aiming to create certain emotional states: tolerance and obedience, terrestrial love, hope and so on. *Majlis*, as the main form of social gathering, included conversation, discussion, collective prayers and listening to music. The favourite poetic form for such social gatherings was *ghazal*.

So what is *ghazal* as a poetic form and why it has become so popular in sufi practice and art?

There are many definitions of *ghazal*, the first of which is dated by the beginning of 12th century and belongs to Shamsiddin Qays. "*Ghazal*' in its initial meaning is affection towards women, and also friendship with them..." Encyclopaedia of Islam defines *ghazal* as: "a song, the elegy of love, frequently also erotic-elegiac genre, the song of man to the woman". At the same time the history of this poetic genre, beginning from the 9th century in Arabic poetry, formation and bloom on the Persian soil (Attar, Saadi, Hafez)⁴, marvellous fruiting in the Turkic medieval literature (Nasimi, Navoi, Fuzuli, Babur) testifies not only about the widest area of his propagation, but also the *universal poetics of genre*, which in the process of this development overgrew the boundaries of its origin. If we summarize theoretical studies of *ghazal* as poetic genre, its formal elements, canonised from the times of Saadi and Hafez, namely are: writing *ghazal* by *bayts* (two verses meaning in Arabic 'a house'), rhyming *bayts* according to the formula: A-A, B-A, C-A, etc., the use of *radif* (monorhyme), and also *takhallus* (reference to the name of the author usually in the last *bayt*).

Semantically *ghazal* is purely *lyric, plotless* form, which characterizes, first of all, internal state, but not external action; therefore, it is in the larger degree *statement about a state, rather than a process*. Semantics of *ghazal* is characterized by the presence of two semantic poles: "I" of the lyric hero and "you" or "he/she" of his beloved, which are mutually-impenetrable. Usually between these two poles there is a space of separation, break, unattainability, etc. This separation creates the poetic, emotional stress of *ghazal*. Furthermore there are number of other relations in *ghazal*: "I" – "rival", "I" – "supporters" (sheikh, wine-man, doctor and others).

No wonder that the main bulk of sufi poetry, including sufi poetry of Central Asia is written in the form of *ghazal*. Another factor, which makes *ghazal* a universal form of sufi art is the fact that *it was and is sang*. For instance all classic repertoire of traditional Uzbek and Tajik music is based on *ghazal* form.

In the long history the sufism poetry, which was accepted as the best way to achieve spiritual ecstasy, was either recited or sang. The 10th century scholar Al Farabi said that "the most perfect is a melody united with verse. This is what can move a man and change his morals"⁵. From the beginning of the 10th century, the process of listening to poetry put on music, called "*sama*'", became a daily habit in social life of sufi brotherhoods.

⁴ Great Persian sufi poets of 11th-14th centuries.

⁵ Razia Sultanova Rhythm of Shahsmaqam, Tashkent, Yana, 1998, p. 28.

4. Female sufi poetry in Central Asia

Discussion of the question of the female role in sufism would not be complete without citing the famous expert in Muslim culture, Professor Annemarie Schimmel. In her book *Mystical dimensions of Islam* she notes that "sufism, more than stern orthodoxy, offered women a certain amount of possibilities to participate actively in the religious and social life..." and that "A number of sufi orders had women attached to them as lay members".⁶ Moreover she names historically-known women attached to sufi orders. Amongst them are "Shâh Jihân's eldest daughter Jihânârâ who joined the Qâdiriyya and was highly praised by her master Mullâ Shâh" and "Bîbî Jamâl Khâtun (d.1639) who was one of the outstanding saints of the Qâdiriyya order during its formative period in the Punjab".⁷ As another scholar pointed out "One may assume that even in our day women are usually more concerned with ritual prayer and fasting than the average man in a Turkish or Pakistani household".⁸

Shemeem Burney Abbas, the author of the book *The Female Voice in sufi Ritual*, defines the main areas of female participation in sufism and its rituals on the basis of her research in the Indian subcontinent. The author marks ten different forms of female sufi activities¹¹ but we would like to point out only three of them:

- Women as mystics in sufi practices.
- Women as creators of sufi poetry.
- Women as singers/musicians/participants of sufi songs.

In Central Asia there is historical evidence of women participating in the development of sufism. Investigation of many ancient cemeteries and tomb complexes in Central Asia shows women had a big influence in that respect. For instance, in the Sverdlov district of Bukhara there is the grave of Mastûra Khânim, or Âghâ-yi Buzurg. She was a famous *murshid* or pupil of the Naqshbandî order. She died on 30th July 1523. Âghâ-yi Buzurg had received her status as a *murshid* from Shaykh Shâd-i Giyyati and his wife. She was brought up in the spirit of *murshid* by her grandfather and father. Among her disciples were both men and women.¹² Another leading woman sufi was a well-known head of the Kubraviyya called Bîbî Khadîcha, who lived near Khiva in the 14th century. Her grave is situated in Agahi village in the Khiva district. She dealt only with women, whom she recruited into her order as teenagers, and whom she educated by sharing her secrets. In the surroundings of Bukhara another female sufi, Bîbî Zumrat, was known. Nowadays, the local old women come to her tomb to pay tribute and say their nightly prayers.. But women in Central Asia were also involved in creating the sufi poetry. The names of the most famous female poets from the area are Zebunissa, Nodira, Uvaisi, Anbar-Otin.

Nodira Mohlaroyim from Andijon (1792-1842) had written poems under the pen-names of Komila and Maknuna. She wrote in Persian and Uzbek. Her work consisting of 10,000 *bayts* is widely known. She used a wide range of genres such as a *muhammas*,

⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical dimension of Islam*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975, p. 432.

⁷ Ibid., p. 433.

⁸ Ibid., p. 429.

¹¹ Abbas, Shemeem Burney. *The Female Voice in sufi Ritual*, Texas University Press, 2002, p. 43.

¹² Bakhtiyor Babajanov. "O zenskikh sufiskikh centrakh-mazarakh v Srednej Azii XVI-XVII vv." *Srednyaya Azia i mirovaya civilizacija*. Tashkent: 1992: pp. 17-18.

ruboi, fard, but most of all *ghazals*. News of Nodira's life and poetry began to spread in her lifetime. Historical treatises such as *Muntahabut-tavorih* of Hakimhon Tora, *Tuhfatu-t-tavorih* of Avazmuhammad Attor, *Tarihi Fargona* of Isohon Tora, *Ansobu-s-salotin va tavorihi Havokin* of Mushrif and the stories *Voqeoti Muhammadlaihon* of Uvaysiy and *Haft Gulshan* of Nodir-Uzlat contain valuable information about Nodira's life and activity.¹³

Here's a *ghazal* of Nodira in my translation:

*O straight cypress, what are your thoughts?
Your promise of rendez-vous burnt my soul.*

*Bound, I pray for pardon,
My aim is your perfection.*

*You argue with the face of the moon,
O, sun, have you achieved eclipse?*

*For assets, water of paradise or water of Kaaba (cube in Mekkah),
For me, the pure drops of your tears are enough.*

*You may not yet read them,
But your fortune-telling on holy sheets was blessed.*

*More precious than Jamshid's cup (cup, in which you could see the world)
O sufi-beggar, your broken ceramics.*

*Your lovers died in your sorrow,
But you have no particle of care.*

*O sick heart, in separation
You have not strength to beat.*

*O, Nodira, you speak about love,
And your condition becomes famous amongst the masses.*

(translated by Razia Sultanova)

Jahonotin Uvaysiy from Margilon (1780-1845) had created 15,000 hemistiches. Her works, *devons* (collection of *ghazals*) are still popular among Uzbek people. One of her *devon* is kept in Tashkent, at the Institute of Academy of Science of Republic of Uzbekistan. It includes *ghazals*, *muhammas*, *musaddas*, *murabbas* and poems "Shahzoda Hasan", "Voqeoti Muhammadalihon".

One of her popular *ghazal* is called "If I ask":

*If I ask for the symbol of the meeting (vasl) from the people who love, they kill me,
If I don't ask I die*

*If I build a shop of love for the suffering people, they kill me
If I don't build I die.*

*Don't put me to torments of jealousy, O death, if my beloved is sitting with another,
If I bark unceasing like a dog at his door he kills me,
If I don't bark I die.*

¹³ Nodira she'riyyatidan, Toshkent, 1979, 3-6 bet.

*There is no other way but to be patient if I want him till the dawn of day
If I wander like a vagabond hither and thither, he kills me,
If I don't wander I die.*

*If I was absent while I was far away, it was because my beloved said, forbear:
If I go today to see the flower of his face, he kills me,
If I don't go I die.*

*He avoids me, intimidates me, my soul leaves this ephemeral world,
If I stay with this wan face, strange Uvaysiy, he kills me,
If I don't stay I die.*

(translated by Razia Sultanova)

5. Female sufi music in Central Asia

So, one can deduce that in sufism the path to perfection goes through many different stations increasing in emotional experience. A similar process happens in music.

Uzbek and Tajik religious or sufi music has not yet been classified among the acknowledged musical categories studied by musicologists. The reasons for this are not only of political origin, e.g. in Soviet Era the consequences of all religious confessions, including Islam, being banned, but are also of a musical nature. Religious and sufi music was, and still is, performed mainly without instruments. This fact led to the genre not being taken seriously enough. However, as it is said: 'The conceptualization of religious music as a chant or recitation, rather than music or song, reflects a fundamental Muslim belief in the supremacy of the word as the basis of all religious communication, starting from the revealed word of the Qur'an itself, which constitutes the very foundation of Islam'⁹

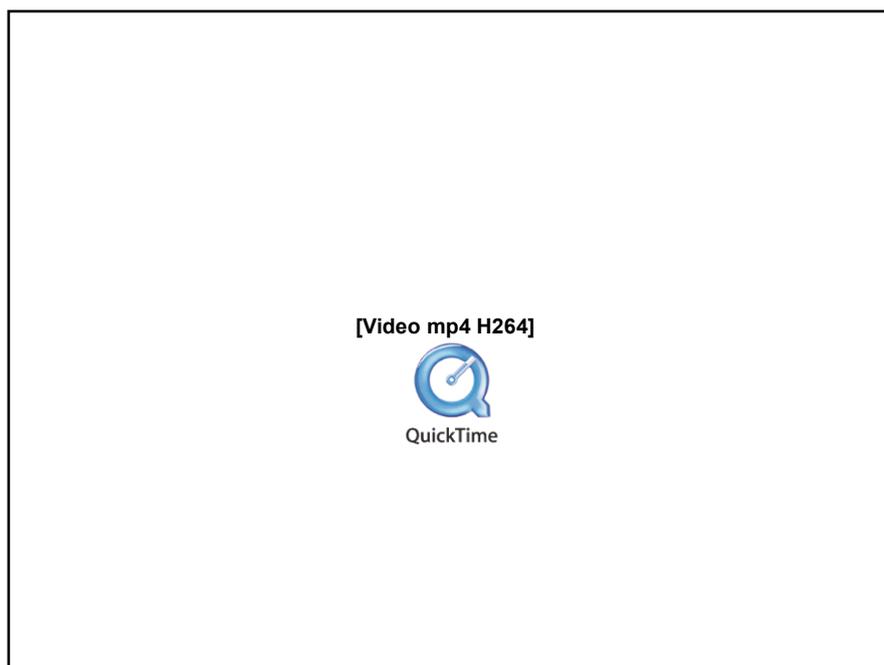
This statement is also true for Central Asian, and particularly Uzbek religious music. According to one of the existing classifications, Islamic religious music could be roughly divided into:

- Mosque music (reciting the Qur'an)
- Sufi order music
- Hymns and songs for festivals¹⁰.

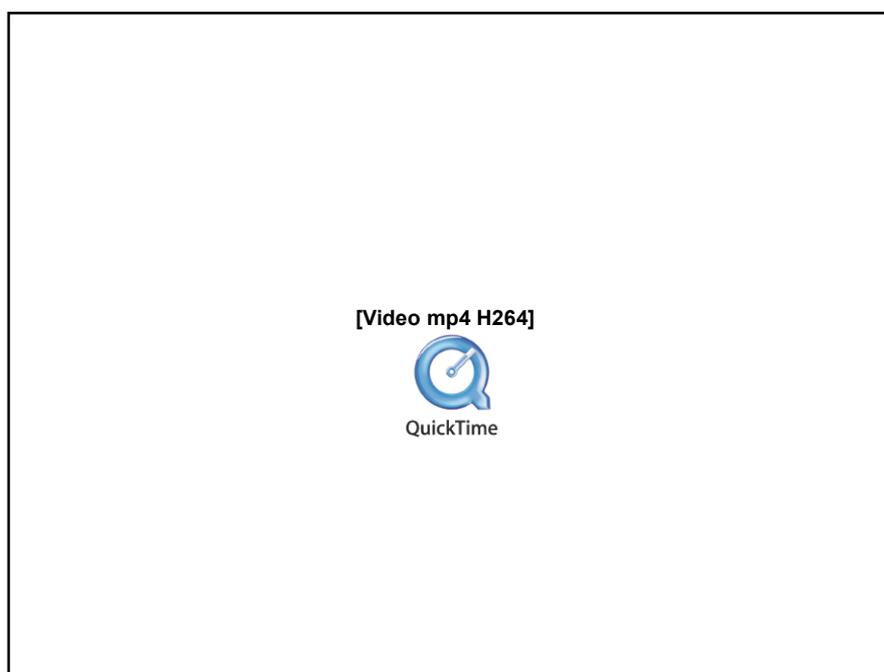
Uzbek and Tajik non-liturgical music is distinguished by particular variety and richness and it differs from one local area to another. For example, hymns expressing devotion to God (*hamd*) or the Prophet (*na't*) combining the celebration of *mavlud* (Prophet Muhammad's birthday) along with the sufi rituals are still found in full range in the Ferghana Valley.

⁹ Regula Qureshi, 'Indo-muslim Religious Music: an Overview', in *Asian Music*, 1972, no. 2, p. 16.

¹⁰ Echarl Neubauer, 'Islamic Religious Music', *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 9, pp. 342-349.



Video example 1. Otin-Oy Malika :
a small part of Mavlyud, performed as a lament on the poetry of Ahmad Yassavyi
Click in the window to play the video inside. Requires adobe reader 6 and +. Or click here >



Video example 2. Sufi Zikr lead by Otin-Oy Saboqad-hola
Click in the window to play the video inside. Requires adobe reader 6 and +. Or click here >



Today this kind of music in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (also southern parts of Kyrgyzstan) is still popular and contains various distinguishing features. One should say that only a few genres of the Islamic musical tradition (for example *azan* – the call to prayer) are still performed in male society. But all other genres occur only in female performances. So far this whole issue has not been discussed in the context of the Uzbek and Tajik religious music.

a) **Shashmaqam**

The *shashmaqam*, the Uzbek-Tajik classical music, is a monumental cycle of vocal and instrumental pieces. It consists of six constituent cycles, or *maqam*¹⁴ each of which is divided into an instrumental section (*mushkilot*) and a vocal section (*nasr*). Each suite contains a series of pieces related by melodic resemblance but set in different metric-rhythmic genres. In general every single suite falls on an older distinction between a fixed, canonical sequence of pieces and an open-ended sequence that followed it.

At the centre of the *maqam* tradition is vocal music. Singers have the greatest cachet among performance and the ability to reach a high tessitura pitch in the *Awj*, or culmination, of a song and sustain it over an entire long breath is much admired by connoisseurs of classical music. Singing *maqam*, however, is far more than a display of virtuosity. "The lyrical expressiveness of the *maqam* is also a means of conveying the beauty and symbolic power of the poetic texts... The text composed in classical forms as *ghazal*... are redolent with symbols drawn from sufism, the mystical trend in Islam. The most salient of these symbols is love, while describing human feelings and activities alludes metaphorically to love of the divine."¹⁵

The melodic development of each *maqam* vocal piece *shu'be*, based on *ghazal* poetry. It progresses through a series of structural divisions distinguished by tessitura: an introductory section, *daramad*, set in a low tessitura leads to a section called *miyyankhona*, typically set at the interval of a fifth above the introduction. *miyyankhona* leads to *dunasr*, set an octave above the *daramad*. *Awj* – "zenith", the culmination – follows *dunasr*, after which the piece gradually descends to the original tessitura in a concluding section called *furaward*. The high-tessitura *awj* is both the musical and the dramatic climax. This description is reminiscent of the path to spiritual wisdom in the *tariqa* (way).

¹⁴ But first time the term *maqam* in its musical means as the system of modes were mentioned by Persian scholar Qutb ad-din al-Shirazi (d. 1311) [See about it: Karomatov F., Elsner Jurgen. "maqam i maqom" in *Muzyka narodov Azii i Afriki*. Vypusk chetvertyi. M.1984, (Music of people of Asia and Africa, volume 4) p. 95.

¹⁵ Theodore Levin and Razia Sultanova, "The classical music of Uzbeks and Tajiks" in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, volume 6, The Middle East, Routledge, pp. 913-914.

SHU'BE

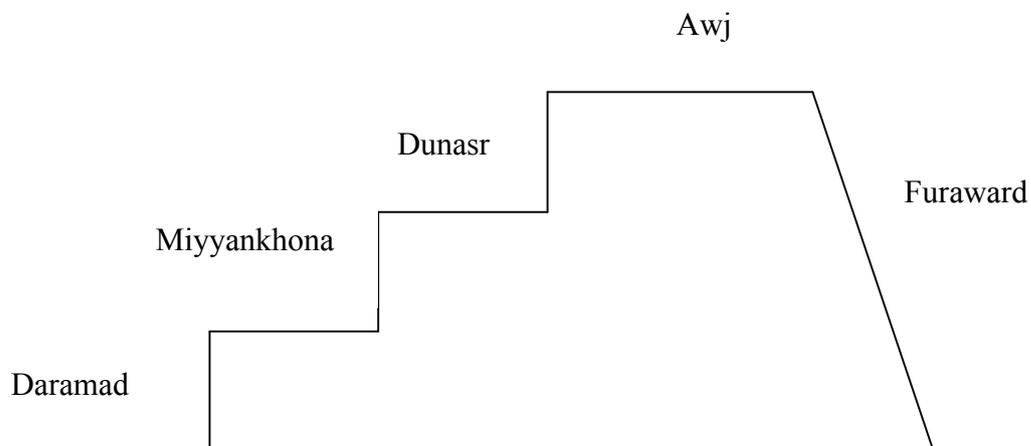


Figure 1: Structure of Shu'be

One can find a similar situation in classical music, where every single *maqam* ("station") is identified with development from wisdom (the first part of *maqam*, *sarahbor*) to quiet Interpretation (the second stage – *talqin*), observation/ recollection/ narration of *nasr* (third stage) and then the optimistic final conclusion (the fourth stage) of *maqam*: *ufar*.

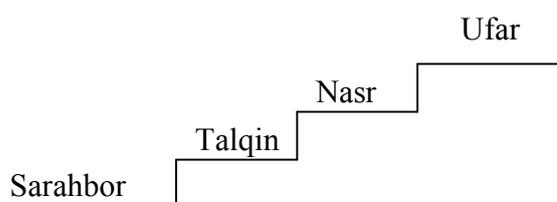


Figure 2: Musical structure of maqam

This long, slowly- developing scale of human feelings and emotional experience reflects how the general sufi comprehension of states of human life has an influence in art and particularly in music.

b) Munajat

Maqam, which used to be performed in long elaborate cycles today very often performed as one piece of music. However the significance of its relation to the sufi dimension is still very high, according to statements of local musicians. In general that music is concerned with the mystical dimension of Islam expressed in musical terms.

The subject of such music is remembrance of God. One of the most popular examples of this kind is the song related to the Ferghana maqam style named *Munajat* (prayer). This song has become famous, being performed by famous female Uzbek and Tajik singers like Barno Is'hakova, Berta Davydova, or Munajat Yulchieva. Every performance of this song awakes an image of zikr based on a long-developed flow of tension in the form of dynamic waves to culmination and back to the foundation. It is a classical song about spiritual assessment to God. It symbolizes the sufi way to perfection. Lyrics by 15th century Uzbek sufi poet Alisher Navoi.

1. *Kecha kelgumdur debon ul sarvi gulro' kelmadi,
Ko'zlarimga kecha tong otquncha uyqu kelmadi.*
2. *Lahza-lahza chiqdimu, chekdim yo'lida intizor,
Keldi jon og'zimg'avu ul sho'xi badho' kelmadi.*
3. *Ul parivash hajridinkim yig'ladim devanavor,
Kimsa bormukim anga ko'rgannda kulgu kelmadi.*
4. *Tolibi sodiq topilmas yo'qsakim qo'ydi qadam
Yo'lg'akim avval qadam ma'shuqqa o'tru kelmadi.*
5. *Ey Navoiy, boda birla hurram et ko'ngul uyin,
Ne uchunkim boda kelgan uyga qayg'u kelmadi.*

1. *My beloved was to come tonight
With his face like a rose and his figure like that of a cypress-tree
But he didn't. The whole night, sleep deserted my eyes.*
2. *Fall of hope, I would take a few steps on the road towards him
My soul was taking flight, But this fickle betrayer didn't come.*
3. *Bereft of his angel-face, I wept and wept like a mad woman.
Whoever saw me must have thought that I was a fool*
4. *Is there is such a thing as a faithful suitor?
If there is one, why does not every step lead him to his beloved?*
5. *Navoi, rejoice in the house of your heart
For sadness never floods a house where wine flows*

(RS: translation from CD Ouzbekistan, Munajat Yulchieva, Ocora Radio France, pp 24-25)

Musical structure here has similar structure to the *ghazal* poetry: double lined *hats* based on *bayats*, gradually rising tension towards the culmination – *awj*. But pure melodic and rhythmical flow makes the music dynamically richer transforming 8'45'' long song into the new dimension. Here is a table of its chronological account:

The first <i>hat/bayat</i> begins at	1'06''
Second	2'33''
Third	3'45''
Fourth	4'35''
Fifth	5'29''
Final (repetition of the fifth)	7'48''

The melody of *munajat* (develops slowly from a low-pitched tonic to the highest register with a dynamic culmination – *awj* (5'29''-7'20'') which takes more than a three-quarters of the way through. It sounds like a philosophical narrative, with

recurring chanting lines. Special attention is paid to individual singing styles of vocalisation, decoration, and ornamentation. The rhythm is based on repetitive ostinato formulas called *usul*, present both in melody development and frame drum accompaniment (*doira*) from the first bar till the last one. Such rhythmic order covering horizontal and vertical space brings to mind decorative ornaments, expressive through their visual sequences, their rhythms of lines and motifs producing a sense of meditation and contemplation¹⁶

The scale is based sequentially on 1-4-5-8 interval pitches developing in a more and more intensive dynamic sphere approaching the culmination – *awj* (5'20"–7'20"). This overshadows the whole previous development as the most expressive part of the song. High pitches, long extending notes, free formulas in rhythm – all work together to create the most powerful part of the piece, bringing an effect of ecstasy or catharsis.

If the previous singing style was based on nasal or throat singing, here at the culmination bright and colourful open-chest singing forms a very significant contrast to the previous long and steady progress of the song. The tune of the *Awj* is also made highly significant by a change in the direction of melodic phrases from ascending to descending. When unity and proportion are attained, a final stage of the structure, a sudden short return to the primary tonic (7'48") as a bridging modulator passage brings the music to a close.

c) Female rituals (O'qish) where Poetry and Music Meet

Originating from folk culture female rituals have an open form of progress. They bear similarity with the *zika* ceremonies and still have a style of development marked by a slow increase to the final stage of climax. So the structure of rituals could be considered as similar to maqam, but belonging to the visual or dramatic arts, with a less formalised means of development than in music.

Through undertaking long periods of fieldwork, analysis and observation over the past fifteen years, I have attempted to build a classification of female rituals I recorded within the Ferghana Valley area and other regions of Uzbekistan. I have divided them into three groups: rituals associated with the life cycle, the calendar cycle, and the religious cycle¹⁷.

Here follows a short description:

- Life Cycle:

bashik toi – birthday or cradle rituals; *sunnat toi* – a circumcision;
toi – wedding rituals; *aza* or *motam* – mourning rituals.

- Calendar Cycle:

Indoor celebrations (*navruz* – New year celebration, 21-22nd March; *sail / lola sail* – tulip-trip; *qovun* – melon-trip) and outdoor celebrations (*suz hotin* – a ritual calling for rain; *hosil bairami* – harvest celebrations; *qor yog'di* – snow celebration).

¹⁶ Sultanova, Razia, *Rhythm of Shahsmaqam*, Tashkent, Yana, 1998, p. 28.

¹⁷ Sultanova, Razia: "En soulevant le voile : le chant des femmes dans les cultures traditionnelles du monde turcophone" in *Cahiers de Musiques Traditionnelles*, Volume 18 : *Entre Femmes*. Ateliers d'ethnomusicologie/Georg éditeur, Genève, 2005, pp. 25-26.

- Religious celebrations:

ramadan or *uraza* – a sacred month of Muslim history; *ashir-oy* – Remembrance day of Imams' death; *qurban-haiyt* – the celebration of Sacrifice; *hudo'i* – 3, 7, 40 days, 6 months, a year of mourning; *mavlud* – birthday of the Prophet and some local rituals like *mushkul kushod* (getting over difficulties).

d) Zikr

Nowadays *zikr* in Central Asia are a mere remains of the real state of worship as it was in past. The passing of time leads to the transformation of rituals. They change not just because of their inner development but also under external pressures, as in Uzbekistan. Today they are only an enigmatic but a very essential shadow of the past, melting in the irresolute image of time. They are a shadow not just in terms of their lost intensity, but also in terms of how they have been reflected by women, who became during the Soviet suppression the only stratum of society which could maintain the sufi tradition in the forms of rituals. Therefore I call this form of female sufism 'reflective sufism'. Innovations in the policy of modern independent Uzbekistan could lead to its disappearance. But as we have seen, that tradition has the inner resources to survive despite external pressures.

As we said, there are two types of *zikr*: *zikr-i-jali* (loud recitation) and *zikr-i-khafi* (performed with either low voice or silently). If in *Naqshbandiyya* the second type is used, in *Yassaviyya*, as we showed, the *otin-oy* follow the loud way. But the silence after the loud *zikr* with *otin-oy* is remarkable. Some of the women were in a trance; others were weeping and repeating the name of Allah. The value and power of the *zikr* is dependent upon the right level of concentration in body and mind. Only when these are achieved can the believer become identified with the *zikr*, i.e the object and the subject is the heart illuminated by the divine light. It should be mentioned that the *zikr* does not allow unity with God. It simply represents the means of purifying the heart.

However, to get a better understanding of the musical development within ritual practice here is the chronometric chart of the ritual *mushkul kushod* (Tajik: *getting over difficulty*) which I recorded in Boisun area of Surhandarya (South-east Uzbekistan) in April 2004. Such analysis offers an introduction to the rich diversity of rituals and their content.

e) Mushkul Kushod – Boisun, April, 2004

Structure of the ritual *mushkul kushod* (2004) consists of many stations. The event developed step by step, built from phases of preparation, introduction, beginning, the ritual itself (with solo and chorus singing), culmination, conclusion, conversation, tea drinking, eating, parting.

All the women gathered together as usual on Tuesday for such a ceremony day. The reason for that occasion was simple: the ritual holder Nasiba Azimova's son obtained a job as a policeman. Such success! A great many ladies, female neighbours and relatives from Boisun village, came to that family to celebrate the event and additionally (as happens in such events) to ask for the assistance of the Goddess to help with other matters (the daughter-in-law of one of these ladies had not given birth for a long time and was mentioned as a person for consideration). The ritual took about two and three-quarter hours.

In preparation for the ritual the ladies gathered together in the biggest room of the household. Upon arrival they entered the room one after another. Moving into the room they sat comfortably around the table cloth (*Dastarhan*) on the floor, greeting each other with usual questions like "How are you? are you in a good health? How is your family, children, mother in law, father in law, your husband? How are your parents? How is your job (if there is any!)". All the ladies spoke in low voices expecting the arrival of the local *otin-oy*. She arrived. Her voice was low in volume and weak, but clearly associated with the poetry she was reciting. All conversations stopped. The *otin-oy* prepared forty candles (by wrapping cotton wool on wooden sticks) to set a fire. Everyone brought food for a meal, putting it on the table-cloth *dastarhan*. Everything was ready for the ritual itself.

At the ceremony the *otin-oy* began reading the first Sura from the Qur'an (*fatihah*). Then she progressed to the proper story of Bibi-Seshanba (41') alternating with religious and educational stories. The ladies all kept their heads down during that reading, collectively adding the endings "Allahu-Akbar". Everyone appealed to the female Goddess Bibi-Seshanba who is believed to be the protector of ladies from all over the world. The story was told about her miracles, her good will and good deeds. She was praised and asked for help. The *otin-oy* sets fire to candles, switched the fire off and the room gets smoggy and dark. All worries were shared and intercession and support asked for in final collective prayer.

Individuals made prayers in low whispering voices. There was silence at the culmination of the ritual. Everyone was in a deep trance (1hour 25").

Thus it can be seen that the system of rituals represents not a casual range of performances, but a harmonic space of songs and sounds, targeting every community member. Being the basic code of Muslim life, these rituals signify the system of religious recitations which symbolise religious meaning. This local tradition underpins any important event in life.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion to this paper one can suggest that today in 21st century Central Asia music in both art (*maqam*) and folk (ritual) forms is based on a similar idea and structure, that of a "long journey" or the way – *tariqa*. In *maqam*-style music an original melodic pattern develops slowly, with consequent emphasis on the culmination, producing an image similar to the sufi's way of *tariqa*.

So, sufism, as the greatest development within Islam, has not disappeared from the scene of Central Asian culture and arts. One can find the evidence of this in the art and folk music forms within female communities in Central Asia.

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