

Maizbhandari Sufi Music: A Study from Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Sufis spread Islam worldwide through 'love', the essence of Islam. Sufi Music is a type of music that is composed around the Sufis' divine love and rapture. Sufi music has been known under various names and forms over time for example, - 'Mystic Music', 'Qawwali Song', 'Lalan Geeti' etc. Similarly, this form of music has been known as Maizbhandari Sufi Music from the time of Gauth al-Azam Hazrat Maulana Shah Sufi Syed Ahmad Ullah (R.). Although this form of music has been known as Maizbhandari music, it is actually Sufi music. Sufi music and Maizbhandari Sufi music have the same characteristics. Maizbhandari Sufi music is unique in that it is the most recent independent version of Sufi music. The Quran and Hadith validate the lyrics of the Maizbhandari Sufi songs, which arouses love for Allah. Due to a lack of awareness regarding Sufi songs and Maizbhandari Sufi songs, some people are spreading false information, claiming that these types of songs are not permitted under Islamic legislation. The purpose of this study is to show that the Maizbhandari Sufi songs do not contradict the Quran, Hadith, Ijma, and Qiyas, rather is supported by the four Sharia jurisprudence and it is a technique of scientific approach for attracting people to the way of Allah. The data have been collected from books, journals, and periodicals and analyzed using the qualitative research approach to verify the Maizbhandari Sufi songs. The findings of the study reveal that Maizbhandari Sufi music is approved by Islamic Sharia and when it is practiced, divine love is aroused in the heart of the travelers on the path of Allah. Hopefully, the truth-seeking human community will find the proper way in regards to Maizbhandari Sufi music through this study.

Keywords

Syed Ahmad Ullah Maizbhandari (R.), Sufi Music, Spiritual Music, Maizbhandari Sufi Music, Mystic Music

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Introduction

Sufism is the essence of Islam, and one of the key themes of Sufism is Sufi music or *sama*. The Sufis used a variety of techniques and approaches to attract people to the path of Allah. Sufi music (the devotional song) is one of the strategies for arousing ecstasy and divine love in the hearts of those who are apathetic or sleeping. It is composed and sung with the intention of arousing devotion to Allah and His Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh). This song is a manifestation of Allah's, the Prophet's, and the Sufi master's admiration. Sufi music, *sama* (the devotional song), and Maizbhandari Sufi music are interrelated. The contents of those songs are approved by four Islamic legislations. Sufi music can be traced back to the Prophetic period. The greatest Sufis were those who accompanied the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh). We can see that there were songwriters, melodists, and artists among the Prophet's companions (pbuh). Although Sufi music has taken on numerous titles over time, the basic theme has stayed unchanged throughout centuries. Hussain pointed out that

When Hazrat Khawja Mu'in al-Din Chisti arrived in India, he noticed that the Indian people enjoyed music; therefore he developed a new approach known as Sufi music. He had succeeded in bringing the masses of India beneath the shadow of Islam by adopting this strategy (150).²

For ages, there has been a debate and dispute between legalists and Sufis on *sama* (the devotional songs). The debate includes a wide range of issues concerning *sama*, including listening to music, using musical instruments, dancing in the *sama*, and clapping hands and stamping feet during the *sama*. The non-Sufi legalists' main argument is that listening to music is outlawed in

² The quoted extract is authors' own translation from original Bengali text:

“খাজা মঈনুদ্দীন চিশতী (ক.) পাক ভারতে আসিয়া ভারতবাসীকে বাদ্য প্রিয় মজাকী রুচি সম্পন্ন দেখিয়া তাহাদের রুচি অনুযায়ী বাদ্যযন্ত্রকে তরীকতের উপাদান ও হেকমত হিসাবে গ্রহণ অনুমোদন করিয়া ভারতবাসীকে হেদায়ত করিতে সক্ষম ও সফলকাম হইয়াছিলেন।”

Islam and they have quoted verses from the Holy Quran as well as Hadith quotes to back up their claims. However, these verses and Hadith cannot be used to argue that the Sufi songs (*sama*) are unlawful. Sufi theologians have researched and analyzed non-Sufi legalists' proof that there are no clear instructions in those references about the topic of whether Sufi songs are prohibited or not which has been clear by Gribetz's analysis, He says, "The weakness in these arguments stems from the fact that 'music' and 'singing' are not specifically mentioned, but are Merely inferred" (45).

Ibn Taymiya (661-728 AD), a Hanbalite theologian who was a detractor of the *sama*, divided it into three categories: lawful *sama*, permissible *sama*, and unlawful *sama*. Ibn Taymiya's usage of the word "*sama*" does not refer to Sufi music; rather, he is referring to the verbal sense of the word "*sama*," which is "listening," as in "listening to the Holy Quran. According to his interpretation, the lawful *sama* is listening to the Holy Quran, and to prove his claim, he quotes the following verse from the Holy Quran, 'For, Believers are those Who, when Allah is mentioned, Fell a tremor in their hearts, And when they hear His revelations rehearsed, find Their faith strengthened, And put (all) their trust In their Lord;' (Al-Quran, 8:2).

We shall attempt to explain the legalists' arguments and provide an answer based on the Quran, Hadith, *Ijma*, *Qiyas*, and Sufi theologians' opinion such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, Abu Nasr al-Sarraj, al-Hujwiri, and Shihab al-Din Suhrawardy. Sufi songs, *sama*, and Maizbhandari Sufi songs are designed in such a way that the songs' objectives are to arouse divine love. A Sufi's sole purpose is to enhance his relationship with Allah. As a result, a Sufi engages in a variety of spiritual pursuits in the path of Allah, and Sufi songs and Maizbhandari Sufi songs are among the spiritual pursuits that can assist him in achieving ecstasy in the love of Allah. Therefore, the aim of the study is to show that the

Maizbhandari Sufi song does not contradict the Quran, Hadith, *Ijma*, and *Qiyas*, but rather is supported by the four Sharia jurisprudence and it is a technique of scientific approach for attracting people to the way of Allah.

Research Objectives

The Objectives of the current research are:

- a. To present the arguments of non-Sufi theologians and legalists who are against Sufi songs and to refute their arguments on the basis of the Quran, Hadiths, and Sufi theologians' judgments.
- b. To show that Sufi song and *sama* are permissible in Islam.
- c. To prove that the Maizbhandari songs are one kind of Sufi songs and it does not contradict the Quran, Hadith, *Ijma*, and *Qiyas*.
- d. To prove Sufi Songs and Maizbhandari Songs are the scientific approach for bringing people to the way of Allah.

Research Questions

The current research tries to find out the answers of the following research questions:

- a. What are the arguments of non-Sufi theologians and legalists against Sufi songs and how can we refute them on the basis of the Quran, Hadiths, and Sufi theologians' judgments?
- b. What kind of song is the Maizbhandari song? Can it contradict the Quran, Hadith, *Ijma*, and *Qiyas*?
- c. How can we prove that Sufi Songs and Maizbhandari Songs are the scientific approaches for bringing people to the way of Allah?

Literature Review

Islam is a sophisticated, liberal, peaceful, and loving religion. The core principle of this religion is the creation of a union between humans and the Creator. Sufi music has the ability to

create ecstasy (*wajd*) in the heart of the seeker of the way of Allah. Sufi music includes the *sama* as well. Listening, and audition are the literal meanings of *sama*, which alludes to music, singing, chanting, and reciting that can evoke religious emotion and ecstasy (*wajd*). In this case, Gribetz says, “*sama* (‘listening,’ ‘hearing,’ ‘audition’) refers to the listening to music, singing, chanting and measured recitation designed to bring about religious emotion and ecstasy (*wajd*)” (43). *Sama*, according to Leonard Lewisohn, “The creation of a specific liturgy, composed of prayer, litanies, singing, music and sometimes dance, known as *sama*” (1).

Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 AD) believes that the heart is the seat of secret things and that it contains a valuable mine of jewels. The most valuable jewels are hidden in the heart, just as fire is hidden in stone and iron, and water is hidden at the bottom of the ground. There is no way to rouse someone up from sleeping unless they hear sweet sounds. “There is no path of sound entering into heart without the door of ear. The feelings that lie hidden in heart are brought out by sweet, melodious and rhymed sounds” (162).

Chishti and Khan state that in *sama*, the most important thing is ecstasy. Higher levels of love and real devotion to the Almighty Allah might lead to ecstasy. The *sama's* fundamental purpose is to establish a profound link between the Creator and human beings. The ecstasy known as truth (*wajdal-haq*) can be experienced in *sama*. In order to get the best benefit from *sama*, the early Sufis prescribed three criteria. “These include time, place and company. If anyone among these is missing, *Sama* will not prove to be a profitable” (286). Hussain asserts that

In Maizbhandari *tariqa*, there is no precondition to recite *dhikr* with musical instruments. Because *Gauth al-Azam Hazrat Maulana Syed Ahmad Ullah* is the *Mujaddid Auliya* (the age-reformer saint), he has appeared in gatherings and assemblies of various nations and religions with various scientific tastes in the modern scientific age. As a strategy

based on place, time, and individuality, he used to allow Sufi songs, musical instruments, and *ghazals* to be used as *dikir's* material (150).³

Bertocci affirms that following the Chishtia sect, *Hazrat Maulana* Syed Ahmad Ullah permitted the practice of Sufi music with musical instruments as a mode of worship. The Maizbhandari School is reported to have generated hundreds of published Sufi songs in the first century after its inception, representing a distinct lyrical tradition (the Maizbhandari *gaan*) within the genre of native Bengali sacred music. The Chishtis believe that *sama*, the use of musical performance, is a unique significance that has been an integral part of this order from the Delhi sultanate times on to the Mughal era, and they insist that according to Bruce Lawrence “*sama* was an essential component of spiritual discipline” (14).

Methodology

The data has been analyzed using a qualitative research method. Primary and secondary data sources have been used. The information has been gathered from books, journals, periodicals, and previously published and unpublished research papers. In the findings and results section, we have first attempted to demonstrate non-Sufi theologians' objections to *sama* as well as Sufi songs, and then we have responded to them using an analytical research approach to determine whether it is permissible or not. Second, we have attempted to show that Sufi songs and *sama* are permissible in Islam, citing the Quran, Hadiths, and Sufi theologian perspectives to support our claims. Third, we have created a historical context for the Maizbhandari songs, as well as the songwriters, in order to prove that the Maizbhandari song is a kind

³ The quoted extract is authors' own translation from original Bengali text:

“মাইজভাণ্ডারী তরীকায় বাদ্যযন্ত্র সহকারে জিকির করিতে হইতে এমন কোন বাধ্যবাধকতা নাই। যেহেতু গাউছুল আজম মাইজভাণ্ডারী (ক.) আধুনিক বৈজ্ঞানিক যুগের বিভিন্ন মজাকীয় বৈজ্ঞানিক রুচি সম্পন্ন বিভিন্ন জাতির ও ধর্মের সমাবেশ ও সংমিশ্রণস্থলে আত্মপ্রকাশিত মোজাদ্দেদ আউলীয়া। গান, বাজনা ও গজল গীতিকে স্থান, কাল, পাত্র ভেদে জিকিরি উপাদান বা হেকমত হিসাবে অনুমোদন ও করার অনুমতি দিতেন।”

of Sufi music incapable of arousing divine love and ecstasy in the hearts of devotees.

Findings and Results

***Sama* and Sufi music: A historical background**

Arabic music was utilized for dancing and marching in the pre-Islamic period, with drums and flutes as instruments. This sort of music elicited emotion as well as a serious tone. During pre-Islamic periods, the Arabs continued to practice this culture. There are many hadiths related to Islamic music during the time of the Prophet (pbuh). The hadiths prove that Islamic music or Sufi music is valid. In this connection, Gribetz quoted a Hadith which is mentioned in the following:

Abu Bakr coming into 'A'isha's presence on the Day of B'ua'th, and finding two young girls singing and beating on tambourines, while Muhammad is resting with his robe over his head. When Abu Bakr rebukes them for their singing, Muhammad intervenes and permits them to continue, since it is a holiday (46).

The word *sama* is most likely derived from the Arabic word 'sami'a', which means 'he heard'. Music is said to be *sama* because it must be heard with the heart's ear. Music was once thought to be a branch of philosophy and mathematics. Al-Kindi (801–873 AD) of Iraq was a great Muslim scholar who demonstrated the impact of melodies on the hearts and souls of humans. He was the first to use music's therapeutic qualities, which he had stated in his book *Tales of Wise Men*. Al-Farabi (870–950 AD) also discussed about the impacts of music and it was stated in IECRC booklet,

Man and the animal under the impulsion of their instincts emit sounds that express their emotions, as they can be one of joy or fear. The human voice expresses greater variety – sadness, tenderness, rage. These sounds in the diversity of

its notes cause in the person that listens to them such shades of feelings or passions, raising him, controlling him or tranquilizing him. (IECRC 12).

Although *sama* has been practiced since the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), “by the end of the 11th century, *sama* was a spiritual concert” (IECRC 12-13). It was sometimes performed by soloists or choruses with instrumental accompaniment. *Sama mahfil* was held at the time under the supervision of a Sheikh or Sufi master. Although there is dispute and controversy about *sama*. However, Sufi theologians believe that *sama* is the only type of spiritual pursuit that awakens divine love in the Sufi follower's inner heart.

***Sama* and Sufi music controversy: An analytical response to non-Sufi legalists**

Gribetz says that the debate and dispute surrounding *sama* began as early as the ninth century when the Hanbalites came to power, and a rich literature against the *sama* was also formed. The *sama* and Sufi songs are forbidden by the legalists because it is comparable to common songs like sensuous music, pre-Islamic and non-Islamic music. Because this type of song is not sanctioned by the Islamic Shariah, *sama* is also considered an illegal song and is therefore prohibited. The legalists have presented verses from the Holy Quran to back up their claims. But the illegality of listening to music is not explicitly stated in those verses. However, their claim is that “Music is equated with poetry, and therefore considered to be forbidden” (44). The following verse is presented on behalf of their claim:

And the Poets, It is those straying in Evil, Who follow them. Seest thou not that they Wander distracted in every Valley? And that they say what they practice not? (Al-Quran, 26:224-226).

Brelovi points out that

The above verse was revealed in the context of the *kafir* (unbeliever) poets of Arabia. Because those poets used to write poems condemning the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh) and would claim that they could write whatever the Prophet told. And the misguided people of their community used to compile the poems from them (683).⁴

As a result, the Almighty Allah revealed the verse above, chastising the poets. In this Quran, Allah warns us not to follow in the footsteps of those poets who used their poetry to attack the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh). Therefore, the verse was revealed reprobating those poets who had composed the poems condemning the Prophet. It will be permitted if the poem's contents are composed in praise of Almighty Allah and the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). In this context, Gulam Rasul Sayeedi stated that

Hazrat Abu Hurayrah (R) narrated that the Prophet (pbuh) said that the most truthful saying is that what a poet said, as the poet Labid's saying: Listen! Everything is destructible except Allah (541)⁵.

The poet Hazrat Hassan bin Sabit (R) was also blessed by the Prophet since he authored poems praising him. He was blessed by the Prophet, who said, "Oh Allah, help him through Gabriel".

It is lawful to write poetry in which the contents are written in praise of Allah and His Prophet. It is not reasonable to prove that listening to music is forbidden by the above verse. If it is

⁴ The quoted extract is authors' own translation from original Bengali text: "এ আয়াত কাফির কবিদের প্রসঙ্গে অবতীর্ণ হয়, যারা বিশ্বকুল সর্দার সাল্লাল্লাহু তা'আলা আলায়হি ওয়াসাল্লামের সমালোচনা করে কবিতা রচনা করতো। আর বলতো, 'মুহাম্মদ মোস্তফাসাল্লাল্লাহু আলায়হি ওয়াসাল্লাম। যেমন বলেন, আমরাও তেমনি বলতে পারি। আর তাদের সম্প্রদায়ের পথভ্রষ্ট লোকেরা তাদের নিকট থেকে উক্ত কবিতাগুলো সংকলন করতো।"

⁵ The quoted extract is authors' own translation from original Urdu text: حضرت ابو ہریرہ رضی اللہ عنہ بیان کرتے ہیں کہ رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم نے فرمایا سب سے سچی بات جو کسی شاعر نے کہی ہے وہ لبید کی بات کی ہے۔ الا کل شیء ما خلا اللہ باطل

permissible to compose poems praising Allah and His Messenger, Sufi music will also be permissible as the contents of both are the same.

Ibn al-Jawzi (1116-1201 AD), a Hanbalites theologian in Baghdad in the twelfth century, provided three verses from the Holy Quran to show that singing was forbidden. These three verses are: (1) But there are, among men, Those who purchase idle tales, Without knowledge (or meaning), To mislead (men) from the Path Of Allah (31:6) (2) Wasting your times in vanities? (*wa-antum samidiina*) (53: 61) (3) And Arouse those Whom thou canst among them, With thy (seductive) voice" (17: 64). To emphasize the disapproval of singing from these verses, he brought up the following arguments.

The first verse above relates to singing, which is supported by tradition. Gribetz argues that "the word '*samada*' is a Himyarite word" (45) that alludes to singing in the second verse of the above-mentioned. The third verse of the above mentioned refers also to singing and music.

Music and singing are not specifically addressed in such verses, according to Quran interpreters, but are just assumed. The following responses can be gathered from non-Sufi legalists' arguments based on the verses above: The word "*samada*" implies "singing" in the perspective of Akrama (R). When the Holy Qur'an was recited in front of disbelievers, they used to sing to divert themselves from the words of the Qur'an. Here, the term "*samada*" refers to such a type of singing which is non-Islamic. Although it is forbidden to sing either an Islamic or a Sufi song while reciting the Holy Quran. As a result, singing a non-Islamic song while reciting the Holy Quran, which is *haram*, is out of the question. Therefore, using the above-mentioned verse to express disapproval of Sufi

music or *sama* is not acceptable. Sayeedi states that “Dhahaq wrote: “*Samdun*” means the arrogant” (573).⁶

Brelovi pointed out that regarding the commentary of the third verse mentioned above, Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas (R) said that “The voice that comes out of the mouth which is contrary to the contentment of Allah is the voice of *Satan*” (524).⁷ Therefore, this verse does not prove that Sufi music is not permissible.

***Sama* and Sufi music: An Islamic perspective on its legitimacy**

Sweet voices and tones have a significant impact on us all. Even Allah, the Almighty, has exalted the sweet voice and disliked the bad voice. This topic has been stated in the following verse, Allah declares, “And be moderate In thy pace, and lower Thy voice; for the harshest Of sounds without doubt is the braying of the ass” (Al-Quran, 31:19).

It has been observed that when Sufi songs are sung in a melodious, lovely tone, the listeners are influenced. In some cases, ecstatic listeners lose their senses. Thus, Sufi music can contribute to developing divine love in the hearts of listeners. The following verse has also been used in defense of *sama*: “So announce the Good News To My Servants, Those who listen To the Word, And follow The best of it” (Al-Quran, 39:17-18). In the above verse the term ‘the Word’ refers to *al-qawl* which means according to Gribetz’s statement that “*al-qawl* is thought by some to refer to *ghina*” (45).

Innocent music or Sufi music is not forbidden in Islam, but it is in accordance with the Sharia. In this connection, Aminul Hoque Forhadabadi quoted the following hadith,

⁶ The quoted extract is authors’ own translation from original Urdu text:

ضحاک نے لکھا: ”سامدون“ کا معنی ہے: تکبر کرنے والے

⁷ The quoted extract is authors’ own translation from original Bengali text:

“যেই আওয়াজ আল্লাহ তায়ালায় সন্তুষ্টির পরিপন্থী, মুখ থেকে বের হয় তা হচ্ছে শয়তানী আওয়াজ।”

Hazrat Imam Ahmad and Hazrat Imam Bukhari narrated from Hazrat Ayesha (R) that when a newly-married woman was taken to the house of one of the Ansar, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Did you not play music with them? Because of the Ansar love music (52).⁸

It is permissible to sing innocent songs with or without the accompaniment of instruments. These kinds of music can bring joy to the listeners as well as divine love.

In his book *Kitab al-Luma' fit -Tasawwuf*, Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi (d.988 AD), a famous Sufi of Islamic mysticism, discussed in detail about *sama*. He has shown the topic through references from the Quran, the traditions of the Holy Prophet (pbuh), and the views of the Sufis to prove the *sama* is valid by Islamic Sharia. In his book, he addressed the importance and significance of a beautiful and melodious voice, citing the Quran and the Prophet's traditions. In this regard, he quoted the Prophet (pbuh) as saying, "Allah has not sent any prophet who has not been endowed with a beautiful voice." (Al-Tusi 338).⁹ Sweet and beautiful voices have the ability to draw people to Allah's path. In the book, he also explored the ideas of a few other Sufis who argued in favor of *sama*. The following are a few of these quotations:

When Hazrat Dhoun al-Noon Misri was asked about *sama*, he said that it is a state revealed by Allah that makes people's hearts restless and drives slaves towards Allah. As a result, everybody who listens to it with sincerity becomes

⁸ The quoted extract is author's own translation from original Bengali text:

ইমাম আহমদ এবং বুখারী (রা:) হযরত আয়শা (রা:) হইতে বর্ণনা করেন যে, এক নব বিবাহিতা স্ত্রীলোককে (তাহার স্বামী) জনৈক আনছারের ঘরে নিয়া যাওয়া হইলে হযরত রাসুলুল্লাহ (দ:) বলিলেন, "তোমাদের সহিত কি গান-বাজনা নাই। কেননা আনছারগণ গান-বাজনা ভালবাসিয়া থাকেন।"

⁹ The quoted extract is authors' own translation from original Arabic text:

"ما بعث الله نبيا الا حسن الصوت"

a truthful person. And whoever hears it with evil desires becomes irreligious (Tusi 397).¹⁰

Tusi (1996) also quoted that when Abul Hasan Nuri was asked about Sufis, he replied that “A Sufi is a person who listens to *sama* and distributes his wealth to others” (Tusi 1996, 398).¹¹

Chishti and Khan mention that only the exoteric *ulema* (*Ahle-e-zahar*) outlawed *sama*, according to Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058-1111 AD), a famous Islamic philosopher and scholar. They do not believe that *sama* has the ability to generate divine love. They think that love, affection, emotion, and friendship can only exist between people of the same gender or between homosexuals. The Sufis' assertions of adoration, love, or *ishq* with Allah, according to the exoteric *ulema*, are completely false. When they had been asked about what is the meaning of love with Allah which is vital for a man. They simply answered that only the worship of Allah and abiding by the rules of Him (291).

Imam Ghazali presented a lot of documentary evidence in favor of *sama* in his impeccable book '*Ihya Ulumuddin*'. Abu Taleb Makki's opinion is also presented in his book. Al-Ghazali narrates that Abu Talib Makki, after analyzing the opinions of many scholars, has come to the conclusion that *sama* is lawful. In this context, he said, Abdullah Muwayyah and his other companions used to listen to *sama*. He added that on the day of certain blessings, the people of Makkah would listen to *sama* and the Medinites also used to hear to them. The sage Attar had two female slaves having a very melodious voice. His friends used to hear *sama* from them. Apart from them, *sama* was heard by the

¹⁰ The quoted extract is author's own translation from original Urdu text:

کسی نے ذوالنون رحمہ اللہ سے سماع کے متعلق سوال کیا تو انہوں نے فرمایا : یہ حق تعالیٰ کی طرف سے وارد ہونے والا ایک کیف ہوتا ہے جو دلوں کو بیقرار کر کے حق تعالیٰ کی طرف لے جاتا ہے لہذا جس نے اسے حق کے ساتھ سنا وہ صاحب حق ہو گیا اور جس نے اپنے نفس کے ساتھ ”سنا و، زندیق ہوا“

¹¹ ”صوفی وہ ہے جو سماع سنتا ہو اور سامان دنیا اوروں کو دے دیتا ہو“

saints Junaid Bagdadi, Sarri Sakti, Junnun Misri, Hares Mohasabi, and Ibne Hasan Askalani. Imam Ghazzali mentioned an incident in Mumsad Dinawari's dream. Once in a dream, Dinawari asked Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh), O Messenger of Allah (pbuh)! Do you dislike anything about *sama*? He replied, "I don't dislike it, but tell them that they should begin it with a verse of the Quran and finish it with its verse" (163).

Chishti and Khan narrate that within the domain of *sama*, Abu Najib Suhrawardi defined three distinct types of listeners. First, those who make contact with Allah during *sama* and hear God's voice. Second, there are individuals who have given much thought to their situation, place, and time; third, there are Sufis whose hearts are devoid of worldly desires, who listen to the *sama* with the purity of heart, and who find their beloved Allah in *sama*. "These people are termed as being the most capable of listening to the *Sama*" (292).

Maizbhandari Sufi song: A historical background

The history of Maizbhandari songs or Maizbhandari Sufi music began in the late nineteenth century. These songs have been written and are continuing to be written based on the honor of *Gauth al-Azam Maizbhandari Hazrat Maulana Shah Sufi Syed Ahmad Ullah* (1826-1906 AD), the founder of the Maizbhandari *tariqa*. These songs are usually Sufi music composed in a spiritual style. The lyrics, words, and appeal of these songs are in complete harmony with the concept of Sufi music. Although Maizbhandari music is basically spiritual music, it is inextricably linked with the cultural tradition of folk music of this country. According to Jahangir, although these songs originated in the late nineteenth century, the connection of these songs can be traced back to the old Bengali *Marfati* and *Murshedi* songs. Moreover, Maizbhandari songs can be found in the religious music of the court of Khwaja Nizam Uddin Aulia and Khwaja Mu'in al-Din Chishti in Delhi and Ajmer. "*Sama*" was the genre of music that Khawaja Moinuddin

Chishti enjoyed. Songs of the *sema* (or *sama*) genre are sung at Maizbhandari rituals” (Jahangir 1999, 179).¹²

Jahangir also narrates that dr. Enamul Haque mentioned *sama* or Sufi music as a feature of the Chishti sect. He found a link between the Chishtia sect and the Maulviya sect in Maizbhandar. In this context, he said, ‘*halka*’ and ‘*sama*’ are almost always held ceremonially at the *dargah* of Maizbhandar, especially during the annual fair (*Urs*). These two events have now become a feature of the *mastans* (the intoxicated by the divine love) here. ‘*halka*’ or circular dancing is a feature of the ‘Maulvi’ community introduced by Maulana Rumi. And ‘*sama*’ or glorification with the help of music is a feature of the Chishti sect. And Maizbhandari music is also similar to the *sama* features of this Chishtia sect. Jahangir also says that “Syed Murtaza Ali finds similarities in it [in the Maizbhandari song] with the rituals of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi’s Maulbiya tariqa, especially the circular method” (Jahangir 1999, 180).¹³

Jahangir also comments that although Maizbhandari songs are related to other types of spiritual music in the spiritual music genre, this music has developed into its own genre in Bengali. The fact that these songs were written and are still being written in praise of *Gauth al-Azam Hazrat Maulana Shah Sufi Syed Ahmad Ullah*, the founder of the Maizbhandari sect and later Sufis, is one of their distinguishing features. These songs were not composed by the founder of Maizbhandari *tariqa* or later Sufis, but rather by their devotees. Maizbhandari songs are different from the general genre of Bengali songs for several reasons. Firstly: Rabindra, Nazrul, Lalou, and Hasan Raja composed the songs themselves

¹² The quoted extract is authors’ own translation from original Bengali text:

“খাজা মঈন উদ্দীন চিশতী যেই ধরনের গান পছন্দ করতেন তাকে বলা হতো ‘সামা’। মাইজভাণ্ডারী সাধনমর্গে যে শ্রেণীর গান পরিবেশন করা হয় তাকেও বলা হয় ‘সেমা’ বা ‘সামা’।”

¹³ “সৈয়দ মুর্তজা আলী এতে [মাইজভাণ্ডারী গানে] মাওলানা জালালুদ্দিন রুমীর মৌলবিয়া তরিকার সাধনমর্গের সাথে, বিশেষত বৃত্তাকারে ঘূর্ণায়মান পদ্ধতির সাথে সাদৃশ্য খুঁজে পেয়েছেন।”

and those songs are known and promoted by their names. But the Maizbhandari songs were not composed by the founder of Maizbhandari tariqa, but by his devotees. Secondly, after the death of Nazrul, Rabindra, Lalon, and Hasan Raja, the composing of those songs has been stopped, but the style of composing Maizbhandari songs is continued. Jahangir also adds that “The Composers of Maizbhandari Songs are the followers of Maizbhandari *Tariqa*” (Jahangir 1999, 182).¹⁴

The songwriters of Maizbhandari *Gaan*

It's difficult to pinpoint who penned the first Maizbhandari song. However, according to some, Hazrat Abdul Hadi Kanchanpuri has been identified as the first composer of Maizbhandari songs. The musical instruments with which Maizbhandari songs are performed are *Khanjari*, *Bella*, *Sarinda*, *Mridang*, Harmonium, and *Setar*. However, the use of harmonium and drums is more noticeable in the performance of Maizbhandari songs at present. According to Jahangir, the evolutionary trend of Maizbhandari songs can be divided into three parts. Firstly, the songs have been composed in honor of *Gauth al-Azam Maizbhandari Hazrat Maulana Shah Sufi Syed Ahmad Ullah*, the founder of the Maizbhandari tariqa. The notable composers in this genre are Maulana Abdul Hadi Kanchonpuri, Maulana Abdul Goni Kanchonpuri, Maulana Bajlul Karim Mondakini, Abdullah Bancharampuri, Rainhan and many more. These songs composed by them were performed only in *sama mahfils* at that time. Secondly, songs were composed in honor of Hazrat Syed Ahmad Ullah Maizbhandari's nephew and his chief caliph Hazrat Maulana Syed Golam Rahman Maizbhandari (1865-1937). The notable composer of the Maizbhandari songs composed in his honor is folk poet Ramesh Sheel. Poet Ramesh Sheel was not only a lyricist but

¹⁴ The quoted extract is authors' own translation from original Bengali text: “মাইজভাণ্ডারী গানের রচয়িতা হলেন মাইজভাণ্ডারী আশেক ভক্তকুল।”

also a composer, and artist. Jahangir also comments that “He enriched the genre of Maizbhandari songs by composing more than three hundred songs” (Jahangir 1999, 183).¹⁵

Thirdly, Maizbhandari songs were composed in honor of Syed Delawor Hussain Maizbhandari (1893-1982), Syed Ziaul Hoque Maizbhandari (1928-1988), and Syed Shafiul Bashir Maizbhandari (b.1999). Notable composers, in this case, are Fakir Farid Hossen, Abdul Gafur Hali, Syed Mohiuddin (Mohi al-Bhandari), and many more.

Maizbhandari Song: An individual version of the Sufi song

Maizbhandari songs are in perfect accord once with Sufi music in terms of melody, rhythm, language, and mood. The contents of Maizbhandari songs are about *tawhid*, the praise of Allah's messenger, and devotion to the Sufi master. Another special feature of Maizbhandari Sufi music is that it is the latest standalone version of Sufi music. In addition to religious formality, more emphasis is placed on moral religion. That is to say, it gives more importance to the internal beauty of the religion than external beauty. Jahangir mentioned the following Maizbhandari song as evident:

“Practice-Breathing in and out- “La Ilaha Illallah,”

Everywhere-within and without-is “La Ilaha Illallah”.

At each center, the sarangi strings are tuned to precious love.

Utter the name of the Creator, “La Ilaha Illallah.”

Inside the seven-hued abode, she dances to music divine;

Entranced in love, utter “La Ilaha Illallah”

In the heart of every devotee is the ever-presence of Gaus-Pir.
Hadi is tutored by his Pir in “La Ilaha Illallah” (Jahangir 2018, 21).

Syed Abdul Hadi Kanchonpuri (1870-1905 AD) composed the aforementioned song. He was one of the spiritual representatives of

¹⁵ The quoted extract is authors' own translation from original Bengali text.
“তিন শতাব্দিক মাইজভাণ্ডারী গান রচনা করে তিনি এ জগতকে সমৃদ্ধ করে তুলেছেন।”

Gauth al-Azam Maizbhandari Syed Ahmad Ullah (1826-1906 AD). The fundamental issue in Islam is *tawhid* (Allah's oneness), which is acknowledged by all religions. The *tawhid* as well as the praise of the Sufi master is covered in the above song. A Sufi song must be linked to the fundamental concepts of Islam, *tawhid*, and *risalat* (prophecy), as well as the Sufi master's appreciation. A Maizbhandari song meets all of the Sufi song's requirements. The above-mentioned song exemplifies this. We can confidently say that the Maizbhandari song is a Sufi song.

Maizbhandari music is a relatively new contribution to the Sufi music world. It conveys the same feeling of divine love as other Sufi songs. The Maizbhandari songs are chanted to conduct *sama mahfil*. However, Syed Delawor Hussain Maizbhandari (1893-1982 AD) has stated several other conditions that must be met in order to do a *sama* program. The Sufi followers must perform ablution before executing a *sama mahfil*, and the presence of the Sufi master or his appointed representative is also required. According to Hussain, in order to carry out a *sama mahfil*, the organizer and the Sufi followers must meet twelve conditions; if any of these conditions is not met, the *sama mahfil* won't be fruitful.

Discussion

Some songs are not recognized as songs by non-Sufi theologians, but they have an appeal to be songs. This type of singing is regarded as *halal* (legal) by all, whether theologians are Sufis or non-Sufis. However, there is a lot of debate over whether Sufi music is *halal* or not. Sufi theologians have stated unambiguously that it is *halal*, that it can assist Sufi followers in developing their spiritually, and that it is one of the most powerful means of arousing divine love. Non-Sufi theologians, on the other hand, have taken a stand to prove that it is forbidden. Apart from that, there is no debate about sensual music. They are all in consensus that sensual music is *haram* (prohibited).

The good and bad sides of an item are determined by whether or not it contains illegal, injurious, or harmful elements. If anything is naturally good, the whole thing will definitely be good. The main themes of Sufi music and Maizbhandari songs are Allah's, His Prophet's (PBUH), and Sufi master's appreciation. If those songs include no illicit or sensual content, no one should infer they are prohibited or in violation of Islamic jurisprudence. That is why Sufi theologians have declared it *halal* (legal).

Limitation

This paper does have a limitation. We gathered data from the books of a few well-known theologians; however, the better the conclusion will be if many more theologians' viewpoints are incorporated to support the validity of the Sufi song. We have studied the songs composed by the early Sufis of the Maizbhandar domain in the case of Maizbhandari songs. We would get a better outcome if we could study more Maizbhandari songs, regardless of when they were written.

Conclusion

The primary goals of both the Sufi and Maizbhandari songs are to establish a link and a bridge between the Creator and His creations. Those songs aren't just for amusement; they play an important role in awakening divine love through the melodious voice of the songs. During the performance of the songs, it is seen that the audience and Sufi followers have lost their worldly senses and are all submerged in a deep sea of heavenly love. Ecstasy (*wajd*) is the term for this state. In Sufi terms, ecstasy is the primary ancillary. The worship of a Sufi devotee will be fruitless until the ecstasy is awakened. Sufi music's sole objective is to awaken the sleeping non-attachment senses to spiritual love. Maizbhandari music occupies a special place in Sufi music. Since most of these songs are composed in Bengali, they easily create a heavenly feeling in the hearts of the devotee. Because of their indigenous qualities, lyrics, and language, Maizbhandari songs are not only practiced by Sufi followers but they're also heard in the mouths of common people in Bangladesh. Due to its distinct characteristics, Maizbhandari music holds a distinctive place in Bangladeshi folk songs.

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