

## Sufi Sama – The Soul of Sufi Mystical Music

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### Abstract

Sama or Sima is the soul of Sufi mystical music. Sama is an Persian word with means to listen. According to an anecdote the trend of singing ‘Sama’ was first started in eleventh century by Khwaja Moimuuddin Chishti. He started singing the Quran verser in Arabic an ‘Buff’. And this style of singing slowly and gradually converted in to Qual and from Quat it automatically covered into Qawwali.

*Key words : Sufi Sama, Qawwali, Sufi Music.*

Sama, the Sufi practice of listening to spiritually simulating songs and a source for inducing a mystical state of ecstasy, through a matter of great controversy between the Ulama and Mashaikh, has been the most widely known expression of mystical life in Islam. The chishtiyah not only recognised it as a great Sufi institution but also widely practised and defended it as a means of Sufi’s attaining Wajd (literally finding God). Like all the basic ideas and institutions of tasawwuf ‘Sama’ is also a subject of discussion in almost all the authentic and standard work on Sufism. There is also a considerable literature against it, but that is not true. We would, however, refer, in regard to the permissibility of music in Islam, to a medieval authority on tasawwuf and a modern commentator of the Quran – both alims of wide recognition in their own right and known respectively as Shaikh Hajwari and Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad. (1888 AD-1958 AD).



According to famous Persian, Hindi & Urdu poet-scholar from Delhi University, “Late Dr. Tanveer Ahmad Alvi,” Hujwari had written that anyone who says that he finds no pleasure in sound and melodies and music is either a liar and a hypocrite or he is not in his right senses and is outside the category of men and beasts. Those who prohibit music to so in order that they may keep the divine commandment, but theologians are agreed that it is permissible to hear musical instruments if they are not used for diversion and if the mind is not led to wickedness through hearing them. Many traditions are cited in support of this view. (Kashf-ul-Mahjub, Pg 401) The Mawlana says, “It is widely believed that Islam frowns upon the cultivation of fine arts and music comes under the prohibited things in the Shariah, but actually it is wrong. However, the truth is that our jurists in their zeal for prohibiting all those things that lead to corrubting the mind have taken this stand. But infact the extreme posture taken by them was on

juridical ground and not on ground of the Shariah Juridical authority is very wide. Everything which if through improper use, leads to moral degradation, can be prohibited by a juridical ordinance. But the fact that it is permissible under the Shariah can not be challenged at all.

Famous Sufi mystic Shaikh Al-Hujwiri's stand in the following extract is self-explanatory as for sama. He writes, "once, when I was at Merv, one of the leaders of Ahl-i-Hadith and the most celebrated of them all said to me," I have composed a work on the permissibility of audition (Sama). I replied, "It is a great calamity religion that the Imam should have made lawful an amusement which is the root of all immorality." If you do not hold it to be lawful," said he, "why do you practise it? I answered, "It's lawfulness depends on circumstance and can not be asserted absolutely: If audition produces a lawful effect on the mind, then it is lawful, it is unlawful if the effect is unlawful and permissible if the effect is permissible. (Kashf-ul-Mahjub, pp. 401-02).

### **Sufi Sama and Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya**

The spiritual empire founded in India towards the end of the 12th century, rose in power and grandeur, reaching its zenith in the personality of Shaikh Nizamuddin Awliya. This made the influential worldly 'ulama' jealous of the Shaikh and they tried to impress upon the minds of rulers that his popularity among the masses might prove a challenge to their authority. On their own part, the most that they could do, was to take up, from time to time, the controversial matter of Sama as a pre text to denigrate the Shaikh as one who had no regard for the precept of the Shariah. This ultimately led to a situation where, in spite of his complete detachment from state of affairs and his reluctance to grant audience even to powerful Sultans he had to appear before Sultan Gyasuddin Tughlaq to argue in favour of the legality of Sama. (Mystical Music)

Sama or Sama was, no doubt, the burning topic of the day. This is, perhaps, why we find Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya discussing its various aspects and giving his opinion on them in several of his discourses as recorded in Fawaid-al-Fuad. Talking about Sama was a stable touchstone of one's piety. (Fawaid-ul-Fuad). Part II, Majilis.4 On another occasion he observed that, according to mashaikh, Sama, assemblies were blessed with divine mercy. He said that in Delhi Sama was popularised by Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri and Qadi Minhajuddin Siraj and that there were quite a good number of ulama who did not say anything about it while some without knowledge picked up a quarrel and made an uproar. Once, when one said that Hazrat Makhdum (the sheikh) could hear sama at any time he wished as it was made lawful for him, he strongly reacted that an unlawful thing could not be made lawful by any one's order and vice versa. Then, he said that opinion differed about Sama and the Imam Shafi (d. 820 AD), contrary to Hanafi ulama considered Sama even with daff (drum) and chaghanah as permissible. Thus, in view of such difference of opinion, he concluded, the ruler's decree will be the order of the day. However, once when the sheikh was informed that some darweshes associated with his august threshold had danced in a Sama where harps, rebecs and flutes were freely used, he remarked that it was not good and proper on their part, for what was unlawful in the Shariah was also undesirable. In yet another majlis he is

reported to have stated that sama had been heard even by the great Shaikhs and those who had taken to the Sufi way of life and people of a refined taste and keen sensitivity, with a heart full of compassion and love, were moved to tears by a single couplet heard from the qawwali singer, no matter whether it had been recited with or without accompaniment of musical instruments. The real sama, according to him was related to the feelings of compassion, it had nothing to do with instruments of music.

In the same majlis, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya told the audience of his own hearing of Sama and said, "Each time when I have heard sama and whatever I have heard from the qawwal in the sama – I swear in the name of the Shaikh's garment – my practice has been to ascribe all that to the virtues and disposition of the Shaikh Nizamuddin. Once, in his life time, I was present in a sama and the qawwal was reciting the verse – "Do not walk like this, lest you be hurt, Be an evil eye." This at once reminded me of the good qualities disposition, piety and righteousness, excellence in learning and captivating grace of hzt Nizamuddin and I was moved to tears with so much intensity that I find it very difficult to describe it. Once, says Hasan Sijzi, when the subject under discussion was sama, he submitted to the Shaikh that, miserable as he was perplexed, for he had nothing of the devotion and worship of God to his credit nor was he used to the devotional practices and litanies of darweshes. But on the other hand, he said, sama had always a moving effect on him and he felt immense relief and comfort when he heard it or when he was in the Shaikh's majlis, a similar effect was produced and he felt his heart devoid of all desires and worldly passions. There upon, the Shaikh observed, 'Sama is of two kinds – hajim (assaulting) and ghair-i-hajim (non-assaulting). The former over whelms the listner i.e. the voice or the verse that is heard, agitates and moves the listener and this is a state which cannot be described or explained. The latter, the non-assaulting.

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