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METAMORPHOSING SPIRITUALITY AND COMMODIFIED QAWWALI

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Qawwali, a devotional musical tradition deeply rooted in the Sufi Islam, has played an important role in spiritual practices and the cultural identity of several communities in southern Asia, particularly in India. Originally from the Sufi poet of the thirteenth century Khusrau, qawwali serves as a means for believers to connect with the divine, transcending the mundane through the music and the lyrics of the ecstasy designed to evoke love and divine desire. Qawwali has materialized as a spiritual ritual and a means of social cohesion. In this environment, the Sufi meetings, or Majlis resonate with the rhythmic patterns of actions in clapping and forming 'sama', promoting an environment where spirituality and community commitment are intertwined (Khasnobis, 2024).

The historical importance of Qawwali is not simply limited to its origins; rather, it embodies a dynamic interaction between art and spiritual expression that has evolved for centuries. The intricate interaction of poetic issues, mainly revolving around love and devotion, underlines Qawwali's role in facilitation of the spiritual journey of his audience. The songs delivered in a call and response format allow community participation, which allows people to interact with performances at a personal and spiritual level. Consequently, Qawwali serves as an important vehicle for the Sufi teachings that emphasize the internal search for divine faith and love, which is indispensable for Khultabad's spiritual landscape and beyond (Khasnobis, 2024). Within the contextual landscape of Khultabad, a city recognized for its sanctuaries and historical suffering associations with outstanding saints Sufi such as the venerated Muntajib al-Din alias Zar-Zari Bakhsh.

A study by James Newell for his doctoral dissertation *Experiencing Qawwali: Sound As Spiritual Power In Sufi India* submitted to Graduate School of Vanderbilt University (2007) stated that Qawwali is a form of devotional music that expresses the mystical Sufi practice of Islam in South Asia, mainly in areas of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The term qawwali comes from the Arabic word "qaul," meaning "to speak" or "to say," thus emphasizing the importance of words of these songs. Its main function is to make the listeners understand the words or message of the songs. A typical traditional place of performance is at the shrine of a Muslim saint. Here, sitting on the ground and facing the tomb of the saint, the musicians perform for the saint, his representatives, his devotees and other Sufis. The audience listens intently to the songs, and when one is affected emotionally by its message, he may suddenly raise his arms, stand, or even rise to move about in a kind of spiritual or ecstatic dance. Qawwali is performed by soloists who specialize in singing these songs with the accompaniment of a chorus and instrumentalists. A typical qawwali group is all male, and consists of a lead singer, one or two other soloists, a chorus



of five or six singers accompanied by harmonium (a small keyboard instrument), tabla (a pair of drums), and percussive hand clapping.

Today, qawwali, as a form of spiritual music sung at shrines of Sufi saints, has undergone a dramatic transformation. Now qawwali has become a secular, commercial genre performed on the concert stage for international audiences. This transformation from a ritual function to one of entertainment from a traditional community context to an international. Due to which Qawwali has gone to the sphere of public performance and commercial consumption, its fundamental essence as a spiritual practice has found significant challenges. Qawwali's mercantilization has led to adaptations that prioritize the entertainment value over spiritual depth, altering both its presentation and reception. This transformation raises concerns about the authenticity of actions, since many modern interpretations serve to marketed places that seek to maximize profits instead of promoting an environment for spiritual communion. In addition, pressures to adjust to popular attraction often require the simplification of exclusive textual and thematic elements of qawwali, diluting the intricate spiritual discourse these actions once confirmed (Khasnobis, 2024).

In the context of Khulatabad, where the celebration of Qawwali is deeply entangled in the cultural fabric of the community, these commercial dynamics underline a tension between preservation and evolution. Many Qawwals are sailing for this contradiction, dealing with the implications of monetization in their artistic integrity and spiritual commitments. Qawwali's performance is no longer about the sacred connection with the divine, but has become increasingly an economic effort, directly affecting the life of artists. This change in the approach not only affects the experimental authenticity of the qawwals, but also endangers the cultural heritage associated with qawwali, since the spiritual and communal aspects of tradition are at risk of being eclipsed by imperatives driven by the market (Khasobis, 2024). Through the Khulatabad lens and an additional academic examination, the complexities of Qawwali's marketing reveal critical ideas about evolving interaction between spirituality, community and the economic landscape within contemporary India., The marketing can be understood as the transformation of traditional practices and art forms into raw materials for market consumption, led by economic imperatives and consumer demand. In the context of India, this phenomenon has seen significant manifestations through various cultural expressions, including the musical tradition of Qawwal. Qawwali, a form of sufi devotional music, is mainly committed to themes of divine love and spiritual desire, with the aim of evoking a transcendent experience between its audience. However, the intrusion of commercial interests in the kingdom of Qawwali raises critical questions about the conservation of its spiritual essence and the implications for the artists involved in this practice (Nadira, 2024).

According to James Newell (2007) the classic study of Qawwali to date is Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali by Regula Burkhardt Qureshi (1995). Qureshi provides a comprehensive musicological and cultural study of Qawwali practice in India and Pakistan, focusing especially on the Qawwal *Bachche* of Delhi. All of the various individuals working in a service capacity at the larger dargahs in South Asia serve by virtue of their hereditary rights. The Qawwal *Bachche* represent the lineage of qawwals attached to the Nizam al-Din Awliya dargah in Delhi, and represent a rich tradition whose antecedents are said to have learned the art of Qawwali under tutelage of Amir Khusrau himself, widely understood to be the father of Qawwali, whose compositions are still sung today on Qawwali occasions. Qureshi expertly describes and analyzes Qawwali performance in the classic of the formal mahfil-i-sama' [assembly for listening], the South Asian Chishtiyya variety of the classic Sufi sama'.



Market forces exert a substantial pressure on Qawwalis practitioners, convincing them to adapt their performance to align with popular tastes and commercial profitability. The growing question of Qawwali in consumer environments - which takes place from music festivals to corporate events - moves a transition from its original context of spiritual meetings to the shows entertained aimed at maximizing profit. This transition intrinsically alters the composition and delivery of Qawwali, since artists prioritise the shows which are engaging on thematic depths and spiritual integrity traditionally associated with the art form. The push towards marketing therefore risks diluting the profound motivations at the basis of Qawwali, when the musicians become artists who turn to the preferences of entertainment of the public rather than to the conduits of the spiritual message (Rizvi, 2023).

In Khultabad, a city historically considered a stronghold of Sufi culture, the impacts of marketing on Qawwali have been particularly pronounced. The first qawwali in Maharashtra was sung at Khultabad, close to Aurangabad, a place of Sufi shrines. Very few sincere attempts have been made by the scholars to find out the precarious situation of the qawwals. The visit to Khultabad and the interaction with the qawwals, certain research work done by scholars like Nile Green and James Richard Newell will support the work to find out the lives of the performers who have to travel with the performance at each and every urs (religious festival of the shrine) across the state to live with the art. The local Qawwals have increasingly found themselves navigating in the dichotomy between the conservation of their cultural heritage and the adaptation to the needs of a growing market for devotional music. As reported by the local parties, this struggle has often involved an addiction to family and simplistic musical compositions that appeal to a wider audience, rather than to create intricate performances that honor the complexity of the spiritual roots of Qawwali (Shaikh, 2022). This commodification can lead to a homogenization of performance styles, in which distinct regional characteristics and innovative expressions are obscured by more commercially profitable formats.

The identities of Qawwalis practitioners are significantly modelled by these market influences. Many Qawwals now perceive their roles as entertainers in a capitalist framework, shifting their attention from service to the community and a spiritual connection to financial sustainability. This transformation generates a conflict in their self-control, although they can be seen as custodians of a rich cultural heritage, the need to appeal to consumers' preferences undermine their commitment to the spiritual dimensions of their art. This phenomenon has been documented in various academic works that examine the intersection between culture and commerce in contemporary India, illustrating that the impacts of marketing are large-scale and can generate a redefined artist identity that gives priority to marketability on authenticity spiritual (Worm, 2023).

The balance between music and text in Qawwali is important for several reasons. In Qawwali the lyric or texts have primary importance, but considerable effort is expended to support these texts with a symbolic soundscape of dynamic musical ideas. Musical sounds can be understood metaphorically as text, but they remain something apart, for they relates as much to the body as to the realm of thought. Musical sounds are produced by the actions of the body, they are taken in through the ear, not the eye, as, at least in modern cultures, text usually is, and they engage the body in movement. Musical sounds, even when transcribed, cannot adequately be reproduced in a text. Musical sounds are often the primary catalyst of engaged, embodied experience in religious practice historically and cross culturally and they provide a similar catalyst for engagement with text for many cultures. Nonetheless, the importance of musical sounds in



human cultural embodiment and communication are often overlooked in academic studies. (Newell, 2007)

Furthermore, since commercial interests intertwine with the artistic expression, the subsistence means of the Qawwals become precariously linked to the fluctuations of the demand for consumers. The irregular nature of this question often precipitates the economic instability for musicians who rely on Qawwali as a source of primary income. This precarious economic position is aggravated by the fact that many Qawwals are browsing a landscape in which traditional patronage, substantially a significant source of financial support, is decreasing in favor of the models of revenue led by the public. Consequently, the search for financial security can lead to compromising artistic integrity, perpetuating a cycle in which the marketing of Qawwali basically alters both its practice and the life of its artists (Nadira, 2024). The contemporary Qawwali performance landscape in India has undergone a significant transformation, marked by a perceptible passage from traditional spiritual environments to commercial places. This transition is particularly obvious in urban areas, where the demand for entertainment often eclipses the original religious intention of Qawwali, which has traditionally served as a means of spiritual expression and community gathering. Damodaran (2024) maintains that this marketing has not only changed the way Qawwali is carried out, but also began to erode its spiritual essence. In traditional contexts, such as Sufi sanctuaries and spiritual gatherings, Qawwali performances are imbued with a deep feeling of devotion and emotional connection. They create an environment conducive to spiritual reflection and communal ties, deeply rooted in the accent put by the Sufi tradition on the experience of divine presence through music (Anwar, 2022).

However, in commercial places, such as music festivals, cafes and private events, performance orientation often moves to the value of entertainment, focusing on the commitment and marketing of the public rather than on spiritual transcendence. Qawwali is presented sporadically alongside other musical genres, requiring adaptations in musical style, repertoire and performance dynamics to attract various audiences. This change tends to prioritize accessibility on authenticity, many musicians feeling obliged to modify their traditional practices to meet the expectations of a largely secular audience (Malik, 2023). Consequently, the shades of the traditional spiritual narrative anchored in Qawwali often dilute, transforming into a more general form of entertainment which loses its original meaning.

In addition, the marketing of Qawwali has implications for the means of subsistence of Qawwals because they sail in this evolutionary landscape. In traditional contexts, the Qawwals have gained their subsistence thanks to regular commitments in Sufi sanctuaries, where they often established long-term relationships with their audience based on shared spiritual values (Khan, 2023). However, with the rise in commercial performance, there is an increased need for Qawwals to adapt to the competitive requirements of the entertainment industry. This adaptation can result in financial pressure, as Qawwals can find themselves facing performance concerts that prioritize short-term popularity on sustainable income. In addition, the economic pressures inherent in commercial places often result in lower wages and reduced performance opportunities for traditional artists who can still adhere to the spiritual roots of the form (Raza, 2024).

As the distinction between the performance of spiritual gratuity and entertainment is blurring, there is an increasing concern vis-à-vis the sustainability of Qawwali as a cultural and spiritual practice. This phenomenon is particularly acute in rural centres like Khultabad, where long-standing traditions of Qawwali performance are increasingly disputed by the behavior of modern consumers who promotes convenience and instant gratuity (Jafri, 2022). The transition to



commercial places promotes a landscape where the authentic expression of spirituality and the careful know-how of Qawwal are at risk of being overshadowed by the pressures of marketing.

While Qawwali's expansion in various places has the potential to reach a wider audience, it simultaneously raises critical questions about the preservation of its spiritual essence and the fate of those who devote their lives to this rich tradition musical., The marketing of Qawwali, in particular in contemporary India, represents a significant change in its context of performance, transforming a deeply spiritual expression into an entertainment product. This phenomenon is obvious in various places - major commercial festivals and events sponsored by companies in television competitions - where Qawwali's central intention often becomes obscured by the requirements of an audience focused on the market. Scholars like Siddiqui (2025) argue that Qawwali's spiritual essence comes from its intrinsic connection with Sufi lessons and devotion practices they inspire. The performances are traditionally rooted in a community experience, designed to evoke transcendental states of emotion and connection with the divine. However, as Qawwali becomes more marketed, these deeper spiritual connections suffer, while the accent goes from devotion to the show.

In Khultabad, a notable site for Qawwali performance in Maharashtra, the impact of marketing has led to observable changes in the way Qawwals - Qawwalis performance - approached their art. Previously, the Qawwals would engage in an intimate dialogue with their audience, creating a shared space of devotion and spirituality. However, in marketed contexts, performances are often shortened to adapt within a predetermined time and are structured to prioritize public entertainment on a real spiritual expression. This change has created an environment where the Qawwals feel in a hurry to adapt their equipment to popular requests or to succumb to nature formulates stage shows. Consequently, traditional poetic forms can be replaced by more accessible musical arrangements, sacrificing the nuanced lyric and thematic depth that characterizes the authentic Qawwali (Mahmood, 2023).

The commodification of Qawwali also manifests itself through marketing tactics used by promoters, which often bring together performances such as cultural experiences rather than spiritual gatherings. This can alienate the same communities from which Qawwali has historically emerged, because sacred contexts are transformed into companies focused on profit. For example, while music festivals attract large crowds, the critical intimate spiritual atmosphere for Qawwali resonance is frequently lost. The Qawwals, which have already played mainly for the satisfaction of the spiritual and community connection, are now found to sail in a landscape where the financial gain replaces spiritual accomplishment. This pressure to comply with commercial viability leads to a dilution of the authentic experience for artists and their audience.

In addition, the wait for Qawwals to maintain a constant public profile at a time dominated by social media exacerbates the disconnection of their spiritual roots. Performance in parameters characterized by rapid comments and an immediate commitment to the public can force Qawwals to prioritize popularity and market trends on the authenticity of their profession. The need to generate captivating content for platforms can transform Qawwali's sacred act into a performative show, where the emphasis is on entertainment value rather than moving expression. This environment ultimately undermines the fundamental spiritual intention that has characterized tradition for centuries.

As the contemporary thrust reflects towards marketing, the intrinsic spiritual connection of Qawwali is increasingly compared. The nuances of the artistic form - its intentions of devotion, community ethics and deeply rooted spiritual significance - are likely to be overshadowed by a



market eager for digestible entertainment. The ramifications extend beyond the spiritual domain, directly affecting the means of subsistence of Qawwals, which are now struggling with the requirements of marketing while trying to preserve the essence of their musical heritage. The marketing of Qawwal's music, in particular in regions such as Khultabad, presents significant challenges to the traditional subsistence means of the Qawwals.

Historically, the Qawwals were venerated not only as entertainers but as custodians of a form of sacred art that favored spiritual connection and community identity. However, the contemporary landscape, as highlighted by Sahib (2024), indicates a prevalent trend in which Qawwals increasingly satisfy the commercial public, influencing their financial stability and traditional sources of income. The beginnings of Qawwali in contemporary postcolonial Maharashtra dated to the arrival of the Sufi shaykh Burhan al- Din Gharib (d.1324) at Khuldabad, near Daulatabad and Aurangabad, in the early fourteenth century. Although Qawwali has a considerable history in association with the Sufi practice of sama' prior to the 13th century, it was not always called Qawwali. The establishment of that particular variety of sama' known to us today as Qawwali is usually traced to the Sufi shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya (d.1325) of Delhi and his disciple [murid], the famed Muslim poet Amir Khusrau (d.1325). Burhan al-Din Gharib of Khuldabad was a khalifa, or successor, of Nizam al-Din for 30 years and a good friend of Amir Khusrau. Nizam al-Din Awliya gave Burhan al-Din spiritual dominion [walaya] over an area of the Deccan plateau region of the Indian peninsula which makes up the northern section of present day Maharashtra. Burhan al- Din traveled to the Deccan during the period when the Delhi Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq (d.1351) attempted to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. (Newell 2007)

There is no evidence that any Sufis prior Burhan al-Din Gharib, and possibly his elder brother Muntajib al-Din (affectionately known as Zar Zari Zar Baksh), engaged in sama' in the Deccan region of what is now Maharashtra state. Based on this observation, it seems safe to claim that Qawwali in Maharashtra began with the practice of sama' in Khuldabad under the direction of Burhan al-Din Gharib. This would place Qawwali in Maharashtra in direct lineage to what is widely understood as the traditional birthplace of modern Qawwali, the dargah of Nizam al-Din Awliya in Delhi. Qawwali in Maharashtra, however, includes a variety of contexts and manifestations that do not always conform with the original, established understanding of Qawwali as the formal practice of mahfil-i-sama' [assembly for listening]⁶ practiced at Nizam al-Din Awliya's dargah. The mahfil-i-sama' is the most ritualized aspect of Qawwali, commonly found in the religious context of a saint's death anniversary ['urs] and other highly structured religious observations, such as the sama' practiced by Burhan al-Din and the early Sufis of Khuldabad. In addition to these formal practices, over the centuries Qawwali has developed into a popular devotional expression for the local poor people of Maharashtra, as well as a popular, secular form of musical entertainment, and an international World Music phenomenon. (Newell 2007)

Within the mahfil-i-sama' is the core of Qawwali meaning, purpose, and function. The mahfil-i-sama' is the classic occasion for Qawwali: a male saint is honored, in the person of a shaykh in the saint's lineage, at a major dargah. The word shaykh comes from the Arabic meaning "old man" or "elder." It is also used as a title for someone in authority, either spiritual or political authority. In the mahfil context, the shaykh is the primary symbol of the sacred Other. Although the mahfil-i-sama' is the most formal ritual process associated with Qawwali, this is not its only manifestation. Qawwali has been widely embraced by the poor of South Asia as a resource of

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solace and affirmation, and also as a form of crosscultural entertainment for the masses. Newell (2007)

All the traditional and lineage working style of Qawwali has been shifted to marketing is characterized by shows in weddings, corporate events and other places led by the profit that give priority to the entertainment value with respect to spiritual and cultural authenticity. In Khultabad, a city imbued with the rich inheritance of sufi traditions, the demand for Qawwal's shows has become particularly distorted. The Qawwals that have once gained sustenance through regular religious and cultural commitments, such as the Urs annual celebrations, are now in a precarious position, dependent on the organizers of events that often emphasize the profitability for the spiritual depth. This economic pressure forces the Qawwals to adapt their performances, satisfying the tastes of a more secular audience, which often translates into a dilution of the original spiritual elements of Qawwali. Financial incentives related to commercial performances tend to encourage surface commitment with music, in which attention can move towards the show rather than the transport of Sufi mystical messages, thus undermining the very essence of Qawwal generations.

In addition, this commercial pivot also worsens the challenges faced by many Qawwals who have historically relying on the patronage of local mosques or the holidays of the community. While the Qawwals adapt to the needs of commercialism, they face the increase in volatility in their income flows. Performance may vary significantly in the remuneration, depending on the type of event and the financial skills of the organizers. This unpredictability not only jeopardizes their financial stability, but also introduces new hierarchical structures in which the quality of a performance can be underestimated in favor of marketability, leading to a devaluation of the art form of the Qawwals.

In light of these dynamics, many Qawwals are captured in a dichotomy: the need to earn sustenance while they strive to preserve their cultural heritage. The evolution nature of the presentation of Qawwali often forces them to navigate in a complex balance between the maintenance of artistic integrity and the assignment to commercial pressures. These circumstances led to the marginalization of the Qawwals, since the traditional forms of sustenance and recognition are obscured by the search for profit in the contemporary music sector.

The academic research indicates that as the commercial places proliferate, the Qawwals are increasingly pushed to conform to the traditional entertainment standards, creating a potential split within the same community of Qawwali. In Khultabad, where the spiritual and cultural heritage is deeply rooted, these challenges are particularly touching, pushing the reflection on the potential loss of a rich common assets in favor of individual earnings. The interaction between marketing and vitality of work therefore poses significant implications for the future of Qawwali, raising critical questions about the sustainability of this art form revolved in the face of the evolution of socio-economic conditions., The mercantilization of Qawwali music in contemporary India is significantly manifested through its interrelation with broader market demands and the influences of popular culture, especially facilitated by the proliferation of Bollywood and other conventional media platforms. This transformation can be traced through a variety of interactions that have remodelled the traditional qawwali actions in products that adapt more and more to mass consumption.

Historically, Qawwali has worked as a form of devotional music with deep spiritual foundations, typically made in Sufi (Dargahs) sanctuaries during sometimes spiritual importance. However, as academics like Evan et al. (2024), states that the growing interest in Qawwali within the sociocultural fabric of contemporary India has led to a significant change in its production and



consumption models. Qawwali's transition from a religious ritual to an art form of commercialized action demonstrates the nuanced interaction between spirituality and marketing.

One of the most pronounced influences in this transformation is Bollywood, which has played a fundamental role in the remodelling of the public's perception and consumption of the public's music. The films often incorporate Qawwali to evoke a mystique and a spiritual environment, often eliminating it from its original context and integrate it into the stories that prioritize the entertainment value over spiritual depth. In doing so, Bollywood elevates the qawwali genre to a show designed to enjoy instead of reverence. For example, songs with qawwali elements are sometimes used in romantic or dramatic contexts, which subtract the purpose of their devotional purpose and ritualistic importance (Evan et al., 2024).

The impact of this media representation is double: it not only influences the expectations and experiences of the audience, but also alters the performance practices of Qawwals themselves. Given the demands of the entertainment industry, many qawwals adapt their style, often prioritizing the show and acoustic clarity on spiritual expressiveness. This reorientation is aggravated by the need to attract the conventional public, which can prioritize visual and auditory stimulation over the most subtle spiritual nuances that characterize the traditional qawwali. As Qawwals performs more and more in places such as concerts and festivals, they often consider it necessary to participate in a "performative authenticity" that meets the expectations of the moulded audience largely by Bollywood's representations.

In addition, Qawwali's commodification fundamentally affects the livelihoods of scenic artists. As the demand that commercially viable qawwali grows, the qawwals are trapped in a dilemma: they must balance the preservation of their spiritual inheritance with the need to adapt to market trends that prioritize profits on authenticity. Some traditional artists have reported that commercial success trusted the routines and formulas rehearsed that guarantee the satisfaction of the audience, which can suffocate innovation and personal expression, intrinsic elements for the *Sama* tradition (Evan et al., 2024). Economic pressures associated with marketing can lead to disparities in income, leaving aside those who refuse to meet market trends, resulting in a possible decrease in the diversity of Qawwali yields.

Academic discourse also emphasizes that Qawwali's commodification is not simply a localized problem. It reflects broader patterns of globalization where artistic expressions become commercial to fit in global entertainment narratives. The resulting global attractiveness of Qawwali has the potential to improve the scope of the genre; however, simultaneously it raises critical questions about the essence of the form and authenticity of the performance experience. As qawwals navigates this complex land, the implications for both their livelihoods and for the spiritual essence of Qawwali are more and more intertwined. The commodification of Qawwali in contemporary India has generated important implications for its authenticity and its overall quality. Learned research emphasizes that market influences often lead to a distortion of traditional practices, by which the intrinsic spiritual essence of Qawwali is sacrificed in favor of the attraction of mass and profitability. According to Morve (2024), the growing prevalence of commercially viable performance decreases the rich spiritual stories and the religious contexts that traditionally underlie Qawwali music. Artists are often in a hurry to modify their repertoire to include popular secular themes, thus contributing to an erosion of the main goal of the genre as a means of divine expression and municipal worship. This tension is particularly pronounced in regions like Khulatabad, where Qawwali has historically served as a conduit to spiritual communion, connecting practitioners and the public sharing their religious experiences.



In addition, the marketing phenomenon often promotes a competitive environment between Qawwals to attract a larger audience, which can definitively affect the quality of performance. Morve (2024) postulates that this competition leads to dependence on superficial elements such as flashy presentations or choreographed dance routines, rather than highlighting the authentic vocal prowess and the lyrical depth that characterize the traditional Qawwali. The result is a form of entertainment that prioritizes the spectacle on the deeply rooted spiritual and cultural meanings, undermining the traditional educational forms which historically shaped Qawwali music. As documented in various ethnomusicological studies, this change has an impact not only on the reception and appreciation of Qawwali among the public, but also the personal and spiritual accomplishment of the Qawwals themselves, who are often artists trained in traditional methods of divine expression.

Under the pressures of marketing, the Qawwals find their livelihoods increasingly entangled with market requests, which can lead to an inevitable compromise in their artistic integrity. Artists can be forced to navigate a delicate balance between staying faithful to their artistic talent and adapt to the tastes of consumers, who mainly promote shorter and more accessible interpretations of Qawwali music. This compromise has deep implications for the sustainability of tradition, because the young generation of artists, influenced by notions of celebrity and commercial success, can seek to imitate popularized figures rather than engaging with authentic practices. Morve (2024) affirms that this transformation results in a generational disconnection, posing threats to the transmission of knowledge and by preserving the spiritual essence which is fundamental to the identity of Qawwali.

To summarize, the learned perspectives on the commodification of Qawwali reveal a complex landscape, in which the consequences of market influences question not only the authenticity and the quality of Qawwali as a musical form, but also the means of subsistence of those who are guardians of this inheritance. These changes provoke a critical reflection on how Qawwali could navigate in its future, balancing the requirements of contemporary society with the preservation of its rich spiritual heritage. The voices of the Qawwals in Khultabad provide a critical overview of the impact of marketing on their art form, in particular by stressing the growing dissonance between spiritual devotion and commercial obligations. Personal accounts of practitioners claims the tension that Qawwali's authentic expression is increasingly overshadowed by market requests and public expectations.

A Qawwal, Ahmed Raza, describes his journey to be an interpreter passionate about Qawwali imbued with deep spiritual meaning to sail in an industry where financial success has become a main objective. He is thinking about how the performance that once sought to connect the public with the divine has now focused to maximize ticket sales and repair of pop culture sensitivities. "It looks like we dance on the edge of a precipice, where each note and verse is examined for its commercial viability rather than its spiritual resonance." (Iqbal, 2023) Raza's testimony reflects a broader feeling among the Qawwals who find themselves torn between their sacred call and the pressure to comply with the logics of the market.

Likewise, Fatima Begum, an eminent Qawwali singer, articulates the challenges facing female artists. She notes, "When we go up on the stage, expectations do not concern spirituality, but the supply of entertainment. Our traditional forms of expression are modified - which was once a sacred offering is transformed into a show." (Iqbal 2023) Begum's insight underlines how marketing can not only dilute the spiritual essence of Qawwali, but also reshape gender experiences in the performance space.



In addition, research carried out by researchers such as Khurram Iqbal (2023) supports these personal accounts, noting that the proliferation of media platforms has encouraged Qawwals to prioritize the audience on the authenticity of their performance. Iqbal postulates that the need to call on a wider audience often leads to the disinfection of words and to the omission of nuanced spiritual themes, a phenomenon observed in the evolutionary Qawwali landscape of Khultabad.

The intergenerational impact of commercial pressures is also obvious in the accounts of young Qawwals which feel the weight of the heritage combined with contemporary demands. Amir Khan, a budding artist, reflects: “I grew up listening to the big ones who sang from the heart. Now it seems that everyone is continuing after views and tastes. It is heartbreaking to see the essence of our art reduced to simple entertainment.” (Iqbal, 2023) Thanks to Khan’s perspective, we discern a collective desire for a return to the roots of Qawwali, emphasizing the desire for a deeper spiritual connection with the public and the art form itself.

Finally, Khultabad’s Qawwal Abdul Rahim claimed that Qawwali’s marketing affects not only their artistic integrity but also their financial well-being. As performance opportunities are becoming more and more linked to popular events and festivals, traditional platforms which once provided sustained livelihoods have decreased. This trend is alarming in particular for elderly Qawwals, which often rely on fixed commitments in spiritual contexts. As Shahid Latif (2023) pointed out, the very places that have celebrated Qawwali for its spiritual meaning have now turned into simple spaces for consumer entertainment, which has an impact on the longevity and sustainability of the careers of Qawwals.

These testimonies demonstrate a deep disconnection between the spiritual essence of Qawwali and the commercial executives who came to define his contemporary practice in Sufi shrines across the nation. These ideas question the story of marketing as purely positive, revealing the complexities and consequences on the life of Qawwals and the authenticity of their art form in a rapidly evolving cultural landscape. The marketing of Qawwali in contemporary India reflects a broader trend in which traditional cultural expressions are increasingly merchant. This change reflects the concerns expressed concerning Qawwali, where the continuation of the mass call leads to a dilution of its spiritual essence, relegating complex spiritual and mystical dimensions in favor of easily digestible content (Morve, 2024).

At places of Sufi shrines, Qawwali performances are increasingly organized for commercial purposes, traditional Qawwals find their transformed role of spiritual artists into artists, often underpaid and exploited within the limits of the culture of the event (Morve, 2024). The marketing of these cultural expressions highlights a significant intersection between art and trade, where the authenticity of performance is compromised by incessant pressure to comply with market demands. Just as Qawwali becomes a consumer show, stripping it of its deep spiritual connections. The researchers noted how this phenomenon affects not only individual artists, but also poses broader questions about cultural preservation, identity and the very purpose of these art forms within their respective communities (Morve, 2024).

The comparative study of this musical traditions which resonates the spirituality metamorphosed to commercial song highlights the global implications of marketing on marginalized cultural expressions in India. In Qawwali the encroachment of commercial principles is used to undermine the very foundations on which these art forms have been built, which questions the ability to prosper their original messages in the environment of the current market. This raises critical questions about the future viability of these cultural expressions and the socio-economic structures that support them, ultimately calling for a re-evaluation of the way for which



society is worth and supports the cultural forms which emerge from lived experiences of struggle and transcendence. The continuous marketing of Qawwali in contemporary India represents a significant removal of its traditional roots, raising critical concerns about its spiritual essence and the subsistence means of qawals. As several scholars observe, Qawwali's transformation into a lamentably traded art form has resulted in a dilution of his fundamental mysticism and community meaning (Marzagora & Orsini, 2025). In Khultabad, a place deeply intertwined with Qawwali's spiritual inheritance, it is evident that the increasing emphasis on the value of spiritual engagement has led to a disconnection between artists and audience members seeking deeper and deeper experiences.

The commercialization trend has manifested itself in many ways, including changing performance practices, such as qawal meets the demands of a more consumer -oriented audience. A prioritization of the spectacle over substance usually sacrifices the holiness of the lyrical content that incorporates Sufi spirituality. As a result, Qawwali's own essence - rooted in devotion and the search for divine connection - are overshadowed by commercial imperatives. This phenomenon is particularly exacerbated in urban environments, where entertainment commodification is widespread, diverging from Qawwali's original intention as a means of spiritual reflection and collective worship.

In addition, the financial implications of this commercial landscape weigh heavily in the subsistence means of Qawwals. Although some artists can experience short -term financial gains, the broader effect seems to compromise their long -term sustainability. The need to comply with market trends can lead to dependence on diluted musical forms and simplified lyrical messages that attract mass audiences, potentially corroding Qawwali's authenticity and cultural richness. This reduction in artistic integrity not only affects the identity of individual Qawwals, but also raises concerns for the larger community of musicians and professionals, many of which struggle to find a balance between maintaining their artistic inheritance and achieving financial viability.

In light of these challenges, it is imperative to establish strategic recommendations that promote a healthier interaction between tradition and modernity. One of the main recommendations involves the development of platforms that encourage authentic Qawwali performances, prioritizing artistic integrity and spiritual depth apart from the commercial interests. Initiatives may include workshops and collaborative festivals that show Qawwali in their traditional form, involving the public in a way that emphasizes the spiritual foundations of the art form. University departments of Music and Performing Arts may have the traditional Qawwali's as part of their curriculum which will promote the learner to understand and know the traditional art. These events would not only preserve Qawwali's authenticity, but would also educate individuals about their historical and cultural significance, thus promoting the renewed appreciation among the latest generations.

In addition, organizations focused on the good -Qawwals, could play a critical role in defending the equitable remuneration that reflects their artistic contributions while protecting their subsistence means in relation to the uncertainties of a market. Efforts to create a support infrastructure - such as subsidies, sponsorship or community financing - can alleviate financial pressures, allowing an exploitation of innovative practices that respect and retain traditional Qawwali elements.

Finally, promoting dialogue between scholars, professionals and the community in general can create a more subtle understanding of Qawwali's role in contemporary society. In engaging in discussions that fill the gap between spiritual and commercial goals, stakeholders can work



collectively to recover Qawwali's holiness, ensuring the financial security of their professionals. This balance is crucial not only to the preservation of Qawwali as a spiritual practice, but also to the well-being and the means of subsistence of those who dedicate their lives to this profound form of art.

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