Qalandari Tradition in the Subcontinent: Exploring the Mystical Path

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Abstract

Within the intricate fabric of the Indian subcontinent's cultural and spiritual legacy lies the enigmatic Qalandari tradition. Rooted in Sufism, it bears witness to the great depths of mysticism and spirituality that have pervaded this region for centuries. Their unorthodox behavior has caused a hue and cry from different quarters. However, some Sufis have spoken in their favour. For a better comprehension of the transformative journey of Qalandars, this article will explore its philosophical foundations, historical roots, cultural manifestations, and current significance.

Keywords: *Qalandar, dervish, wandering, ascetic, transformation, ecstasy*

1. Introduction:

Qalandarism is a spiritual movement of transcendent Muslim dervishes who form an eccentric mystical order which observably emerged in the eleventh-century-Khorasan.[1] Despite their roots in Sufism, the adherents of this nonconformist order have largely been denounced by *Shari'ah* masters for their outré behavior, offensive dresses, odd practices, and outlandish rituals. Their aura of nondescriptness caused them to be largely ignored in

[1] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Qalandariya," accessed April 4, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Qalandariyah

the mainstream literature of early Sufism. Nevertheless, the Qalandari tradition has deeply influenced and permeated the popular culture of India and Pakistan. This influence is evident in various genres of cultural expression, such as folk lore, music, poetry, literature, fine arts, and even social norms.

Qalandar, by definition, bears various significations. According to Shah Naimatullah Wali, a fully realized Sufi attains the status of a Qalandar upon achieving his ultimate objective, although alternate interpretations suggest that Qalandar and Sufi are synonymous. Khawaja 'Ubaidullah Ahrar posits that Qalandari refers to the process of losing one's identity through absolving oneself from contradictions. Alternatively, some interpretations suggest that a Qalandar denotes someone who transcends spiritual states, stages, and miracles. Additionally, it is suggested that the word Qalandar may refer to one of the names of Allah in the Syriac language.[1]

2. Foundation:

Although the etymology of the word Qalandar is unclear, its philosophy is rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Some may perceive their practices as too extreme or unorthodox, even questioning the sincerity of their faith. However, dismissing Qalandars as foreign elements within Islam is a superficial and cursory perspective. A deeper examination reveals that Qalandars draw their inspiration from the fundamental tenets of Sufism, such as *zuhd, faqr, sayr, sama, raqs, hubb, wajd, sukr, jazb, fana,* and etcetera.

A distinctive characteristic of Qalandarism is the principle of *zuhd*, which denotes a deliberate withdrawal from worldly pleasures in order to devote oneself to the service of God.[2] In the Holy Qur'an, there is a poignant comparison drawn between the fleeting nature of earthly delights and the enduring rewards promised in the Hereafter. One such Qur'anic verse reads, "The (material) things which you are given are but the conveniences

[1] Sayyid Muhammad Zawqi, *Sirr -e-Dilbaran* (Karachi: Mahfil-e-Zawqia, 1920), 19
[2] Edward Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Willams & Norgate,1863), 1:1260

of this life and the glitter thereof; but that which is with Allah is better and more enduring: will you not then be wise?" [1]

Expounding on the theme of *zuhd*, the Qur'an elucidates further, highlighting the transitory allure of worldly possessions such as wealth, family, and material goods, juxtaposed against the ultimate goal of drawing closer to Allah. It states, "Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: Women and sons; Heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to Allah is the best of the goals (To return to)."[2]

The essence of this concept was precisely encapsulated by the Holy Prophet in these words: "The world is a prison for a believer and Paradise for a non-believer."[3] Once a man sought guidance from him, asking, "O Messenger of Allah, direct me to an act which, if I do it, (will cause) Allah to love me and the people to love me." In response, he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) advised, "Renounce the world and Allah will love you, and renounce what the people possess and the people will love you."[4]

Faqr embodies a distinctive characteristic of Qalandars, epitomizing a state of poverty, need, and want. It's a condition where an individual possesses only what is sufficient for his household or those under his care, and their sustenance becomes a responsibility he diligently fulfills.[5] However, far from being a burden, embracing poverty by choice and enduring it with patience and contentment elevates it to a virtuous deed that draws one closer to Allah. A *faqir*, or one in this state, requires nothing but Allah's grace and adheres to His commandment: "O you men! It is you that have need of Allah; but Allah is the One Free of all wants, worthy of all praise."[6] This sentiment resonates with the teachings of Al-Qur'an 47:38.

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[1] Al-Qur'an 28:60
[2] Al-Qur'an 3:14
[3] Muslim ibn Hajjaj, *Al-Sahih* (Lahore: Darussalam, 2007), Hadith: 2956
[4] Suleman ibn Ash'ath ibn Majah, *Al-Sunan* (Lahore: Darussalam, 2007), Hadith: 4102
[5] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:2425
[6] Al-Qur'an 35:15

The honorable nature of this state is exemplified when Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) refers to himself as *faqir,* expressing his desperate need for any goodness that Allah may bestow upon him.[1] Despite their destitution, *fuqara* find contentment in their circumstances. They do not seek financial aid from the affluent; rather, they rely solely on Allah. Their humility is profound, as illustrated by Allah's depiction of the qualities of the *fuqara*: "(Charity is) for those in need, who, in Allah's cause are restricted (from travel), and cannot move about in the land, seeking (for trade or work): the ignorant man thinks, because of their modesty, that they are free from want. You shall know them by their (unfailing) mark: They beg not importunately from all the sundry."[2] This highlights their modesty and self-restraint, distinguishing them from those who seek charity indiscriminately.

Being true to their state of *faqr*, Qalandars often do not seek to hold permanent residence in one place. They choose to live a life free from the constraints of society and the shackles of conformity to experience the world on their own terms. They are wandering ascetics who travel long distances, often through rugged terrains and difficult weather conditions, in search of spiritual enlightenment in the communion with God. To attain an ecstatic experience, they often sing songs of love, recite devotional formulae praising Allah, and perform hypnotic dances.

Their display of fondness for travelling (*sayr*) resonates with the command of Allah: "Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts."[3] The command emphasizes that the physical journey has the potential to transform hearts and ears. It fills hearts with wisdom and removes the veils from ears that shut the voice of the Truth. The verse reveals that blindness, in a true sense, is not a physical impairment in the eyes, but it is the spiritual hindrance of the heart. Hence, for Qalandars, physical journey is a means to a spiritual journey. They engage themselves in travelling to unlock the doors to the path of spirituality. This illuminates

[1] Al-Qur'an 28:24
[2] Al-Qur'an 2:273
[3] Al-Qur'an 22:46

hearts and gives them vision beyond physical boundaries. Iqbal, the national poet of Pakistan, alludes to this state of heart in the following couplet:

عقل گو آستاں سے دور نہیں　　اس کی تقدیر میں حضور نہیں

دلِ بینا بھی کر خدا سے طلب　　آنکھ کا نور دل کا نور نہیں

> "Although intellect isn't far from the entrance to the Beloved, its destiny does not entail direct communion with Him. Pursue a perceptive heart from God, for the illumination of the heart differs from that of the eyes."

Dhikr, the devotional formulae praising Allah, serves as a means of spiritual connection, and ultimately, union with the Divine- the ultimate goal every Qalandar aspires to. They are often seen chanting *Allah al-Haqq* (abbreviated as *Haqq*), *Allahu* (abbreviated as *Hu*), and sometimes *Haqq Hu*. This practice aligns with the directive of a Quranic verse which mentions such people: "Men who celebrate the praises of Allah, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth."[1] Incessant remembrance of Allah is a souvenir of Divine love for Qalandars. Their hearts find comfort and solace in the remembrance of Allah as they immerse themselves in it. Their continuous communion with God entails their excellence in spirituality and closeness to the Divine. The Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, remarked that *Mufarridun* had outdone everyone. Upon inquiry of the Companions, he clarified they are men and women who frequently remember Allah.[2]

Some practices of Qalandars such as *sama'* and *raqs*, have won criticism from the adherents of ostentatious religiosity. Whereas for them, singing and dancing are not forms of entertainment or frivolous pastimes; they are pathways to spiritual ecstasy and union with the Divine. They experience a sense of liberation as they immerse themselves in the rhythmic movements and melodious hymns. Singing and dancing engenders a state of consciousness on them so profound that they lose themselves in the

[1] Al-Qur'an 3:191
[2] Muslim, *Al-Sahih*, Hadith: 2676

moment. Their imagination takes flight, breaking free from the confines of materiality and soaring towards the celestial realms of transcendence. Their essence undergoes a transformation; what appears is not what they are. Their outward demeanor may seem worthy of reproach, but their inner being reaches the Beloved's abode. About them, the Holy Prophet peace be upon him told, "Many a people with disheveled hair and covered with dust are driven away from the door, but if they are to swear in the name of Allah, He would definitely fulfil that."[1]

Although the role of *sama'* (spiritual listening) and *raqs* (dance) within Islam is often a subject of debate, these practices find roots in narrations attributed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. A famous account relayed by 'A'isha illustrates this. She recounts an incident about the Messenger of Allah who was reclining on a bed in her home while two girls from Ansar were singing songs about the battle of Bu'ath and beating a tambourine. Her father, Abu Bakr entered her house and reproached her for such activity. The Prophet replied, "Abu Bakr! Leave them for this is our Eid (a day of celebration)." On the occasion of Eid, he permitted 'A'isha to stand behind him and observe as Black slaves performed a war dance with shields and spears until she was content.[2]

'A'isha also recounts an incident wherein she arranged the marriage of a girl from the Ansar community. On that occasion, the Messenger of Allah inquired why she did not arrange for someone to sing, as singing at weddings was a tradition among the Ansar.[3] Abu Husain Khalid Al-Madani and his companions saw girls singing and beating tambourines on the Day of 'Ashura in Madina. Troubled by this sight, they voiced their concerns to Rubai' bint Mu'awwidh. She responded by recounting an incident from her own wedding day when two girls sang, extolling the virtues of her forefathers who had fallen in the Battle of Badr, all while the Messenger of Allah was present.[4]

[1] Muslim, *Al-Sahih*, Hadith: 2622
[2] Muhammad ibn Isam'il al-Bukhari, *Al-Sahih* (Lahore: Darussalam, 1997), Hadith: 949
[3] Al-Khatib al-Tibrizi, *Mishkat al-Masabih* (Karachi: Dar-ul-Isha'at 2013), Hadith: 3154
[4] Ibn Majah, *Al-Sunan*, Hadith:1897

Zayd, Ja'far, and 'Ali were so overwhelmed with joy when the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) praised them that they started hopping on one leg. The Prophet then addressed each of them individually. He said to Zaid, "You are my freedman." He said to Ja'far, "You resemble me in both creation and manners." Finally, he said to Ali, "You are from me, and I am from you."[1] His words clearly indicate his profound connection with them. On one occasion, a group of Abyssinians danced in front of the Prophet accompanied by songs in their native dialect, "Muhammad is a Righteous Servant."[2] This incident hints at his tacit approval for *raqs* and *sama'* if nothing immoral is attached to them.

One major theme of Qalandarism is a passionate love for God (*hub or ishq*). The Qalandars are travelers on the path of Divine Love. Through this mystical journey, they experience a deepening sense of love for God. The Qur'anic verse (50:16) speaks about the mystical experience of divine intimacy. Allah declares that He is nearer to us than our jugular vein. This verse emphasizes a spiritual connection between man and God that penetrates the depths of the soul. The Qalandars realize this connection and consider Allah close to them. They cannot ignore His presence even for a moment. They are ardently immersed in the ocean of His love and testify the command of Allah: "But those of Faith are overflowing in their love for Allah."[3]

As for a Sufi lover, he passes through several stations during his journey of love. These stations symbolize different levels of consciousness, awareness, and spiritual realization. He develops an intense desire for closeness with his Beloved (*'ishq*). He seeks an experiential understanding of divine truths (*mar'ifah*). He approaches a state of complete selflessness and surrenders to experience union with the Divine (*fana*). He is spiritually reborn in God, and transforms into a new existence (*baqa*). He becomes a witness to divine realities (*mushahidah*) and perceives His presence in all things. A seeker ultimately becomes the sought-after. The lover transforms into the beloved. Allah reciprocates his love with His Love. This

[1] Ahmed ibn Hanbal, *Al-Musnad* (Lahore: Darussalam, 2013), Hadith: 857
[2] Ahmed, *Al-Musnad*, Hadith: 12540
[3] Al-Qur'an 2:165

reciprocation is evident in the Verse: "Soon will Allah produce a people whom He will love as they will love Him."[1] Iqbal sums up this outcome of Divine love in these words:

عشق کی اک جست نے طے کر دیا قصہ تمام

اس زمین و آسماں کو بے کراں سمجھا تھا میں

> "A single surge of Divine love covered the entire journey (to Allah's communion), otherwise I used to think that earth and heaven were too immense to be surpassed."

At the pinnacle of spiritual enlightenment, Allah oversees the affairs of His beloved. The seeker passes through different levels of consciousness or states of being that go beyond the ordinary human experience. These states are often described in Sufi terminology as *wajd, jazb,* and *sukur*. When he witnesses the realities of the Divine truth, he attains a state of consciousness known as *Wajdan* where certain emotional and spiritual experiences manifest within his heart (*wajd*) leading to feelings of overwhelming joy, happiness, ecstasy and transcendence.[2] Furthermore, a profound encounter with the Divine invokes a state of *Sukur* (*Intoxication*) characterized by a temporary suspension of reason due to wonder or awe, an inner absorption in the presence of the Divine (*jazb*), and ecstatic abandonment of the other.[3] As these states are beyond ordinary human grasp, those who attain such states, like Qalandars, are frequently misunderstood, criticized, and even labeled as heretics or disbelievers.

3. Sufi Masters of this Path:

The Qalandars seem to be inspired by an early mystical order of the ninth to tenth century in Nishapur, known as *Malamatiyah* (the Path of Blame). Based on developing complete sincerity and honesty with God, it emerged as a response to ostentatious claim of piety. It entails elimination of vanity, delusion and presumptuous pretension even at the cost of incurring constant blame by mankind. It is a form of self-scrutiny and self-criticism

[1] Al-Qur'an 5:54
[2] Zawqi, *Sirr -e-Dilbaran*, 331
[3] Ibid., 198

that aspires to abandon any outward mark of distinction or inward claim to spiritual superiority.[1]

In *Malamatiyah* ideology, the greatest veil between man and God is self-conceit. A virtuous person views his virtues with pride and feels an exaggerated belief in his abilities. He quickly develops an inflated sense of self-importance and superiority over others, often leading to overestimation of his prowess. He expects admiration, praise and recognition from others and dislikes criticism and hostility. Allah disapproves of such individuals, as stated in the Quran: "And Allah does not love any self-conceited (*mukhtal*) boaster (*fakhur*)."[2]

As an antithesis, a *malamati* willingly endures public reproach through unconventional acts to eliminate pride, embrace humility, and shun self-conceit. Allah praises them, saying, "They do not fear the blame of a blamer."[3] The *malamati* not only invites external reproach but also engages in continual self-reproach. He undertakes a conscious practice of introspection, aimed at transcending the ego and realizing a deeper spiritual truth. This state of consciousness is praised by Allah as He swears in the Quran by such "self-reproaching soul."[4]

The Sufi master, Dhu 'l-Nun al-Misri (d. 859), walked the path of blame, concealing his inner spirituality and intimate connection with God from the eyes of the people of Egypt. They remained unaware of his Sufi stature and questioned his spiritual excellence until his death, when these words were discovered inscribed upon his forehead, reflecting his mystical journey and spiritual transformation: *This is the beloved of God, who died in love of God, slain by God*. At his funeral, a flock of birds appeared out of nowhere and gathered around his coffin, weaving their wings. That night, seventy

[1] Sara Sviri, "Hakim Tirmidhi and the Malamati Movement in Early Sufism." In *The Heritage of Sufism*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 1:584
[2] Al-Qur'an 57:23
[3] Al-Qur'an 5:54
[4] Al-Qur'an 75:2

people saw the Holy Prophet Peace be upon him in their dreams, saying: I have come to meet Dhu 'l-Nun, the friend of God.[1]

A contemporary of Dhu 'l-Nun in Baghdad, Bishr al-Hafi (d. 841), was similarly undeterred by public opinion as he walked barefoot through the streets. Engrossed in contemplation of God, he viewed shoes as a barrier separating him from God, expressing: "The earth is His carpet, and I find it unfitting to step on His carpet with anything between my foot and His creation."[2] Another Sufi master from Balkh, Ahmed ibn Khadruyah (d. 864), embraced the path of blame. He often wore a soldier's uniform. His stature earned him high respect among the people of Nishapur. He once advised, "Conceal the dignity of poverty (*faqr*) and avoid proclaiming yourself a dervish to others, lest your innermost secret be exposed." This anecdote illustrates his profound dedication to the practice of *faqr.*[3]

The greatest Persian Sufi of the ninth century, Bayazid al-Bustami (d. 874), led an ascetic life renouncing worldly pleasures in search of the mystical Union with God followed by self-annihilation (*fana*'). He was an expositor of a state of ecstatic experience in love of God known as Intoxication (*sukr*). In such a state, some ecstatic utterances (*shathat*) may come out from the mouth of a Sufi, as al-Bustami once said, "*Subhani ma A'zama Shani*" (Glory to Me! How great is My status!).[4] He is thought to be expressing a profound spiritual realization, suggesting the annihilation of the self (*fana*) and the realization of divine unity (*tawhid*), wherein the individual ego is transcended, and only the divine presence remains. It reflects a state of deep spiritual enlightenment and union with God.

One notable figure among them is Abu Hafs al-Haddad (d. 879), credited as the founder of the *Malamatiyya* in Nishapur. Initially a blacksmith, he eventually abandoned this trade to embrace the path of blame without seeking any outward recognition. He adopted modest attire, refrained from

[1] 'Ali ibn Uthman Al-Hujveri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, trans. Fadl-ud-din Gohar (Lahore: Dia-ul-Qur'an, 2010), 163
[2] Ibid., 168
[3] Ibid., 183
[4] Fariduddin 'Attar, *Tadhkirah al-Awliya,* trans. Arthur J. Arberry (Ames, Iowa: Omphaloskepsis, 2000), 141

giving public sermons, and avoided frequent pilgrimages.[1] Remarkably, despite not knowing Arabic, he conversed directly with Junayd Baghdadi in Arabic, bypassing the need for an interpreter.[2] His contemporary and a proponent of the Malamatiya ideology was Hamdun al-Qassar (d. 884). As a jurist, he followed Sufyan al-Thawri, and as a Sufi, he was influenced by Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi.[3] According to him, a Sufi's fixation on others acts as a barrier between him and God. He believed in detaching oneself from concerns about what others think or say. He emphasized sincerity in private communion with God, even if it invites criticism from others.[4] Regarding his spiritual path, he reportedly said: *Al-Malamah tark 'l-salamah* (Blame is the abandonment of worldly comfort). Those who embrace this path relinquish reliance on worldly approval and seek divine glory instead.[5]

Originally hailing from Rayy, Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri (d. 911) relocated to Nishapur, where he formed a close association with Abu Hafs al-Haddad that endured until his passing. Initially linked with Yahya ibn Mu'adh, he later served Shah Shuja' Kirmani in exploring mystical dimensions beyond the conventional expressions of religion.[6] Together with his mentor Abu Hafs, he represented a balanced faction of the *Malamatiyah* movement in Nishapur, countering the more radical perspective of Hamdun al-Qassar. Al-Hiri's spiritual approach involved first guiding his disciples through specific practices. And as they became absorbed in these exercises, he would then direct them to recognize their limitations. He famously expressed that no action or state could achieve perfection unless God brought it about without the individual's intention or awareness of the deed, or any consideration of others observing the act.[7]

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[1] J. Chabbi, "Abu Hafs Haddad." *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed April 4, 2024. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-hafs-amr-b
[2] Al-Hujveri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, 203
[3] Ibid, 205
[4] Ibid, 271
[5] Ibid, 139
[6] 'Attar, *Tadhkirah al-Awliya*, 313
[7] Sviri, Hakim Tirmidhi and the Malamati Movement in Early Sufism, 598-599

One of the most prominent figures among the devotees of God, yet equally contentious, was Hussain ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 913). Embracing a path marked by spiritual intoxication (*sukr*), he ascended to great spiritual heights, often expressing unorthodox, even blasphemous, statements in states of ecstasy that eventually led to his execution. His fluid journey through transformative experiences elicited varied responses from his contemporaries; while some revered his spiritual stature, others vehemently opposed him. Most of them have refrained from endorsing his ecstatic utterances, such as *I am the Truth*, citing concerns about their origin in altered states of consciousness.[1]

When Hallaj was taken to the gallows, he was chanting the following poetics verses that underscored his profound submission to the Will of God:

> *My boon-companion's not to be; accused of mean inequity*
>
> *He made me drink like him the best; as does the generous host his guest*
>
> *And when the round was quite complete; he called for sword and winding-sheet*
>
> *Such is his fate, who drinks past reason; with Draco in the summer season* [2]

Hallaj reflects that God should not be accused of being unfair with him. Like a generous host, He made him drink the divine wine of spiritual enlightenment. However, after the drinking session, He made arrangements for his death and burial. This sobering reflection suggested that anyone who indulges excessively in the divine, akin to drinking beyond measure, is inevitably destined to confront such a fate.

4. Qalandars in the Subcontinent:

While Qalandarism and Malamatiyyah are distinct spiritual paths, they share several ideological themes that have influenced Qalandarism, including asceticism, travel, self-annihilation, absorption, intoxication, and

[1] Al-Hujveri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, 231-232
[2] 'Attar, *Tadhkirah al-Awliya*, 363

ecstasy. Originating in the Persian cultural sphere, the ideology of Qalandars spread to the Indian subcontinent as well. Sayyid Khizar Rumi (d. 1350), a disciple of ‘Abd ul Aziz ‘Alambdar Makki, is thought to be the pioneer of this tradition in India who received permission from Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, the renowned Chisti Shaykh, to take the oath of allegiance. Therefore, his order is known as *Qalandariyah Chistiyah*.[1]

Khizar Rumi’s spiritual journey was marked by travels abroad and a return to India, where he ultimately passed away. Immersed in Divine love, he dedicated himself to extended periods of meditation. Known for his asceticism, he wore clothing made of leather as a symbol of detachment from worldly comforts. Under the guidance of Mir Jamal-ud-din Mujarrad, a prominent figure of the Tayfuriyah order, Khizar Rumi received spiritual instruction. Following the practices of his mentor, Khizar Rumi adopted the practice of shaving his eyebrows, mustache, and beard (known as “*Char Abru*”). However, in the final year of his life, he grew his beard. Among his notable disciples were Sayyid Najamuddin Dehlavi Qalandar, Shah Bahri Qalandar, and Sayyid Ruh Allah Qalandar, who continued his spiritual legacy after his passing.[2]

Najamuddin Dehlavi (d. 1434) began with taking the pledge at the hands of Nizamuddin Awliya, a revered Chisti Sufi master. Under his guidance, he embarked on a path of spiritual learning and traveled to Khizar Rumi to study the manners of the Qalandars. Accompanying Khizar Rumi, he returned to India, where he would further deepen his understanding of mystical practices. His grandfather, Sayyid Nuruddin Mubarak, was the son of Shahabuddin Suhrawardi’s sister. Through this spiritual lineage, he received enlightenment from Suhrawardi order. He spent most of his life in a state of spiritual ecstasy, immersed in divine love. He had profound influence within the mystical landscape of India as the renowned Bu ‘Ali Qalandar was his disciple according to some Indian historians.[3]

Sharafuddin Bu ‘Ali Qalandar (d. 1324) stands as a revered mystic Sufi hailing from Panipat, India. Born to Fakhruddin, a distinguished Islamic

[1] Ubaidullah Koti Nadwi, *Silsilah Qalandariyah* (New Delhi: Farid Books, 2005), 20
[2] Ibid., 147-149
[3] Nadwi, *Silsilah Qalandariyah*, 151

scholar, his lineage was steeped in scholarly traditions. His cousin, Shaykh Qutubuddin Jamal Hansawi was a disciple of Fariduddin Ganjshakar, establishing his connections with the Chisti order. For three decades, he dedicated himself to teaching traditional religious disciplines. However, his path took a profound turn when a wandering dervish appeared unexpectedly, admonishing him for his pursuits. Filled with the passion for Divine love, he abandoned his former life and embarked on a transformative journey. Traveling far and wide, his quest for spiritual enlightenment led him to encounter luminaries such as Shams Tabraiz and Jalaluddin Rumi before returning to India.[1]

In the depths of his love for God, Bu ʻAli Qalandar was so engrossed that he remained unaware of his overgrown mustache. It took the intervention of Mawlana Ziauddin Sinami to notice and trim his mustache while catching his beard. He considered his gesture blessed as it aligned with the teachings of *Shariʻah*. He often visited the monastery of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya. Renowned poet, Ameer Khusrau admired his prowess in mystic poetry, reflecting his profound understanding of spiritual themes. He left behind a rich legacy, including a collection of poems (*diwan*) and letters (*maktubat*) that captured the essence of his spiritual insights. In describing the path of the dervish, he eloquently conveyed the message of spiritual transformation: "To extinguish the flames of one's ego, transcend the limitations of existence, detach from worldly attachments, liberate oneself from the clutches of the self, embrace intimacy and connection with the Beloved, and burn in the fires of love and passion until only ashes remain."[2]

Another disciple of Najamuddin Dehlavi Qalandar, Qutubuddin Bina Dil Jaunpuri (d. 1519) was blind by birth but had an enlightened heart, hence he was called *Bina Dil*. He received the favours of Shurawaridya order from Shaykh Shamsuddin Zafarabadi, of Firdousiyah order from Shaykh Hasan bin Muʻiz Balkhi, and of Madariyah order from Sayyid Jamal, aka Shaykh Jumman.[3] Contrary to his predecessors, Bina Dil Qalandar donned himself with a type of attire specific to religious scholars. The same attire,

[1] Ibid., 157
[2] Ibid., 158-159
[3] Nadwi, *Silsilah Qalandariyah*, 161

white tunic, cap and pyjama, was adopted by his son, Shah Muhammad Qutub Jaunpuri (d. 1544) who was immersed in the sea of Divine Love. Inspired by Ibn 'Arabi, Muhammad Qutub also believed in the Oneness of Existence. This spiritual lineage was further progressed by his son and grandson, Abdus Salam Jaunpuri (d. 1569) and Abdul Quddus Jaunpuri (d. 1643) respectively. (Nadwi 2005, p.164) Some other notable Indian Qalandars include Shah Mujja Qalandar Laharpuri (d. 1674), Shah Fath Qalandar Jaunpuri (d. 1707), Shah Allahadiya Ahmad Laharpuri (d. 1735), Shah Abdur Rehman Thani (d. 1785), and Shah Mazhar Kul Koti (d. 1817). [1]

A significant figure in this realm is the Persian poet Fakhruddin 'Iraqi (d. 1289), who initially served as an educator for eighteen years in Hamdan. His life took a transformative turn when he encountered a young Qalandar and was drawn to their unconventional mystical way of life. Joining their group, he embraced their mannerisms and embarked on a journey with them from Persia to India, where they visited the esteemed Bahauddin Zakariyah Multani. Inspired by Bahauddin's spiritual eminence, 'Iraqi expressed a deep desire to be initiated into the Shurawardiya order, thus parting ways with the Qalandar group. Under Bahauddin's guidance and supervision, he spent twenty-five years immersed in spiritual practice and enlightenment. His poetic compositions became profoundly moving, stirring audiences to states of ecstatic rapture. During moments of divine ecstasy, he would sing spiritual songs, a practice that unsettled other disciples of Bahauddin. However, Bahauddin asserted that such expressions were permissible for him, reflecting his unique spiritual journey and relationship with the divine.[2]

One of the most esteemed disciples of Bahauddin Zakariya Multani and a central figure in the Qalandari tradition is Shaykh Uthman Marvandi (d. 1274), renowned as Laal Shahbaz Qalandar, or The Red Falcon. Residing in Sehwan, in the province of Sindh, Pakistan, he served as a beacon of guidance and a source of spiritual inspiration for countless individuals. Despite his exalted spiritual status, he remained steadfast in adhering to the

[1] Ibid., 134
[2] Hamidullah Hashmi, *Ahwal-o-Athar Bahauddin Zakariyah Multani* (Lahore: Tasawwuf Foundation. 2000), 114-116

commands of Shari'ah, except during moments of intense ecstatic communion with God. He had the privilege of meeting with other eminent Sufi masters, including Bahauddin Zakariya, Fariduddin Ganjshakar, and Jalaluddin Bukhari Surkh-posh, collectively known as the "Four Friends" (Chahar Yar). These encounters enriched his spiritual journey and further deepened his connection to the mystical tradition.[1]

The shrine of Laal Shahbaz stands as a timeless symbol of Qalandar devotion in Pakistan. Each year, on the 18th of Safar, devotees from far and wide converge to celebrate his 'Urs, or death anniversary. This sacred occasion, often referred to as *Sham-e-Qalandar,* is a vibrant manifestation of ecstatic experiences of divine joy within an atmosphere steeped in rich cultural traditions. The festival is characterized by the traditional music, dance, food, and crafts of the region. The rhythmic beats of drums, the hypnotic chanting of hymns, and the intoxicating fragrance of incense infuse the air with an aura of spiritual enlightenment. Central to the festivities is the ecstatic dance known as *dhamal*, a torrid expression of spiritual ecstasy that transcends the boundaries of individual identity.[2]

A 16th-century Punjabi Sufi poet, Shah Hussain, aka Madhu Laal Hussain (d. 1599), was renowned for his unconventional approach and spiritual depth. Initially a disciple of Shaykh Bahlul Daryai, under whose guidance he learned the disciplines necessary for personal growth and spiritual development, Hussain frequented the shrine of 'Ali Hujveri for years. One pivotal moment of transformation occurred in his life when he heard the exposition of the Qur'anic verse: "And the worldly life is not but play and amusement."[3] Overwhelmed with ecstasy, he left the gathering, embracing a path of blame, shedding societal norms and expectations. His unorthodox approach manifested in his outward appearance and behavior; he shaved his beard and mustache and roamed the streets, singing songs and partaking in wine. He even formed a deep connection with a Brahmin youth named Madhu Laal, who later converted to Islam and became his disciple. Today, Madhu Laal Hussain's shrine in Lahore serves as a beacon of spiritual and

[1] Hashmi, *Ahwal-o-Athar Bahauddin Zakariyah Multani*, 125-126
[2] Aeman Jaffer, "A Drama of Saintly Devotion: Performing Ecstasy and Status at the Shaam-e-Qalandar Festival in Pakistan." *The Drama Review* 62, no.4 (2018): 23-40
[3] Al-Qur;an 6:32

cultural expression. The annual "Festival of Lights" (*Mela Chiraghan*), celebrated in spring, typically in the last week of March, is a vibrant tribute to his legacy. Through music, dance, and fervent devotion, devotees gather to honor his teachings and experience the richness of spiritual and cultural traditions.[1]

Abdullah Shah, revered as Bulleh Shah (d. 1757), was a Punjabi poet and mystic from the city of Qasur, whose life was marked by unconventional practices that often drew criticism from society. Deeply enamored with music and ecstatic dance, his spiritual journey defied societal norms and expectations. After completing formal religious education, he was guided through a vision to seek spiritual excellence from Shah Anaytullah Qadri. This *murshid-murid* relationship was notable for transcending the taboo of caste differences; Shah Anaytullah belonged to a farmer's caste, *Ara'in*, while Bulleh Shah hailed from the esteemed Sayyid family.[2]

Now and then, the soil of the subcontinent has produced Sufis with qalandari inclinations. A fifteenth-century Sufi, Shaykh Musa 'Sada Suhag' (d. 1449) of Gujarat, realized God in gendered terms, identifying himself as the bride of God. He dressed up like a bride throughout his life, hence, known as *Sada Suhag*, keeping in view the Indian ethos and cultural conventions. (Anjum 2015, 420) In Mirpur district of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, there were Pira Shah Ghazi (d. 1743), aka *Dammari Wali Sarkar* (the One who accepts the offerings of a coin no longer in use) and Mian Muhammad Bakhsh (d. 1909), the intoxicated Punjabi Sufi poet.[3] In Sargodha, there was Mian Abdur Rasheed Qalandar, known as *Notan Wali Sarkar* (the One who gives rupees).[4]

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[1] Zahurul Hasan Sharib, *Tazkirah Awliya Pak-o-Hind* (Lahore: Progressive Books1999), 245-249

[2] Ibid.,, 338-339

[3] Sean McLoughlin and Muzammil Khan. "Ambiguous traditions and modern transformations of Islam: the waxing and waning of an 'intoxicated' Sufi cult in Mirpur." *Contemporary South Asia*, 15 no. 3(2006): 289-307. https://doi.org/10.1080/09584930601098042

[4] Muhammad Iqbal Khan, "Sufism and Sufi Practices in Pakistan: A Case Study of 'Notan Wali Sarkar' (1917- 1994)." South Asian Studies 30, no.1 (2015): 7-14

5. Conclusion:

Qalandarism is an unconventional mystic movement which has been largely marginalized by mainstream Sufism yet deeply influenced the cultural fabric of India and Pakistan. Drawing inspiration from Qur'anic verses and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, this movement embodies Sufi ideals, such as *zuhd* and *faqr*. Their journey of passionate love for God leads them through various stages of spiritual realization, culminating in ecstatic states of *wajd*, *jazb*, and *sukr*, often misunderstood by orthodox interpretations.

Despite their differences, the Qalandars share many common themes and principles with the Malamatiya ideology of Abu Hafs al-Haddad and Hamdun al-Qassar, advocating detachment from worldly approval and emphasizing sincerity in private communion with God. Their path of spiritual transformation and union with the Divine, manifested by self-annihilation, absorption, intoxication, and ecstasy, is inspired by Bayazid al-Bustami and Hussain ibn Mansur al-Hallaj.

The influence of the Qalandari tradition is evident in the rich spiritual and cultural heritage of the subcontinent, reflected in annual festivals, shrine gatherings, and mystical poetry. The Qalandariya order flourished in India through Khizar Rumi. Among the Qalandars of this order, Bu 'Ali Qalandar stands out prominently. In Pakistan, Laal Shahbaz Qalandar, and Madhu Laal Hussain exemplify the Qalandari tradition's commitment to spiritual transformation, seeking a direct connection with the Divine. The Sufi poets like Fakhruddin 'Iraqi, Bulleh Shah, and Mian Muhammad Bakhsh further illustrate the profound impact of Qalandari spirituality on the subcontinent's literary and cultural landscape.