CONCLUDING THE ARGUMENT
There was a door to which I found no key;
There was a veil past which I could not see;
Some little talk awhile of ME and THEE,
There seem'd- and then no more of THEE and Me.

Definitions and academic understanding of Sufi studies has traditionally revolved around certain reified set of perspectives consisting of Sufi-ulama conflict, Sufi-state relation, political alliances and religious competition. And in doing so the focus invariably gets shifted from a proper understanding of the ideology, fundamentals and belief this community stood for, which in turn was reflected in the traditions of writing and articulated through living practitioners of the institution. The emphasis then often rests on the context vis-à-vis which the ideals of Sufism can be understood, or at least attempted. Modern scholars working towards the intention of resolving the problematic that surrounds the mystical face of Islam, often land up creating more problems for themselves, for which they seldom have an answer.

Thus going back to the quatrain above, the key which is so essential to opening the little understood world of Islamic mysticism remains elusive. All debates, discussions and analysis revolve around the pretext through which modern day scholars hope to understand the world of the mystic. In doing so Islam's mystical traditions are explained as essentially opposed or aligned towards certain socio-political or religious lineages. But the basic truth regarding the institution itself remain out of bounds. The veil remains firmly in place and it becomes all the more difficult to see past it. With suspicion from mainstream Islam darkening with every passing day, it becomes all the more difficult for the light of spiritual truth to pierce the dark clouds of distrust and misunderstanding.

As a corrective to the above it can be started by saying that Sufism is very much a form of Islam. One that locates its roots in the prophetic tradition of Muhammad, where all mystical ideas, beliefs and practices traces...
itself back to the time and deeds of the Prophet. But at the same time
Sufism is also about a tradition of experience – one that moves beyond
spiritual theories and dogmas in order to seek a closer and more personal
relation with God. It is a way through which countless Muslims all around
the world immerse themselves in the experience of the transcendent- finding
themselves closer to their Lord. And in doing do they strive to establish an
interpersonal relationship with their Creator, express their love for Him and
suffer when separated from His blessings.

This tradition of experience would have remained largely incomplete
and limited to a handful had it not been supplanted by the even richer
tradition of textual representation. The enormity of theoretical and
genealogical treatises produced within the mystical tradition of Islam is a
vindication of the fact that Islamic mysticism is far greater than any ordinary
experience of the metaphysical kind. These genres of writing overlap on
many occasions, but at the same time provide the best possible lens through
which one can capture the world of the Sufi- his spirituality and scholarship,
words and experience.

Nowhere do the above traits and characteristics find a better
application than in the geographical location of south Asia, where Islamic
mysticism has left a strong and indelible tradition of practice and preaching,
philosophy and religion. This thesis looks into the mystical traditions of
south Asia. And in doing so it attempts to explore the possible angles of
emerging perspectives that can be utilized to procure a better understanding
of south Asian Sufism. Within this framework the present study has sought
to examine the ways of viewing Sufi rituals and practices as a means of
transmitting spiritual knowledge, essentially within a particular order. These
rituals were considered as modes of worship for Sufi shaykhs, together with
symbolizing a convergence of philosophy with mystical theology and
practice. For Sufis such practices were crucial for internal purification of the
heart leading to moral self-discipline and elevation to spiritual enlightenment.

While working on the dynamics of Sufi rituals in south Asia, two dimensions have been explored. Firstly the world of Sufi practices and the realities that condition such a powerful aspect of south Asia’s Islamic mystical tradition. Secondly, in exploring this dimension of south Asian Sufism the enormous tradition of literary accounts left by the saints and their disciples have been focused upon, being the most vivid representation of the world of Sufi ideals and theory, beliefs and practices. The textual tradition is perhaps the only way through which the realities of south Asian Sufism came to be represented and passed on to successive generation of believers.

This work never attempts to limit itself to a historical account of Sufism as it began and flourished in its south Asian context. It is far from the intention of this work to limit the historical and socio-political significance of Sufism in south Asia. Rather it is well recognized through the works of leading scholars on this region and subject that the history of Sufism as a part of the Indo-Muslim establishment in south Asia has a rich lineage and in countless number of ways has influenced and been influenced by the social and cultural institutions of this 4000 year old civilization.

However it needs to be kept in mind, as elaborated earlier, that an attempt has been made in this work to look into the lesser explored dimensions of Sufi history in south Asia, with the aim of gaining newer insights into the living world of the Sufis as it unfolded through their own words and writings. Thus the thesis engages itself in the study of certain approaches to Sufi practice as a means to understanding the phenomenon of Sufism. The approach to this institution of south Asian Islam has been made through the perspective of rituals and practices. A different method has been suggested in order to measure the inner voices of this tradition as
resonated in the life and activities of the masters themselves. By focusing on the transcendent qualities of mystical practices this work argues that being more than just ways of spiritual devotion these rituals aim at defining the integral identity of a particular Sufi order through embracing the qualities of modesty, sincerity and patience.

In the field of Sufi studies in south Asia much work has been done on the Chishtia and the Suhrwardia, as enumerated in the introduction to this work. Also much progress has been done from the traditional perspectives of analysis around state-Sufi and ulama-Sufi binaries. The researcher under no circumstances intends to limit or question value of these works, which have been crucial contributions in this field. But it is our good fortune that scholarship on the field of Sufi studies in the subcontinent has made remarkable progress taking within its fold many aspects of Sufi authority, mystical teachings of Sufi masters, master-disciple relationship with regard to a particular order or as a dominant principle of Sufism, critical theories of Sufi theology and so on and so forth.

It is with due respect to such progresses made in the field that the current work tries to locate itself within the broader field of Sufi studies in the subcontinent. And in doing so it builds upon past accounts and their perspectives, while at the same trying to put forward a new dimension towards studying Sufism in this region. The various trends that have been included in this work revolve around dimensions of religion, politics, philosophical standings, literary and theological perspectives that directly or indirectly influence the shaping up of this thesis.

Sufi rituals can rightly be termed as a journey in experience. An experience of those great souls who surrendered everything material in an endless search for the transcendental Real. It is also an experience of remembering God not for the sake of material gains or after world benefits, but for the sake of God Himself. So that the journey towards the Almighty
culminate in the experience of losing oneself in the eternal Being. While at the same time being fortunate enough to be reinstated in the true glory of residing in the everlasting existence of God. Mystical practices are essentially the means of achieving this experience of remembering God with such intense passion that their entire lives become an exercise in spiritual destiny marked by a degree of exemplary sanctity.

South Asia’s Sufi tradition needs to be studied through a more careful selection of the textual genres, followed by a more nuanced reading of these texts. The current work, while trying to place the first step in that direction, has greatly benefited from a variety of sources. These works succeed in establishing important connections between the real and the written worlds of the Sufi. The important literary and textual traditions of Sufism in south Asia are often beset with overlapping genres of writing attempting to embody the reality of Sufi practitioners in south Asia. Some of the more important ones include

- biographical accounts (taṣkīrā)
- theoretical manuals (risāla)
- instructional treatises (dastūr-i-amal)
- conversational treatises (maljuzāt), and
- letters and writings of the saint (maktubah)

In the current work a comprehensive study of Sufi rituals has been attempted by bringing together and cross examining the two distinct worlds of the Sufi – the written world and the phenomenal world of mystical rituals and practices, along with the long shadows they cast upon one another.

One aspect that becomes strikingly evident while handling the above sources is the unquestioned dominance of Persian which made the greatest contribution to the mystical literary tradition of south Asia. Infact the first Persian theoretical treatise on Sufism was written by Ali ibn Uthman al-Hujwiri, a Sufi who settled in Lahore in the mid-eleventh century and
composed his famous work *Kashf ul-Mahjub* (Unveiling of the Veiled). The current thesis has made extensive use of the above in its discussions on mystical practices and rituals, more as a theoretical introduction to the practices of audition (*sama*) and remembrance of God (*zikr*). The insights provided by this work into the Sufi traditions of south Asia with particular regard to spiritual practices has enriched the argumentation the current thesis attempts to make in the pages above. Apart from its insightful analysis on various aspects of Sufism the most important contribution of the treatise is perhaps on the front that it attempts a successful reconciliation of Sufi ethics and the key practices that are involved in turn with Islamic mysticism, irrespective of its controversial or devotional character. Such an insight has been applied to the study of Sufi practices with regard to south Asian in the context of the current thesis.

One major argument which the current thesis tries to put forward in its pages concerns the apparent irreconcilability of Sufism and orthodox Islam. It has been argued in the pages of the thesis that mainstream Islamic practices were never in conflict with the mystical traditions of Islam. Rather they were held in great esteem by the Sufi master who considered them imperative in their spiritual journey, if the soul was to attain higher levels of spiritual realization. These religious exercises were performed at par with mystical practices, and were never considered in conflict with each other.

In quite the same vein the *Kashf ul-Mahjub* successfully drives home the argument that moralizing and ethical qualities of Sufism were never contra to the mainstream beliefs and practices of Islam. While doing do it successfully connects the greater world of Muslim piety to its mystical traditions and at the same time makes it a point to remind those, who argue for a bitter relation between orthodox Islamic tenets and Sufism, of the danger that lurks when an attempt is made to talk of Sufism in a different breath from Islamic law or the study of the Hadith. Hujwiri argued that
though mystical practices required a degree of regulation in its exercise it did not under any circumstance lead one away from the way of achieving spiritual union with God. And in the same sense Sufism was never hostile nor an alternative to the tenets of normative Islam.

Thus within such an argumentative framework the mystical practice of listening to verses accompanied by music, or without music, came to be justified as permitted within the tenets of Islam. The Chishtis of the subcontinent considered sama to be the most distinctive expression of their identity, more than any other mystical order of the region. This vigorous defence in favour of sama arose not from a sense of mystical competitiveness with other orders, but essentially from the belief that this particular ritual provided the best possible way to lose the heart in the remembrance of God. More than a mystical ritual sama was treated in the spirit of a religious exercise, where the soul of the mystic could be subjected to such levels of devotion that it completely destroyed itself in an unending passion for the Almighty, and at the same time was resurrected in an eternal existence in the essence of the Lord.

In this sense sama was never antithetical to mainstream religious practices but more a supplication to it, where the mystic could transgress the limits of formal religious devotion towards a limitless quest for the divine other. Such was the ideal set forth by the great Chishtia masters of the subcontinent when they argued that in an assembly of sama the poetry, and at times music, does not effect the material pleasures of the heart, but in turn takes the mystic to a flight in the ‘angelic spheres’. The realization of the divine message hidden in the verse of sama is an no less than the ‘unfolding of the cosmos from the highest sphere of the spirits to the lowest sphere of the human heart’. It brings about an effect which only the true mystic can hope to realize. An effect which not only elevates the heart and frees the soul from all material bindings but at the same time descends on
the limbs of the body, which too gets enraptured in the spiritual bliss of sama.

However such a vociferous defence of sama from the Chishtia masters does little to silence the skeptics of their constant diatribe against a mystical ritual engaging in seemingly frivolous passions. For the Chishti masters though, as mentioned earlier, this spiritual exercise was by no means of lesser worth than Islamic devotional exercises. In the words of the great master Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, sama as a spiritual exercise of the highest order can only be compared to the practice of reciting the Quran. The shaykh could have compared the exercise to that of prayer, since both comes close to some sort of a personal devotional practice in the name of God. But his comparison to that of recitation of the Quran is also quite insightful. He argues that in the exercise of reciting the Quran the devotee experiences a sense of spiritual bliss. Such an experience manifests itself in the form of celestial lights, mystical states and physical effects; and in turn it alights from the three worlds of the present, the potential realm and the angelic sphere.

The shaykh goes on to elucidate that celestial lights descend from the angelic sphere on the spirit; this is followed by mystical states that descend from the potential realm on the heart, and lastly the physical effects from the present world descend on ones limbs. It was under such multiple effects of spiritual bliss that mystical states (hāl) appeared in the heart of the mystic. Hence what became apparent were the physical expressions of sama in the form of crying, movement and agitation of the limbs. Such are the states that descend from the present world of the mystic and effects the bodily limbs.

Taking cue from above it can be argued that, for Chishti masters sama was an exercise in devotion as much as the regular Islamic devotional practices. So that a leading Sufi master of the likes of Shyakh Nizamuddin
Awliya had little hesitancy in equating sama with mainstream religious practices like recitation of the Quran (talawat). Therefore it can be rightly argues that it was to the genius of the Chishti saints that they could easily reconcile the apparent differences between religious and spiritual practices, while upholding the importance of both. Accommodating a spiritual exercise with a tradition of controversy clinging to it, and in turn making it the most defining spiritual trait of their order was no mean task for the early Chishti masters. It has been argued, and rightly so, in the current work that it was only because of the respect Chishti masters accorded to Islamic law and devotional exercises that they were able to withstand the severe criticisms leveled against them by the upholders of Islamic theology.

It has also been argued that simple theoretical justification was not enough for the Chishtis to base their claim that mystical practices like sama did not infringe on the territory of Islamic religious practices. Tomes have been written by Persian masters justifying their claims on the legality of listening to poetry with, or without, the accompaniment of music. Yet the fervent attacks by religious leaders and scholars of theology seldom dissipated. It was once again to the genius of the Chishti masters that leaving the first few sultans of the Delhi Sultanate, none dared to challenge the position of the Chishtia saints with regard to their practice of sama. In the pages of the current work an incident has been cited where the great Chishtia master Shyakh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki remained enraptured in state of trance after listening to a Persian verse in the sama assembly of a fellow mystic. What was remarkable in this entire episode concerns the devotion of the mystic, not towards his unending passion for God, but the obligatory tenets of Islamic religion. Even in his complete trance like state Shaykh Bakhtiyar Kaki returned to his senses only during hours of prayer—five times a day, before lapsing back again to his 'semicomatose state of ecstasy'.

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Such was the vindication, as has been argued, of the Chishti masters in the subcontinent that set them apart as peers of Islamic mysticism in south Asia. Their dedication towards the tenets of religion leaves us with little room to buy into the arguments of those, scholars and legists, who continue to spew hatred and defame these Sufis as non-believers in the Islamic traditions of faith and practice. It is well known that the mystical and scholarly genius of Shaykh Nizamuddin put to rest once and for all such attacks on the Chishti brotherhood in south Asia. But the tradition was set long before the shaykh saw the light of the day, by the first generation of Sufi masters who took great pains to uphold the sanctity of Islamic law and belief, even in the midst of their unending quest for spiritual succor.

While the Chishtis were passionate in their upholding of practices beyond the prescribed words of religion in their search for the divine Reality; no other order in the subcontinent adhered to the principles of mainstream religion and in turn successfully incorporated them in their litany of spiritual practices as the Suhrawardis. This order too has been dealt with in the thesis especially with regard to an equally important spiritual practice, that of remembering and recollecting God (zikr). Zikr as a mystical exercise epitomized the spiritual quest of the Suhrawardi mystics in the subcontinent, together with their fervent support of religious tenets and mainstream Islamic practices, like prayer (salaat) which they considered crucial for realization of the divine.

It has been argued in the pages of the dissertation that the ritual of zikr is an expression of the spiritual journey towards God, through an interiorisation of the Quran together with its incorporation into spiritual exercises. Zikr for the Suhrawardi Sufis represented the inner aspect of their spiritual belief, which were not merely symbols of spirituality but were part of the larger exercise towards a search for the Divine. Suhrawardi zikr rituals, though arguably less fascinating than poetry set to music had a
supreme sense of morality and etiquette attached to it which connected Suhrawardi Sufis to the larger world of Islamic spirituality. Zikr was meant to be a specialized ritual, quite like sama, orchestrated at a special time and place aimed at creating a sacred moment of spiritual elevation and nourishment.

The Suhrawardi spiritual exercise of zikr had a definite focus in the essence of tasawwuf in the Islamic tradition. It was precisely due to this that the exercise retained its religious character while at the same time could accommodate a spiritual dimension intended for the more mystically oriented souls. In the Suhrawardi spiritual lineage the steadfast practice of zikr was aimed at immersing oneself in the remembrance of God through the recollection of his names and attributes. Many a times it included specific verses of the Quran that had a deeper spiritual meaning and significance for Suhrawardi mystics. Under such circumstances the practice of zikr did not remain a mere repetition of the names of God, rather it transformed itself to combine the practice of recitation of the Quran while at the same time drawing within its fold the benefits accrued from the practice of zikr. But it remains undoubted that the practice, with all its adab and akhlaq, remained at the core of Suhrawardi spiritual practices aimed at purifying the heart while preparing it for the divine moment of God's presence.

It has been mentioned in passing, in the passage above, that zikr as a spiritual exercise comprised essentially of the same aims and means in the spiritual world of the Sufi. Only that the method of application appeared varied. But this did not necessary entail that the gains that mystics sought to avail from these two highly disciplined mystical exercises were anything different from spiritual leverage. With this in view it has been argued in the dissertation that both the Chishtis and Suhrawardis of the subcontinent shared a tradition of overlapping spiritual exercises where the boundaries of
sama and zikr often got fused in the personality of a single Sufi master or among a particular generation of Sufi masters.

Thus while we witness the great Suhrawardi master Qazi Hamiduddin Nagauri immersing his heart and soul in the feverish passion of Persian verses in an assembly of sama; Chishtia masters like Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya openly advocated in favour of the spiritual practice of zikr. Once the disciples of the Chishti shaykh were pleasantly surprised to know how much their master, considered to be the greatest defender of sama in the history of the Chishtia order in the subcontinent, argue vociferously that under no circumstances can sama be separated from the mystical practice of zikr. He then went on to explain that the result of sama on the physical state of the listener is ecstasy (wajid). In an assembly of sama no individual can hope to achieve that state of ecstasy unless he is blessed from the Divine. Thus one of the names of God is al-Wajid or the bestower of ecstasy. Thus in an assembly of sama the listener remembers Him who bestows ecstasy on the listener. In that sense the participant in the assembly of audition (sama) remembers God and recollects his attribute in the form of zikr as the one who bestows upon His loved ones the beneficence of ecstasy.

Returning to Suhrawardi Sufis of the subcontinent, the current work has tried to argue that alongside mystical rituals the most important dimension of spiritual philosophy and practice that conditioned Suhrawardi mysticism, together with the Chishtis was the emphasis on morality (akhlaq) and etiquette (adab). Overlooked by scholars of religion as mere traits of morbid piety, these twin values mentioned above came to condition any discussion on the characterization of spiritual exercises as the most expressive form of mysticism in the context of south Asia. Though emphasis on the moral aspects of spirituality has its roots beyond south Asia, it finds mention in almost all the leading texts and treatises concerning Sufism, irrespective of orders, and its philosophy in the subcontinent.
It has been tried, in the context of the current work, to drive home the point that the importance of *adab* among the Chishtis and Suhrawardis of the subcontinent was a direct influence of the Prophetic tradition, where *adab* was considered to be a crucial pre-requisite for maintaining the external and internal discipline of a believer. At the same time it was imperative to adhere to it so as to ensure a smooth and uninterrupted flow of spiritual knowledge from the master to the disciple thorough chains of spiritual genealogy. And in almost all the spiritual orders of the subcontinent, especially the two discussed in the context of this thesis, the spiritual genealogy locates its roots back to Prophet Muhammad, the first Sufi and the last Messenger. If only does an individual ensure the quality of *adab* in his spiritual regime can be hope to uphold the high standards of *akhlq* crucial for gaining knowledge in the mystical Path. Hence it has been argued that a proper cultivation of these twin qualities remains imperative if the mystic attempts to strike a balance between the inner and outer realms of his mystical quest, towards the goal of spiritual union with the Almighty.

It must be kept in mind though that the intrinsic nature of the work under consideration warrants an inclusion of the perspective of religion as a viable argumentative context. But the fact that this thesis is being pursued on a broader substratum of historical enquiry makes it imperative to engage with the tools of historical analysis as a part of the research methodology. The first step in this direction has been on the realm of historical geography. Studies on Sufism in south Asia have been limited largely to north India, the cradle of Sufi activities in the subcontinent. In the last decade they tried a shift towards Bengal and Deccan. But ultimately the works have been isolated within the physical boundaries of the region itself. The current thesis while emphasizing on north-west, north and south of the Indian subcontinent, has attempted to rise over the area centric approach, and at the same time tried to connect these areas through the common context of
Sufi rituals and devotional practices as an expression of spirituality in south Asian Islam. Such an attempt at creating a connected history has resulted in a fine and imperceptible binding that essentially followed the pattern of natural dissemination of the Chishtia order, and to some extent the Suhrawardis.

Application of such a model for examining mystical rituals and devotional exercises—moving beyond geographical limitations—has helped bring out an element of continuity within the mystical tradition of both the orders. For the Chishtis it has been from the north to the Deccan, while for the Suhrawardis it maps the north-west and the north. At the same time it has also helped understand the networks of scholarly production and map the development of knowledge—both religious and mystical—together with its production and dissemination. Spiritual masters of both the orders considered rites and rituals as not something to be exhibited; rather they are to be interiorized for the soul was to experience higher planes of spiritual reality.

No great amount of intellectual dexterity and historical scholarship is required to realize the inherent worth of these mystical networks, across the subcontinent. The researcher, while working on the same from north-west to north and south, was amazed at the degree of interconnectivity these regions shared with each other along the dialectics of mystical practice and scholarship. At the end it became absolutely impossible to ignore the Chishtia linkages from Delhi and Punjab to Deccan, and Suhrawardi networks from Multan and Ucch to Delhi, in an attempt to study the dynamics of Sufi rituals and practices, together with the influences and convergences that arise with such shifting regional affiliations.

It may be justified to round off the discussion with one more aspect where this thesis tries to substantiate itself. Being the result of an essentially migratory process it is difficult, and at the same time unjustified, to analyze
Sufi trends in south Asia without any reference to its antecedents, primarily from Central Asia and Iran. While distinct patterns of immigration naturally cross the mind, this work has mentioned the chains of knowledge and scholarship operating within these mystical networks. Forms of interaction-linguistic and otherwise- that developed between the religious and cultural institutions Sufis brought with them and the pre-existing socio-cultural norms of the regions, here north and north west India along with the Deccan, they moved into forms one of the central processes of south Asian history. A complete analysis of its history falls beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless the influence of such interactions have been incorporated as much as they are relevant towards a better understanding of mystical psychology that operated behind the functioning of rituals and devotional practices.

The two silsilas chosen for contextualizing the phenomenon of rituals and practices have not been done in random, as mentioned above. Rather the intention has been to study the wide diversity of their types and practices. Furthermore it is certainly not claimed that these are the only Sufi rituals, or the conclusions that will be drawn from them are the only conclusions that can be drawn from such a study. Sufi rituals can be characterized as signs: signs of a way of life, signs of a mystical order, and more importantly signs of the ultimate goal of the mystic and his order – that is God Himself. Along with the above it has also been argued that these rituals are not undertaken just for the sake of performance, rather they focus on a higher aim, and are always directed towards that deeper Reality. Origins and ethos may differ, the actual articulation of rituals like audition (sama) and remembrance (zikr) may greatly vary, but the fundamental truth in these practices remain embedded in the mystical psyche of the orders discussed, linking and uniting them in their sacred quest for the Eternal.