Dervish

Dervish is a general term for various types of marginal mystics. Its etymon is the Persian word *darvīsh* (lit. "poor, needy"), but it has commonly been used to denote practitioners of religious poverty. The mediaeval Ṣūfī tradition applied this word to a specific lifestyle, in which detachment and renunciation were both material and spiritual. Dervishes had to go from door to door to beg for alms and, metaphorically, from gate to gate to ask for divine revelations, as at each stage of his spiritual quest, the dervish calls upon God to show him the way. Historical analysis shows that the dervish represents a form of mysticism that promotes marginality with respect to society, religious institutions, and Ṣūfism itself. This marginality is perhaps the only common characteristic of the dervishes, as they did not adhere to a common underlying ideology but reacted in a variety of ways to what they considered hypocritical or materialist tendencies among their contemporaries. Like other marginal people and societal outcasts, some dervishes protested consciously against society's ills, while others adopted an anti-establishment lifestyle because they did not, for different reasons, fit into society and thus decided, consciously or unconsciously, to drop out.

Although folk etymologies commonly referred *darvīsh* to *dar* (door), various explanations were proposed for *vīsh*, such as *pīsh* (front, in *dar-pīsh*, "in front of the door"), *vīz* (from *āvīkhtan* "to hang", in *dar-vīz* "hanging about the door"), and *yūza* (mendicant, in *dar-yūza*, "one who begs at doors") (Algar; Dehkhudā; Uludağ, 103). Meaning "poor" (originally without religious connotation), "dervish" referred to those among the pious who chose to live in poverty, most often as mendicants, begging from "door to door" *(dar ba dar)*. As early as the fifth/eleventh century, Ṣūfī authors, mostly from Iran and Central Asia, refined the definition. Al-Mustamlī al-Bukhārī (d. 434/1042) identified dervishes and *faqīr*s as ascetics and voluntary poor; Abū Saʿīd b. Abū al-Khayr (from Mayhana, in Khurāsān, d. 440/1049) considered dervishes as saints, in the sense that they were gates to God; ʿAlī al-Hujwīrī (of Ghazni, d. 465/1073) detailed the concepts of spiritual poverty and wandering: the former means depriving oneself of everything but God (*fanāʾ*, lit. "annihilation" in God), while the latter suggests that the dervish is not a wayfarer but a way himself through which God conveys his will to mankind. Khʷāja ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī (from Herat, d. 481/1089) spoke of the radicalism of dervishes who, adopting a *via negationis*, abandon not only this world but also the Hereafter, if not the religion itself (Akimushkin, 56; Algar; Gramlich, 2:228–9).

The great upheaval caused by the Mongol conquest led to the impoverishment not only of individual Muslims but also of certain social groups in the Muslim East; this, in turn, encouraged world-renouncing tendencies in society at large. Such tendencies were not new: they seem also to have been occasioned by the proliferation of Ṣūfī communities throughout the seventh/thirteenth century, when dervishhood became a widespread form of ascetic and mystical piety in the Middle East, Central Asia, and India. This was probably a revolt against the institutionalisation of Ṣūfism and the increasing dependence of its leaders on the benevolence of secular rulers (Karamustafa, chap. 3) and an attempt, especially in the case of groups such as the mediaeval Qalandars,

to return to the ascetic and self-denying practices of the first ascetic Muslim devotees, in order to halt the imagined or real decline from those originally high standards of piety. But the most radical dervishes considered their path a rejection of all models, no matter how prestigious and time-honoured, and many had simply no interest in these intellectual questions of the decline and evolution of piety. Among the myriads of Ṣūfī mendicants *(faqīr*, pl. *fuqarāʾ)*, ecstatics *(majdhūb*, pl. *majādhīb)*, madmen *(majnūn*, pl. *majānīn)*, and holy fools *(dīvāna*, pl. *dīvānagān)*, who roamed the city streets and the pilgrimage routes and appeared frequently in lyric poetry and folk tales (see *Qiṣṣa-yi chahār darvīsh*, also known as *Bāgh-u bahār*, by Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī, d. 725/1325), there were many persons and groups that are clearly identified in the sources (Frembgen, chap. 6; Karamustafa, chaps. 4–5; Ocak, 1–79; Zarrīnkūb, 359–79).

Two major groups that were associated with popular figures were the Qalandars and the Ḥaydarīs. The former, who claimed to be spiritual descendants of the "People of blame" *(ahl-i malāma, malāmatiyya)* of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, considered Jamāl al-Dīn Sāvī (fl. seventh/thirteenth century) from Sāva in Iran their founder; they flourished in Syria and Egypt, then spread to Iran, Asia Minor, and India. The Ḥaydarīs were a group founded by Quṭb al-Dīn Ḥaydar (fl. seventh/thirteenth century, buried in Zāva, in Khurāsān), which spread in the same regions between c. 600/1200 and c. 900/1500. Other mediaeval dervish communities included the Jawlaqīs, active mostly in the Balkans, Anatolia, and India; local Rifāʿī branches, such as the followers of ʿAlī Ḥarīrī (d. 645/1247–8), in Damascus, and the Badawīs, in the Nile Delta; and the Jalālīs (eighth/fourteenth century), the Madārīs (ninth/fifteenth century), and the Malangs (ninth/fifteenth century), all in India. Balkan and Anatolian dervishes, whose voices echo in the verse of prominent poets such as Yūnus Emre (fl. seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries) and Qaygusuz Abdāl (d. 818/1415), often espoused social deviance and religious antinomianism (Köprülü, part 2). They became particularly active and widespread in the early Ottoman period. A series of incidents perpetrated by dervish groups had made them famous and aroused contradictory feelings in society, ranging from veneration to hostility. In 819/1416, Torlāqīs led by Şeyh Bedreddīn rebelled against taxes and land spoliations; then ʿOthmān Bābā (d. 883/1478) and the Abdāls of Rūm challenged the authorities, including religious and Ṣūfī ones, during the reign of Meḥmed II (855–86/1451–81). Dervish activists tried to attack Bāyezīd II (r. 886–918/1481–1512) in 897/1492 and the grand vizier Ṣoqūllū Meḥmed Pāṣā in 987/1579 (the year of the latter's death); in the first half of the tenth/sixteenth century, no fewer than three uprisings were initiated by dervish leaders, namely, Şāhkūlū, Bozoqlū Celāl, and Şāh Qalandar (İnalcık; Karamustafa, chap. 6; Ocak, 126–32).

Beside these antinomian circles, established Ṣūfī orders—even those which were labelled "orthodox" (*bā sharʿ*, lit. "with the law," in Persian)—admitted "free" (*bī sharʿ*, lit. "without the law") dervishes to their ranks, although sometimes conditionally. For example, the Naqshbandī master Khʷāja Aḥrār (d. 895/1490), from Samarqand, defended dervishhood *(darvīshī)* as a righteous profession *(kār)*, but condemned some "wrong" views

held by dervishes, such as excessive love for the spiritual master and the vanity of dervish leaders (Aḥrār, 164, 173, 226, 286, 310). This integration of "extremist" and "moderate" dervish groups seems to have been common beginning in the late tenth/sixteenth century, a period of expansion of *ṭuruq* (Ar. plur. of *ṭarīqa*, lit. "way," hence Ṣūfī order) that coincided with a revival of long-distance initiatory journeys *(siyāḥa)* and wandering practices. Among the Naqshbandiyya, Dervīş Khākī travelled from Istanbul to Syria, Baghdad, Yemen, Egypt, India, Central Asia, and Iran (Khākī, fols. 8a–b, 11b, 12a, 16a, 20a–b, 55a). Naqshbandī Qalandars of the eleventh/seventeenth and twelfth/eighteenth centuries described, in Chaghatay or Persian texts, their peregrinations across Central Asia and along the *ḥajj* routes (Papas, chaps. 1–3). Other dervish poets, such as the Pashtun Raḥmān Bābā (d. 1118/1706), narrated their experiences in vernacular languages (Ṭabībī, chap. 13; Wieland-Karimi, 41). On the other side of the *dār al-Islām*, in North Africa, several antinomian sub-orders emerged among the lower social classes. The ʿIsāwiyya branch of the Shādhiliyya was known for its spectacular, occasionally violent, rituals and magic practices, while branches of the Ḥamdūshiyya performed self-mutilation and exorcist healing. The Heddāwas of Sīdī Heddī (d. 1805) lived as vagabonds, rejecting all activity and using large quantities of narcotics (Brunel, chap. 1–5; Frembgen, 111–3). While these non-conventional behaviours were sometimes signs of impoverishment, they also demonstrated a need, among certain devotees, to live out of a world whose traditional values were challenged by European colonialism and modernist attitudes. The dervishes believed that these new challenges endangered their mystical convictions and world-renouncing way of life.

Whatever the historical context, the marginal place of dervishes in Ṣūfī organisations—neither inside nor outside—was embodied in their physical appearance, which tended to exaggerate the Ṣūfī practices related to the body. The cloak *(khirqa)*, made of rags or patchwork *(muraqqaʿ, zhanda, dalq)* of wool, cotton or sackcloth and sometimes decorated with strings of beads, has been described, symbolically and etymologically, as a sign of poverty, a "tearing *(kharaq)* from the world" or as a "desert crossing" *(kharq)*. Colours also had meanings: white, for example, stood for daylight (i.e., clarity of the heart) and green for verdure and water (i.e., joy and liveliness). Ḥaydarīs and Shamsīs wore a black or white woollen vest *(namad)*. Most dervishes wore a special hat *(kulāh)* of felt or sheepskin, sewn with sturdy seams (sing. *waṣla*). Here again, various colours held symbolic significance: for example, blue, the colour of the sky, represented the soul's loftiness, and brown, the colour of the soil, represented spiritual fertility. To one's dress might be added a belt *(kamar)* and a pair of sandals *(naʿlayn*, sing. *naʿl)*. Both of these terms were supposed to contain the letters symbolic of the dervish's virtues: *k* for *kifāya* (sufficiency), *m* for *maskana* (humility), *r* for *riḍā* (contentment); *n* for *niyāz* (indigence), *ʿayn* for *ʿizzat* (grandeur), *l* for *luṭf* (kindness).

Another key element of the dervish's equipment was the begging bowl *(kashkūl, kāsa)*, an oblong dish made from coconut, gourd, wood, or metal, in which he received his alms. Additional paraphernalia included an axe *(tabarzīn)* and a stick *(ʿaṣā)*, useful for defence against wild animals and highwaymen. Abdāls of Rūm, for example, carried on the shoulder a

"hatchet of Ebūmüslīm" (from the surname of the Abbasid general of Persian origin and leader of the first organized movement against the Umayyad dynasty Abū Muslīm (d. 137/755) in the epic tradition, the 'hatchet bearer of Khurāsān' (*tabardār-i Khurāsān*)), and a long, bent stick in the hand. Dervishes often used a rug *(pūst)* made from the skin of a sheep, goat, gazelle, panther, or leopard. More rarely, vagabonds, such as Khāksārs and Jalālīs, blew horns *(nafīr)* to attract crowds or to beg from house to house; musical instruments were not unusual.

As for the body itself, dervishes treated their hair in various ways: while Qalandars used the "four blows" *(chahār ḍarb)*—that is, shaving the hair, beard, moustache, and eyebrows—Ḥaydarīs kept the moustache and a tuft on the head, and Torlāqīs and Shamsīs were reputed to be clean shaven. On the one hand, such a hairless, supposedly repulsive, appearance was a sign of chastity and a protection against sexual desire. On the other hand, long hair and a clean-shaven face might signify an approach to the realm of women, as was probably the case with tenth/sixteenth- and eleventh/seventeenth-century Jāmī dervishes, who claimed to be spiritual heirs of Aḥmad-i Jām (d. 536/1141): their appearance was deliberately feminine—long, flowing hair, clean-shaven faces, earrings, bracelets, little bells, etc. (Brown, 193–6, 250, 268; Jarring; Ocak, 101–17; Vāʿiz Kāshifī, 58–68).

The jewellery of Rifāʿīs or Malangs represents not only asceticism but also the feminine status of the dervish as "bride of God" and symbolises the union with God or a saint. We know of several cases of transvestism among *bī sharʿ* groups: as early as the mediaeval period, followers of the aforementioned ʿAlī Ḥarīrī wore women's clothes; Salmān al-Ṭawwālī, a Qādirī *majdhūb* of tenth/sixteenth-century Sudan, wore a woman's belt and danced with his slave girls, as did another Qādirī *majdhūb*, Nūr al-Dīn Isḥāq, in eleventh/seventeenth-century southern India; today in northern India, members of the Sohāgī branch of the Suhrawardiyya wear red women's clothing and jewellery and are closely associated with castes of transsexuals and transvestites (Frembgen, 73–4, 100–1, 135–6; Kadkanī, 251–2; Kugle, chap. 4; Watenpaugh). The overlap between antinomian Ṣūfīs and unconventional milieux and the transgression of sexual boundaries once again manifest the marginality implicit in dervishhood.

Parts of this peripheral but fascinating and boisterous world, which still existed in the late nineteenth century, had vanished a few decades later. The attacks against dervishes—always more vehement than against more "conventional" Ṣūfīs—were triggered by the spread of antinomian tendencies among certain dervish communities and individuals, and the coup de grâce was delivered by colonial as well as Muslim reformist and modernist authorities. Dervishes were repeatedly accused of being dirty, aggressive, impious, insane, drug-addicted, and sexually perverse. Their bad reputation even reached China, according to Ma Zhu (d. 1123/1711), a Hui scholar who claimed that a group of Gelandai (Qalandar) from India had propagated heterodoxy among the Muslims of Yunnan. He even managed to push the case through the courts, resulting in a ban against the alleged Qalandars and their expulsion from the region (Ma Zhu, chap. 10). In the Ottoman lands, Western orientalists warned their compatriots against the dangerous itinerant dervishes (sing. *sayyāḥ*), who "infested" the roads of

Anatolia, and the "fanatic" Muslim wanderers who "terrorised" Balkan Christians (Brown, 348; Garnett, 194). Through all these diatribes, one detects the persistence of dervishhood in modern times, as evidenced, for example, by the many dervish inns *(kalenderhāne)* in Istanbul, which continued to be active until 1925 (Zarcone, 145–64, 179–80, 186), and the numerous photographs (Illustrations 1 and 2) by Western (Garnett, 30, 142, 176) and native observers, such as Antoin Sevruguin (d. 1933) in Iran. *Bī sharʿ* Ṣūfism, however, diminished greatly in the first decades of the twentieth century, a victim of successive waves of criticism. In the republics of the Soviet Union, reformist authors and revolutionaries agreed that immorality *(äkhläqsïzlïq)* and debauchery *(fàhshlek)* pervaded the dervish lodges of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan (Mozaffari, 29, 112–8). In Egypt, Salafī and Wahhābī intellectuals published articles and lampoons against the seventh/thirteenth-century saint al-Badawī and his cult at Ṭanṭa, denouncing the "empire of dervishes" *(dawlat al-darāwīsh)* (Mayeur-Jaouen, 107–19). Despite their defence of poverty *(faqīrlīq)* and dervishism *(darwīshlīq)*, based on authoritative quotations and codified practices (*Risāla-yi ahl-i darvīsh*, fols. 2b-4b, 5a-6a, 7a-8a), the dervishes of Xinjiang were almost completely eradicated. Two notable exceptions are Pakistan and India, where the dervish

Illustration 1. A group of dervishes in Iran, between c. 1910 and c. 1915. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-B2- 3285-11.

Illustration 2. A holy fool (*divāna*) of the Syr Darya region (Uzbekistan), from *Turkestanskii al'bom* (1871–1872), part 2, vol. 2, pl. 116. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-14787.

form of Islamic mysticism is still very much alive. Similarly, Iran is still home to some Khāksār lodges *(khānqāh)*. Afghanistan is a more ambiguous case: Chishtī dervish groups in Bāghlān, Malang healers north of Kabul, and *majādhīb* elsewhere existed until recently, but many of them seem to have disappeared during the Russian invasion in 1979 and the devastating conflicts that ensued (Wieland-Karimi, 27, 111–6, 148, 154–5). In other places, such as Turkey, dervishhood has survived in an acceptable intellectual and literary form, exemplified by poets such as İsmail Emre (d. 1970), called a "dervish without lodge" *(tekkesiz dervis)*, who was occasionally referred to as the "new Yunus Emre" (Alemdar).

The word itself is still well known, preserving a memory of dervishhood in various languages of Islam. Although *darvīsh* entered a great variety of tongues, including Chinese and Malay-Indonesian, it is used most frequently in the Iranian and Turkic languages. In colloquial Persian the word *darvīsh* refers to Khāksārs—who make a distinction between the *darvīsh-i kharābātī* ("dervish of disreputable establishments"), and the *darvīsh-i munājātī* ("dervish of the invocations")—and the adjective *darvīsh-ṣifāt* means "humble, accommodating." The Tajik term (used also in Uzbek) *darveshona* applies to a collective ritual meal for the poor (Abashin; Algar; Gramlich, 1:70, 2:291). In Ottoman and modern Turkish, a *dervīş ādam* is a simple, modest man; in Chaghatay, the synonyms *dervīshkhūy* and *dervīshvesh* signify "to be or to behave like a dervish"; and in modern Uyghur, *dervishlerche* designates the lifestyle of a free thinker.

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Didactic poetry, Arabic

Arabic didactic poetry, taken in a broad sense, intends to instil morals or