

## Why people of every faith are drawn to Hazrat Nizam-ud-Din Auliya

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RECENT STORIES



**As Mallika Iyer drowns into the ocean of love that Hazrat Nizam-ud-Din Auliya is, she wonders what draws people from every religion, sect and cult here**

*'Aap ke ghar mein main hoon bhikari,*

*Aap hi toh hain daata;*

*Sare rishton se hai badhkar*

*Tera mera naata!'*

The heartfelt song of the qawwal fills the night air, as crowd's throng the dargah of Nizam-ud-Din Auliya, the greatest of Sufi saints, in a densely occupied and bustling quarter of New Delhi.

The songs are spiritually uplifting and strikingly simple and offered at the quadrangle outside the tomb of the saint of the Chisthi order who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. He preached a simple message of prayer and renunciation; ate little and distributed whatever he received to the needy, regardless of their faith. It is not Friday prayers or empty rituals, he said, that were fundamental to Sufism, but the intent to do unto others what you wish for them to do unto you. Individual communion with God through the annihilation of the ego was the path he preached.

But I am drawn here not so much by the Sufi mystic and his teachings as much as by the beautiful rendition of the Sufi Song *Kun Faya Kun*, I have heard in the movie *Rockstar*. A qawwali I am told is a sacred love hymn and the founder of this style was Amir Khusrau, beloved student of Nizam-ud-Din Auliya, who lies buried within the same precincts as his guru.

As the musicians begin to take their place with their instruments and the crowds settle down around them, I turn to a middle-aged man sitting beside me and ask him what draws him to the place.

*"The Peer is dear to Allah," he explains. "And I come here to send my dua to the Lord through the Peer. Woh Allah ke pyaare hain. My dua may not reach Allah but I know he will listen to his Chosen One."*

This is the philosophy that guides many a believer, drawing them here every Thursday when a special *dua* (prayer/wish) accompanies the namaaz at the adjacent mosque. The saint, they believe can solve their problems and lift them out of their calamities.

*"It is like a lawyer who takes your petition to the judge!" explains Burhan, an older man who has heard our conversation, when I point to the women tying colourful threads on the jali of the dargah walls outside the tombs of Nizam-ud-Din and Amir Khusrau. "They tie the thread to mark their dua which they send to Allah through the Peer," he explains.*



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## Divine music

The qawwali begins slowly and gradually gains momentum. A harmonium and a *dhol* are the only two instruments that accompany them as they clap to the rhythm and join the main qawwal in singing. There is no microphone and it is the intensity of their melodious voice alone that carries the message of love and devotion to the listeners. The lyrics are simple and there is a vibrant energy in the atmosphere.

An old man with a large green cloth *pankha* mounted on a stick, frantically fans the crowds to help them keep cool in the heat. Listeners clap along with the qawwals as devotees lay down notes before them in appreciation. The tempo increases to a crescendo and listeners are transported to another realm.

*"You sing beautifully,"* I tell a qawwal after he has finished his piece. *"It is not me,"* he replies humbly. *"It is He who sings through me...it is all his grace,"* he says pointing toward the saint's tomb.

The qawwals come to the dargah every Thursday to sing their songs of devotion to the Sufi saint revered by people of all faiths. Many of them have been coming there since they were little. *"We belong to different groups and we all come here from Daryaganj on Thursday for the prayers and the qawwali,"* Alam Zaim Nizam, a qawwal with a soul-lifting voice tells me.

It strikes me much later that all the qawwals I heard that evening were men. I wonder if women also participated in the qawwali sometimes.



### **Breaking barriers**

But there is more to the evening than divine music. The saint often *"Came into conflict with the orthodox mullas of the Delhi mosques,"* writes William Dalrymple in the *City of Djinn*s about the Auliya. The mullas often complained about the saint to Ghiyas-ud-Din Tughluk, the then Sultan accusing him of heresy. It strikes me as ironic that seven hundred years hence, it is the saint that survives in the living culture of his people, nor the conservative mullas, neither the powerful Sultan.

*"Do you not notice how much Islam in India is influenced by Hindu practices and beliefs?"* remarks Malik cutting into my thoughts. *"If you go to the West Asia, you will not find dargahs and music there. Or for that matter women tying threads on shrines to make a dua. This beautiful blend and form of Islam you will find only in India,"* explains Malik as I nod, appreciating the import of what he says.

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*"The Quran says that there are 1,24,000 Nabi or prophets in Islam," explains Malik. "And Muhammad was the last of them. We regard Moshe and Isa (Moses and Jesus) also as our prophets. The Auliya is one amongst them," he explains.*

And then comes the statement that leaves me floored. *"Rama and Krishna,"* adds Burhan, *"can also be counted amongst the messengers sent by the Almighty to show Humans the right path. They too may be counted in the list of prophets according to me,"* he says, revealing his thoughts.

Malik and Burhan are not self-styled intellectuals hollering out opinions in television newsrooms. Nor are they political heavy-weights with divisive agendas. Their simple wisdom and open mind leave me spellbound. And I am certain, it is this wisdom of the ordinary people that forms the durable fibre from which is made the multi-coloured quilt called India.



As I look around me, I notice that people of every faith are drawn to Hazrat Nizam-ud-Din. And as I wind my way back through crowded by-lanes and chaotic streets, I realise how that is the eternal beauty of the multi-faceted diverse nation I call home.

Where there is room for every faith, sect and cult; from every belief system and denomination; from the atheist Carvaka to the monistic Advaita, from Christian tenets to Jaina philosophy, from Sikh to Zoroastrian beliefs, from Tantric Shaktism to Upanishadic thought, from the eight-fold path of the Buddha to the mystic path of the Sufis, from polytheism to monotheism and monism to atheism. There is indeed room for all in this diverse nation. Where one may, without getting dogmatic, unflinchingly walk many paths at the same time and drown in divinity of every hue.

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