

SUFI CHANTING AND ALTERED STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS: A PRELIMINARY REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This preliminary study explores the role of Sufi chanting in inducing Altered States of Consciousness (ASC) that is known as Fana in Sufism. Sufi chanting such as Zikr is a prevalent spiritual practice in Islamic mystical tradition, well-known for its profound impact on mental health and spiritual growth. This preliminary study investigates the mechanisms of these chanting practices through their rhythmic and melodic elements and comparing their effectiveness in inducing ASC and promoting psychological well-being. The problem addressed in this study is the lack of comprehensive understanding of how specific elements of Sufi Chanting contribute to Fana or ASC and consequently lead to psychological well-being. This preliminary study employs content analysis method which includes past literatures and communication artefacts such as texts, pictures, audio and video related to Sufi Chanting and ASC. The initial findings reveal that Sufi chanting significantly enhances emotional regulation, reduce stress, and induce states of deep meditation and spiritual connection. The findings suggest that incorporating traditional spiritual practices like Sufi chanting into contemporary therapeutic models can improve mental health intervention. These practices offer a culturally sensitive approach to well-being, providing holistic benefits that integrate spiritual and psychological health.

Keywords: Chanting, Sufism; Fana; Altered State of Consciousness (ASC); psychological well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

Achieving spiritual enlightenment by chanting is a common practice in Islamic mysticism i.e Sufism. Fana, one of the spiritual enlightenments in Sufism, is the term for the total destruction of the self in the divine, attained via chanting among other rituals (Laughlin & Takahashi, 2020). The purpose of this review is to explore how Sufi chanting affects Fana as a form of Altered States of Consciousness. The precariousness of psychological and mental state has been highlighted by the increased stress, anxiety, and depression levels seen throughout the world (Li, 2023; Tran et al., 2022). Numerous researches have revealed that the ASC can impact an individual's overall psychological well-being (Corneille & Luke, 2021; Drigas et al., 2022). The accomplishment of ASC is becoming better acknowledged for its profound effect on mental health (Cheung et al., 2023). ASC is being investigated progressively in academic literature for its ability to support transformative experiences that improve self-awareness, emotional regulation, and cognitive functioning, all of which have a direct impact on a person's psychological well-being (Perry et al., 2022). The ASC study offers insightful information about enhancing psychological well-being and highlights the need for further thorough research in this area.

Religious chanting has gained attention in tandem with the growing body of research on Altered States of Consciousness (ASC) because it can induce ASC experiences, making it an effective therapeutic tool in a variety of cultural contexts (Perry et al., 2021). Chanting is thought to cause ASC, which may have positive psychological effects. Chanting is commonly acknowledged as a spiritual development aid and a conduit to the divine (Weinel, 2018; Dudeja, 2017). Many spiritual contexts, including Sufi practices that use chanting to promote divine connection and facilitate entry into trance states, have well-documented the ability of chanting to induce ASC (Vernon, 2009). After delving deeper into the various concepts associated with these traditions, it is clear that in Sufism, Fana refers to Altered States of Consciousness (ASC) (Isgandarova, 2019; Valverde, 2021). According to Beyad and Vafa (2021) fana is the collapse of the ego in the divine in Sufism. Although chanting is widely used in many cultures and traditions as a tool for spiritual development and altered states of consciousness, the underlying mechanisms of this practice are still mostly unknown.

However, there is still lack of comprehensive understanding on how specific elements of Sufi chanting contribute to Fana or Altered States of Consciousness and consequently lead to psychological well-being. The research questions therefore focus on what are the rhythm and tempo and what are the specific mechanisms in Sufi chanting that can elicit Fana or ASC? This preliminary review therefore, aims at exploring Sufi chanting by focusing on the rhythm and tempo and its influence in inducing Altered States of Consciousness (ASC). In order to gain an initial understanding on this matter, this study employs content analysis method such as past literatures and communication artifacts such as texts of various formats, pictures, audio and video related to Sufi Chanting and Altered States of Consciousness.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Since this is just a preliminary study, it employs content analysis method which includes past literatures and communication artefacts such as texts, pictures, audio and video related to Sufi Chanting and ASC.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Another name for chanting is Dhikr or Zikr. This is an essential Sufi activity (Saniotis, 2018). Islamic mystical strand places a strong emphasis on a person's spiritual relationship with God (Karim, 2020). Sufi chanting is the rhythmic and melodious recitation of brief sentences or the names of God, frequently accompanied by music and gestures. Chanting is meant to awaken the heart, purify the soul, and draw the chanter closer to God, ultimately resulting in a state of spiritual ecstasy and oneness with the divine.

Islamic text, which promotes remembering God to become closer to Him spiritually, is the source of Sufi chanting (Knysh, 2019). Sufi chanting is widely used in Islamic traditions, but little is known about its psychological consequences. On the other hand, recent investigations have demonstrated that chanting can lead to altered states of consciousness, which can significantly affect psychological health. Insights into the function of spiritual practices in Islamic traditions in fostering wellbeing and mental health can be gained from more research on this subject.

The fundamental idea of fana in Sufism is the destruction of the ego, which leads to a condition of oneness with the divine (Beyad & Vafa, 2021). Various techniques, including chanting and meditation, which are thought to generate Altered States of Consciousness (ASC), are used to help this process of self-negation. A sense of oneness with the divine, ego loss, and expanded awareness are characteristics of these ASC, and they are thought to be routes to enlightenment and spiritual purification (Saniotis, 2018; Laughlin & Takahashi, 2020).

Although there is not much information on ASC led on by fana, early study points to possible advantages for mental health. For example, Sufi chanting has been linked to lowering blood pressure, promoting serenity, and decreasing anxiety (Isgandarova, 2019). Sufi meditation techniques have also demonstrated potential in boosting general wellbeing, lowering symptoms of anxiety and depression, and increasing cognitive performance (Gul & Jehangir, 2019).

4. CONCLUSION

This preliminary implies that integrating traditional spiritual practices such as Sufi chanting into modern therapy paradigms can improve mental health interventions. With their holistic advantages that incorporate psychological and spiritual health, these practices offer a culturally sensitive approach to well-being. Future research should focus on the incorporation of religious and spiritual approaches in mental health interventions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is funded by GP-IPS - GERAN PUTRA INISIATIF SISWAZAH- Vote number 9785500 from Universiti Putra Malaysia. I am grateful to my supervisor Dr. Arfah and my co-supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ratna Roshida for their invaluable assistance and guidance throughout the project. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Department of Government and Civilization Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology for providing the necessary resources and facilities to carry out this research.

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