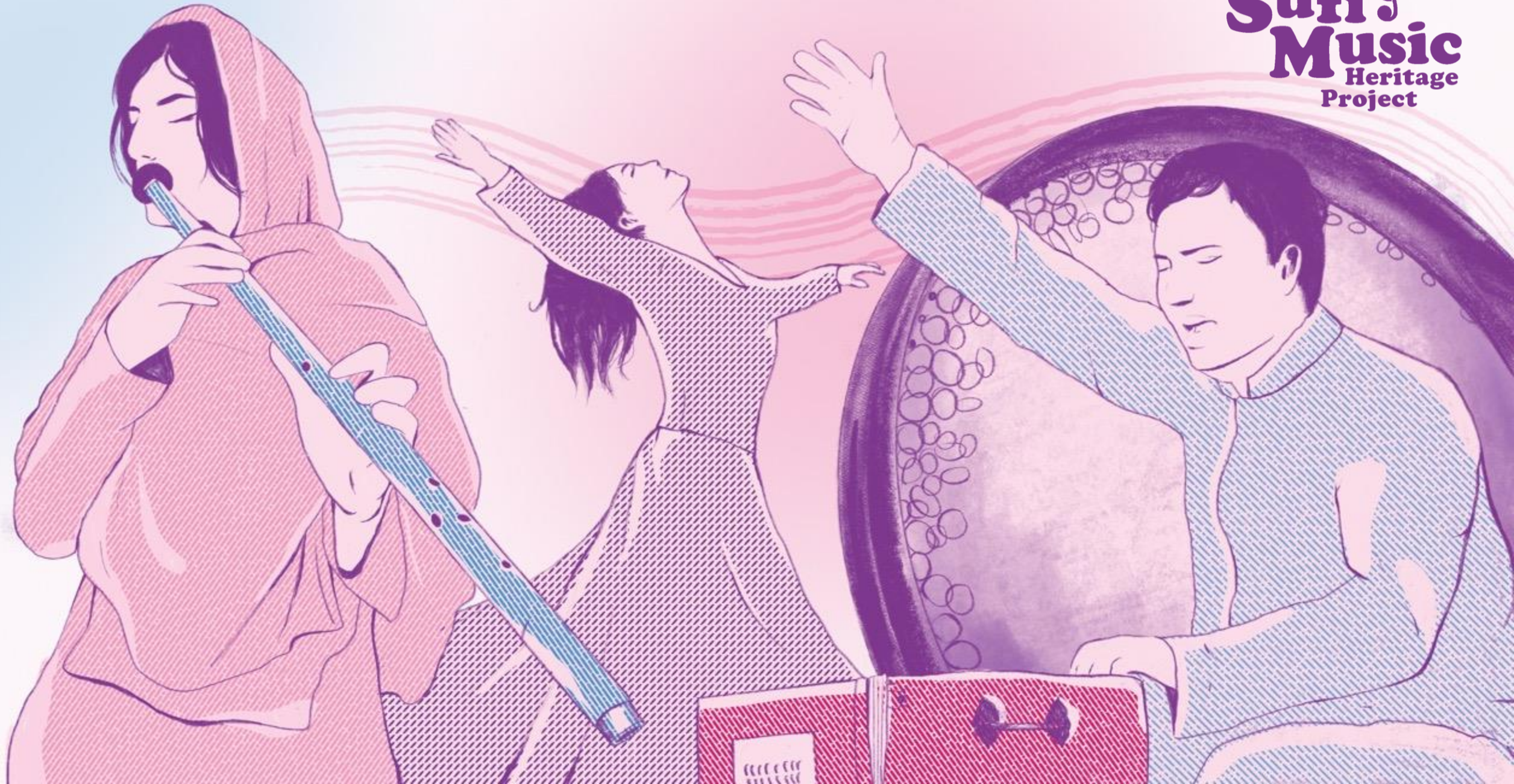




INTRODUCTION TO SUFI MUSIC, POETRY & MOVEMENT

Learning objectives

A deeper awareness of Sufi practices through music, poetry, and movement

An understanding of traditional Sufi music instruments used worldwide

Learning about key historical events and milestones in Sufi music and poetry



“Undeniably, music and spirituality have been intricately linked throughout mankind's history, from the early ages to the present day.

Music is a constant flowing force connecting, uplifting, cajoling, comforting, and inspiring humanity. Its rendition may have changed, but its innate ‘essence’ has remained the same.”

- Ishtiaq Ahmed, Khidmat Centre, Bradford

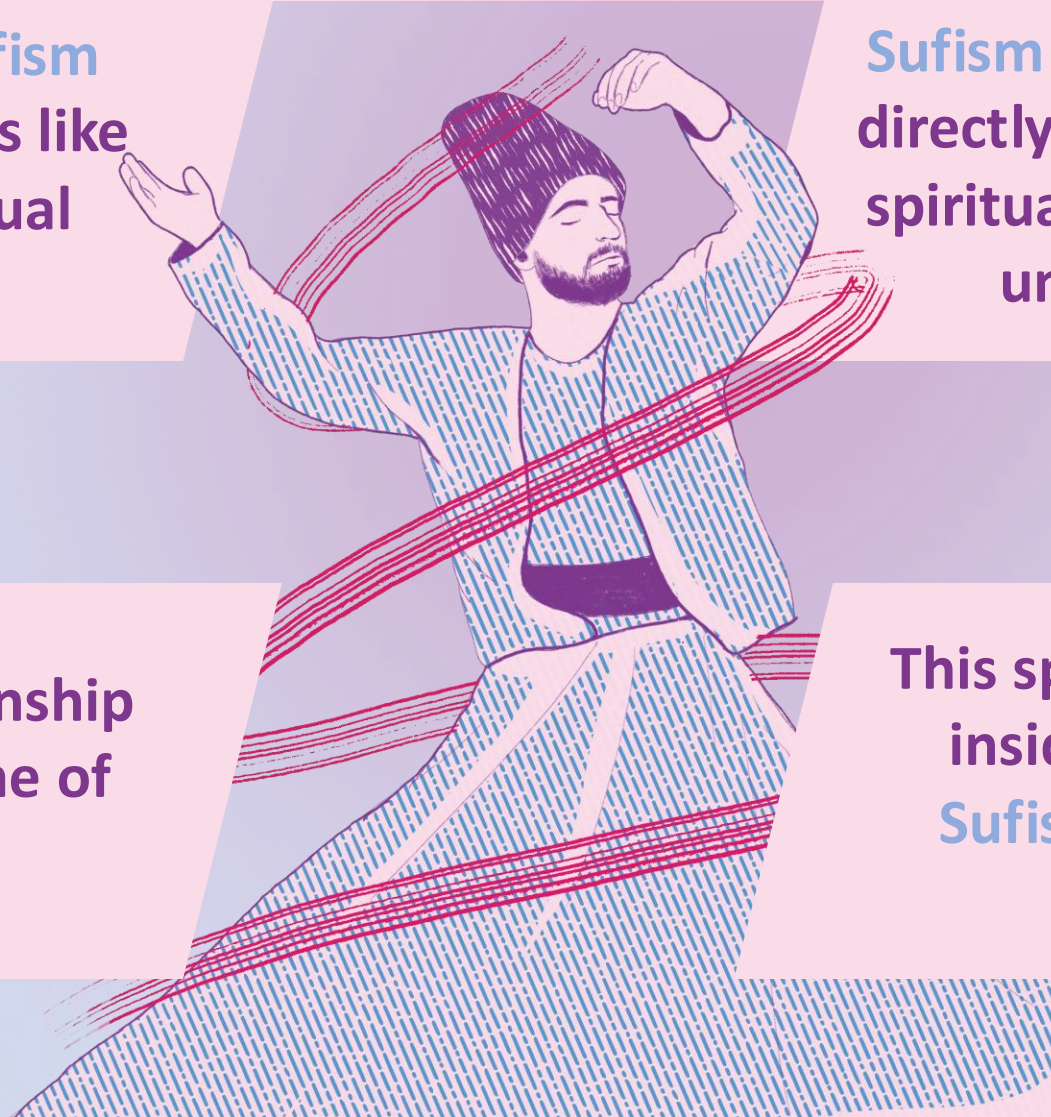
WHAT IS SUFISM?

People who follow **Sufism** are called **Sufis**. A **Sufi** is like a traveller on a spiritual journey.

Sufism is a way of connecting directly to **the divine**, a higher spiritual reality, through pure unconditional love.

Sufis see their relationship with **the divine** as one of deep love.

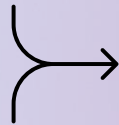
This spiritual journey happens inside their hearts, where **Sufis** feel their love for **the divine** growing.



WHAT IS A SUFI?

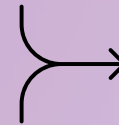
The word **'Sufi'** originates from the Arabic word **'suf'** which means 'wool' referring to a garment worn by Sufi mystics.

Sufis usually dress in simple clothing as a way to reject the material luxuries of the world.



The word **"Sufi"** is also related to the Arabic word **"safa"** which means **"purity."**

It means making the heart clean and free from bad things.



Sufis believe that by doing **good deeds**, they can make their hearts pure and show how good their character is.



*“The **Sufi** who sets out to seek the divine calls himself a ‘**traveller**’ (sālik); he advances by slow **stages** (maqāmāt) along a ‘**path**’ (tarīqat) to the goal of union with the **Reality** (fanā fi ’l-Haqq).”*

“The Mystics of Islam” by Reynold A. Nicholson (1914)

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ORIGINS

Sufism started around **610 CE** driven by the quest for a deeper, personal connection with **the divine**, transcending beyond material and political concerns. Sufi music reflects this **spiritual journey**.



HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF SUFI MUSIC

Key forms of Sufi music include:

Sama

Sama is a special practice in Sufism that includes listening to **music, chanting, and poetry**. The most famous Sama practitioners are the whirling dervishes of the Mevlevi Order in Turkey, who use music and dance in their rituals.

Qawwali

In the **Indian subcontinent**, Qawwali is a type of Sufi music that has lively singing and harmonium playing, often accompanied by tabla and dholak drums. It aims to make listeners and performers feel joyous and close to the divine.

Ghazal

Ghazals are poems that are often about **love and mystery**. **Many ghazals talk about Sufi ideas of divine love**. Singing ghazals is an important part of Sufi music especially in Persian and Urdu, where they are sung to convey deep spiritual emotions.



HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ORIGINS

Middle East and Central Asia

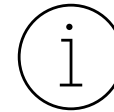
Sufi music comes from the Middle East and Central Asia, where Sufism first grew. These places have different musical traditions that are important in Sufi ceremonies. Instruments like the **oud, ney, and daf**, which are common in Sufi music, originally came from these regions.

Persian Influence

Persian culture has greatly influenced Sufi music. **The Mevlevi Order, started by Rumi's followers**, is famous for its whirling dervishes and music that includes the ney (reed flute) and frame drums.

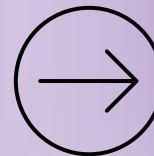
Indian Subcontinent

Sufi music has a special history in the Indian subcontinent, **mixing local musical styles with those brought by Sufi mystics**. Qawwali, a beloved type of Sufi spiritual music, began in the Indian subcontinent, especially in what is now India and Pakistan.



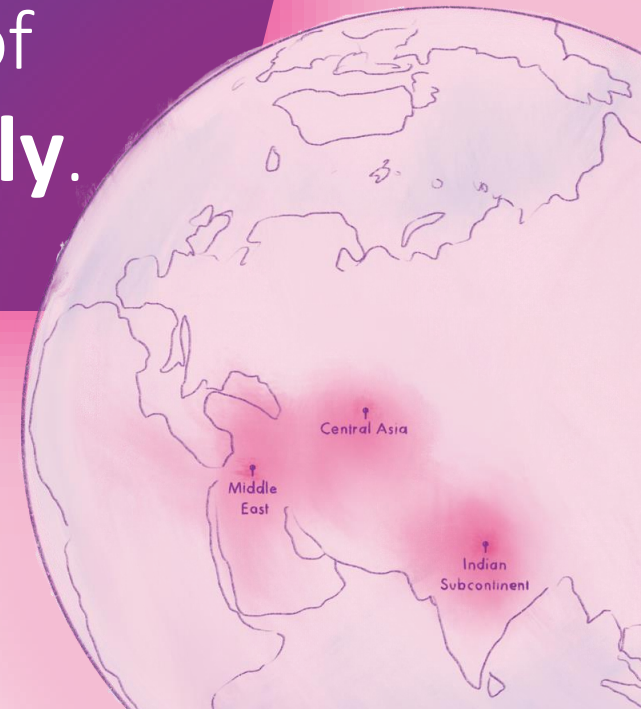
Sufi mystics, saints + scholars:

- ❖ Baba Farid
- ❖ Mir Mohammad Baksh
- ❖ Rumi
- ❖ Guru Nanak Dev Ji
- ❖ Guru Amar Das
- ❖ Guru Ram Das
- ❖ Mohammad Iqbal



SUFI COMMUNITIES

Sufi music, in its various forms and regional styles, deeply embodies the **mystical and devotional** dimensions of Islam, touching spiritual seekers **globally**.



SUFI COMMUNITIES

Community building

Inclusive gatherings:

Sufi gatherings (dhikr or sama sessions) promote inclusivity and communal harmony

Shared spirituality:

Collective practices enhance a sense of belonging and shared spiritual pursuit

Core values

Love and compassion:

Central to Sufi teachings is the expression of divine love and compassion

Humility and service:

Sufis engage in humility and service to others

CLASSICAL & TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS IN SUFI MUSIC

Sufi music employs a variety of classical and traditional instruments, which vary by region:



The ney:

A reed flute, commonly used in Turkish and Persian Sufi music, known for its haunting and meditative sound.



The saz:

A traditional stringed instrument from Turkey, known for its long neck and a rounded body with three to four courses of strings.



The rabab:

A traditional stringed instrument from Central Asia, particularly Afghanistan, also used in Pakistan, India, and Iran.



The tabla:

A pair of drums used in Indian Sufi music, offering intricate rhythmic patterns.



The oud:

A pear-shaped stringed instrument is common in Middle Eastern Sufi music.



The daf:

A large frame drum used in Persian and Kurdish Sufi music.



The santoor:

A rectangular trapezium stringed instrument, commonly used in the classical music of Jammu and Kashmir.



The tanpura:

A long-necked plucked string instrument from India, providing a harmonic drone.



The sitar:

A plucked string instrument from India, known for its resonant sound and complex playing technique.



The qawwali harmonium:

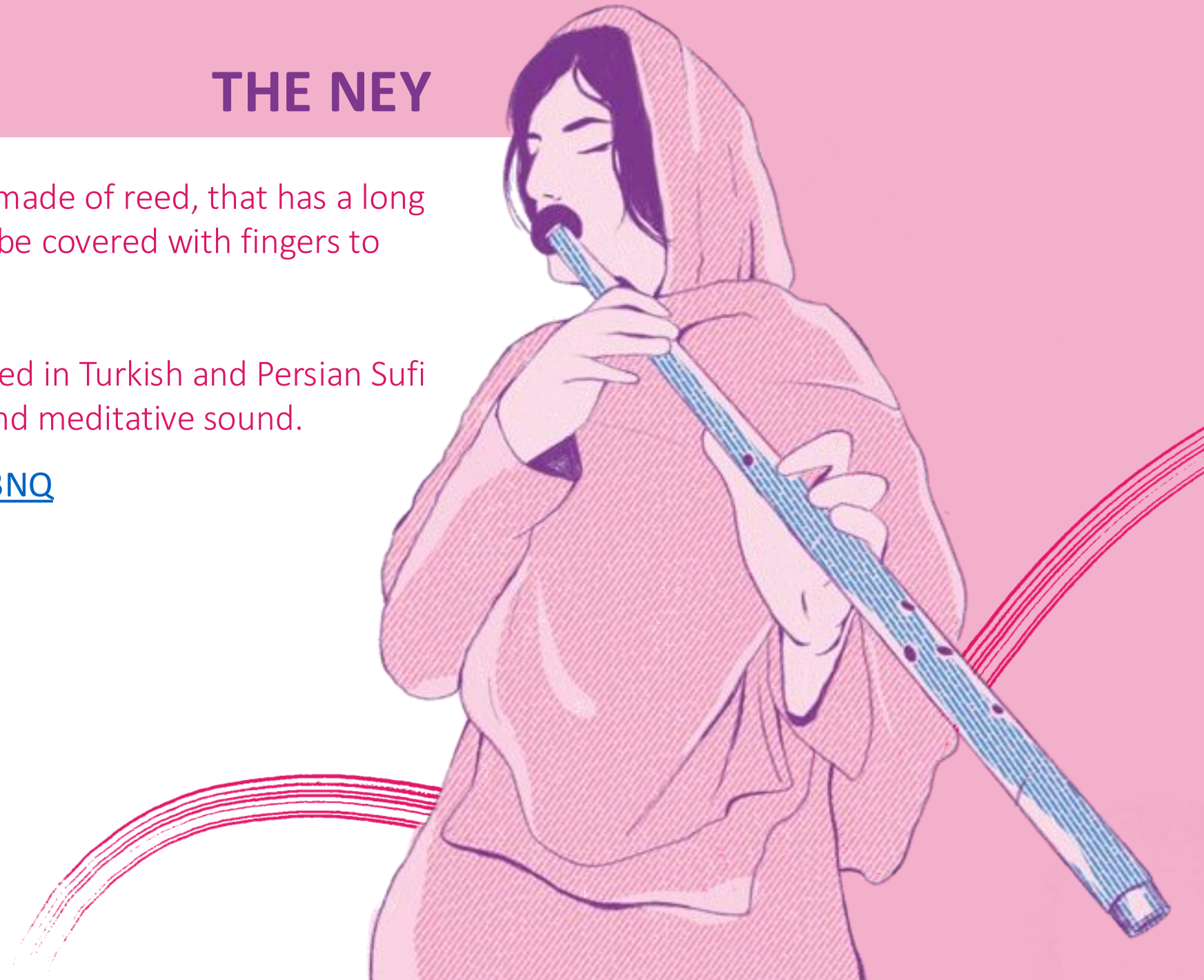
A small, hand-pumped reed organ used in Qawwali music, providing melodic support.

THE NEY

The ney is a simple, wind flute, made of reed, that has a long body with 6 or 7 holes that can be covered with fingers to create different sounds.

This instrument is commonly used in Turkish and Persian Sufi music, known for its haunting and meditative sound.

Listen here: <https://bit.ly/4byP3NQ>

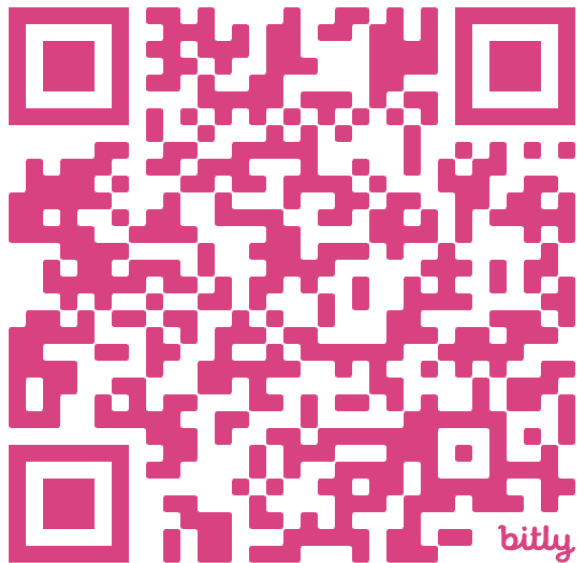


THE DAF

The daf is a large frame drum that emits a deep, rich tone thanks to its large size and construction,

It consists of goat skin stretched over a wooden frame.

Listen here: <https://bit.ly/3VXBe5y>

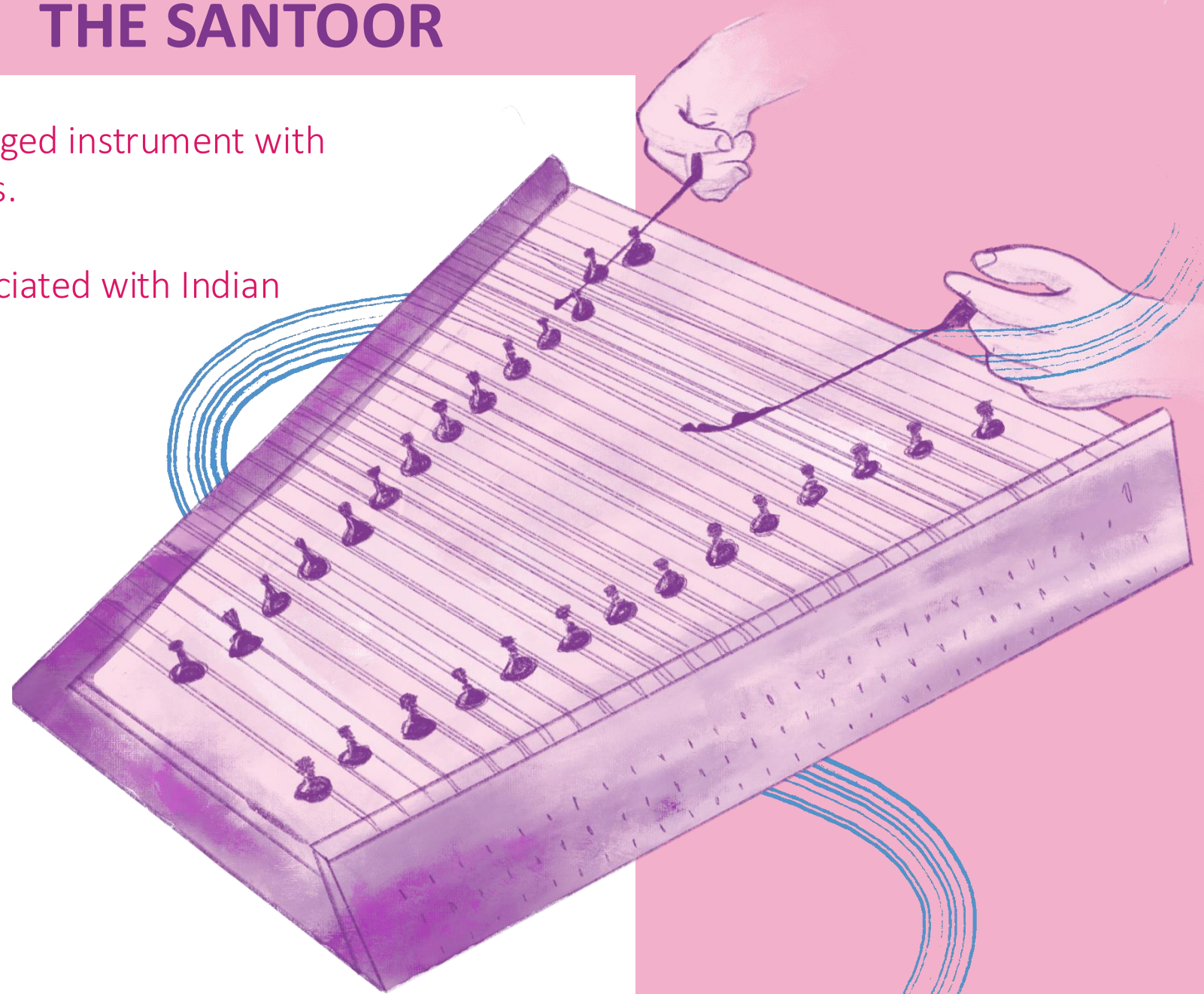


THE SANTOOR

The santoor is a traditional Indian stringed instrument with 72 strings, played with wooden mallets.

It produces a rich, melodic sound associated with Indian classical music.

Listen here: <https://bit.ly/4jaRsDf>



THE SAZ

The saz is a traditional stringed instrument from Turkey. It has a long neck, a rounded body, and three to four courses of strings.

The instrument is played with a plectrum and produces a bright, twangy sound. It is known for its versatility in Turkish folk music.

Listen here: <https://bit.ly/46rbD9U>

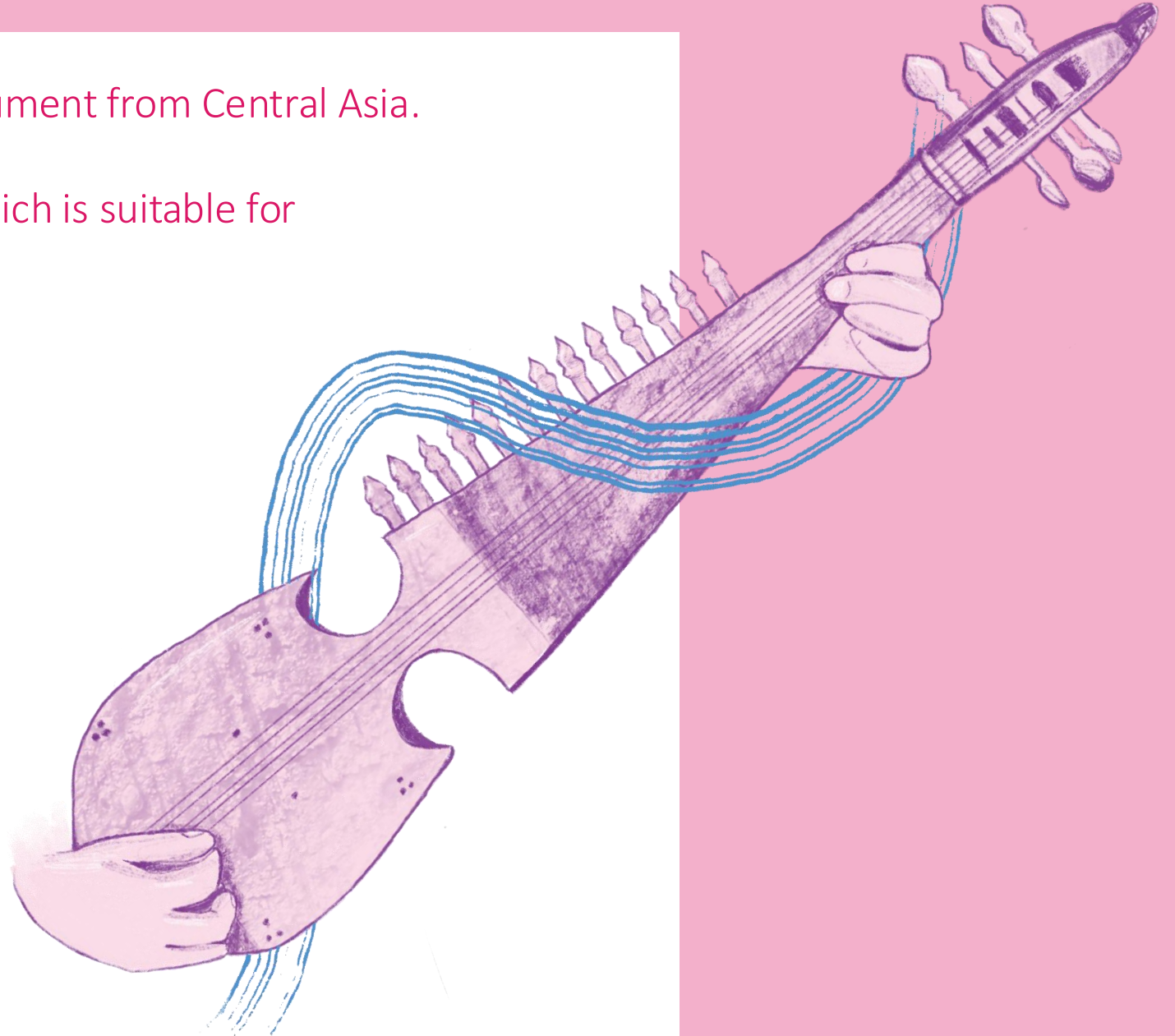


THE RABAB

The rabab is a traditional stringed instrument from Central Asia.

It produces a warm, resonant sound which is suitable for traditional Persian and classical music.

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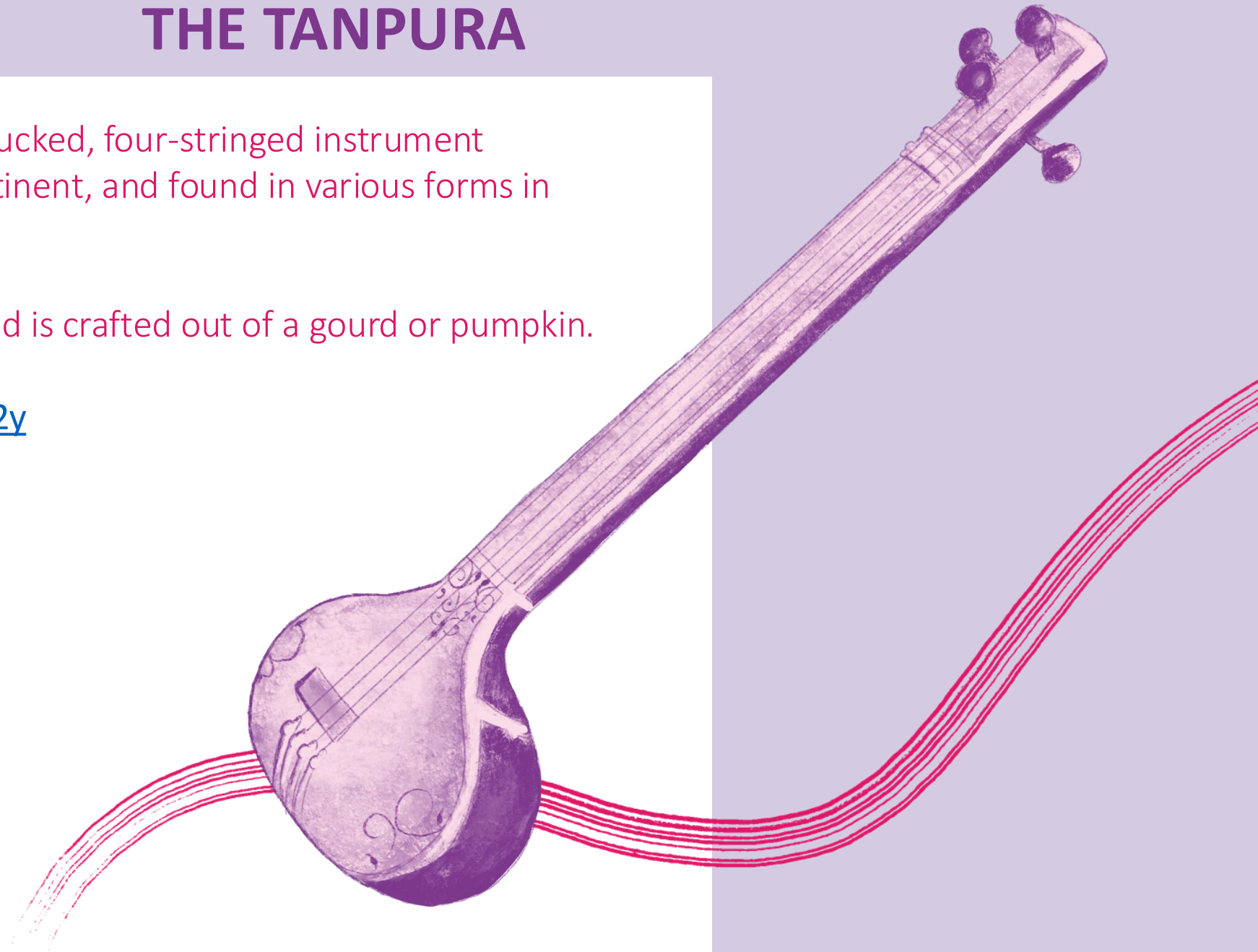


THE TANPURA

The tanpura is a long-necked, plucked, four-stringed instrument originating in the Indian subcontinent, and found in various forms in Indian music.

It resembles a simplified sitar and is crafted out of a gourd or pumpkin.

Listen here: <https://bit.ly/3LK8l2y>

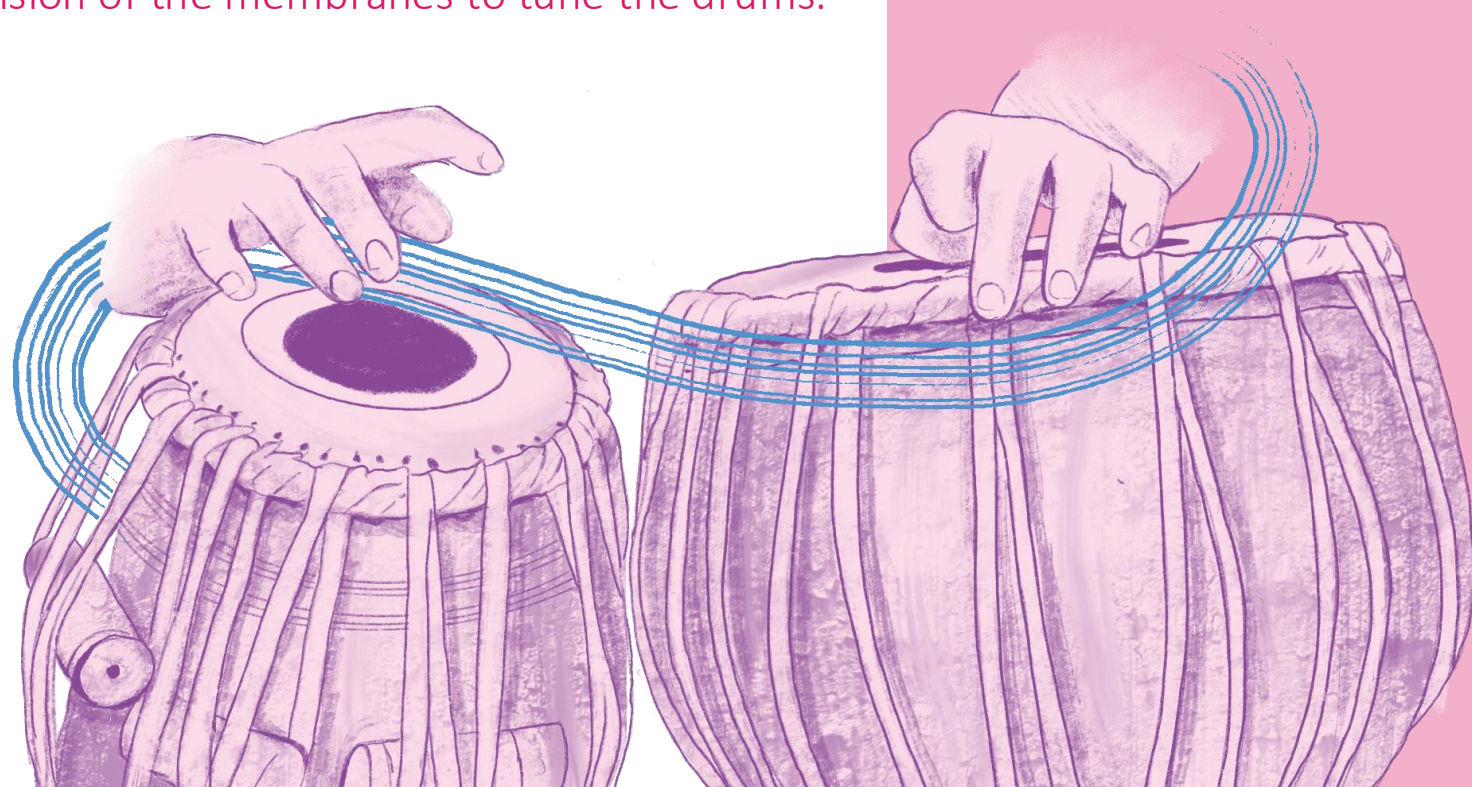


THE TABLA

The tabla is a pair of hand drums from the **Indian subcontinent**. The name tabla likely comes from **tabl**, the Arabic word for drum. The tabla consists of two small drums of slightly different sizes and shapes. Each drum is made of hollowed-out wood, clay or metal.

The smaller drum (**dayan/tabla**) creates treble and tonal sounds, while the larger drum (**baya/dagga**) produces bass. They are laced with hoops, thongs, and wooden dowels on their sides. The dowels and hoops tighten the tension of the membranes to tune the drums.

Listen here: <https://bit.ly/4eXnmRJ>

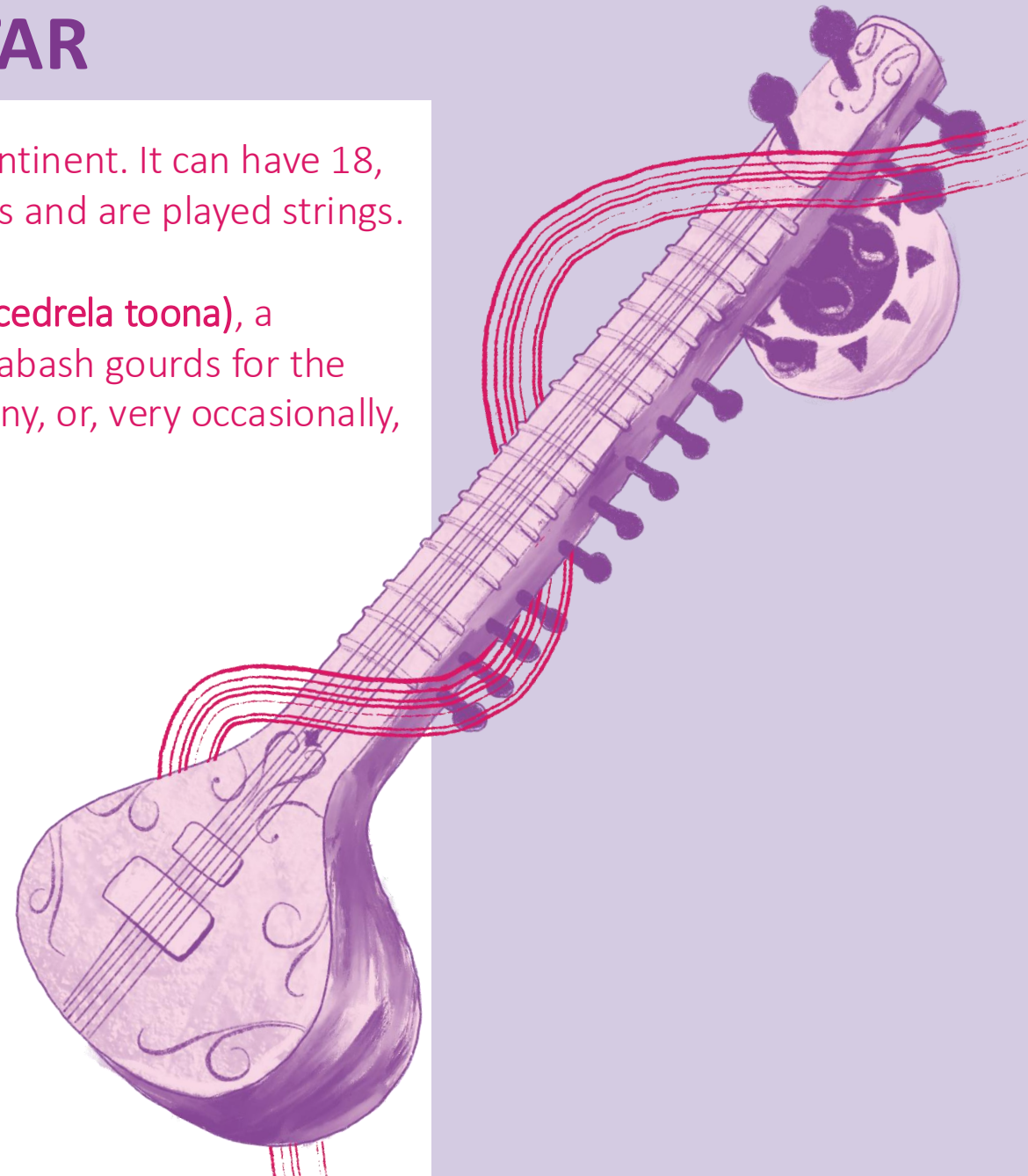


THE SITAR

The sitar is a plucked stringed instrument from the Indian subcontinent. It can have 18, 19, 20, or 21 strings, 6 or 7 of which run over curved, raised frets and are played strings.

Materials used in construction include teak wood or tun wood (**cedrela toona**), a variation of mahogany for the neck and faceplate (**tabli**), and calabash gourds for the chambers. The instrument's bridges are made of deer horn, ebony, or, very occasionally, camel bone. Synthetic material is now standard as well.

Listen here: <https://bit.ly/3VXBfq8>



THE OUD

The oud is a Middle Eastern short-neck lute-type, pear-shaped, fretless stringed instrument.

Modern-day ouds fall into three categories: **Arabian, Turkish, and Persian**, the last also being known as **barbat**.

Listen here: <https://bit.ly/45UpTYC>

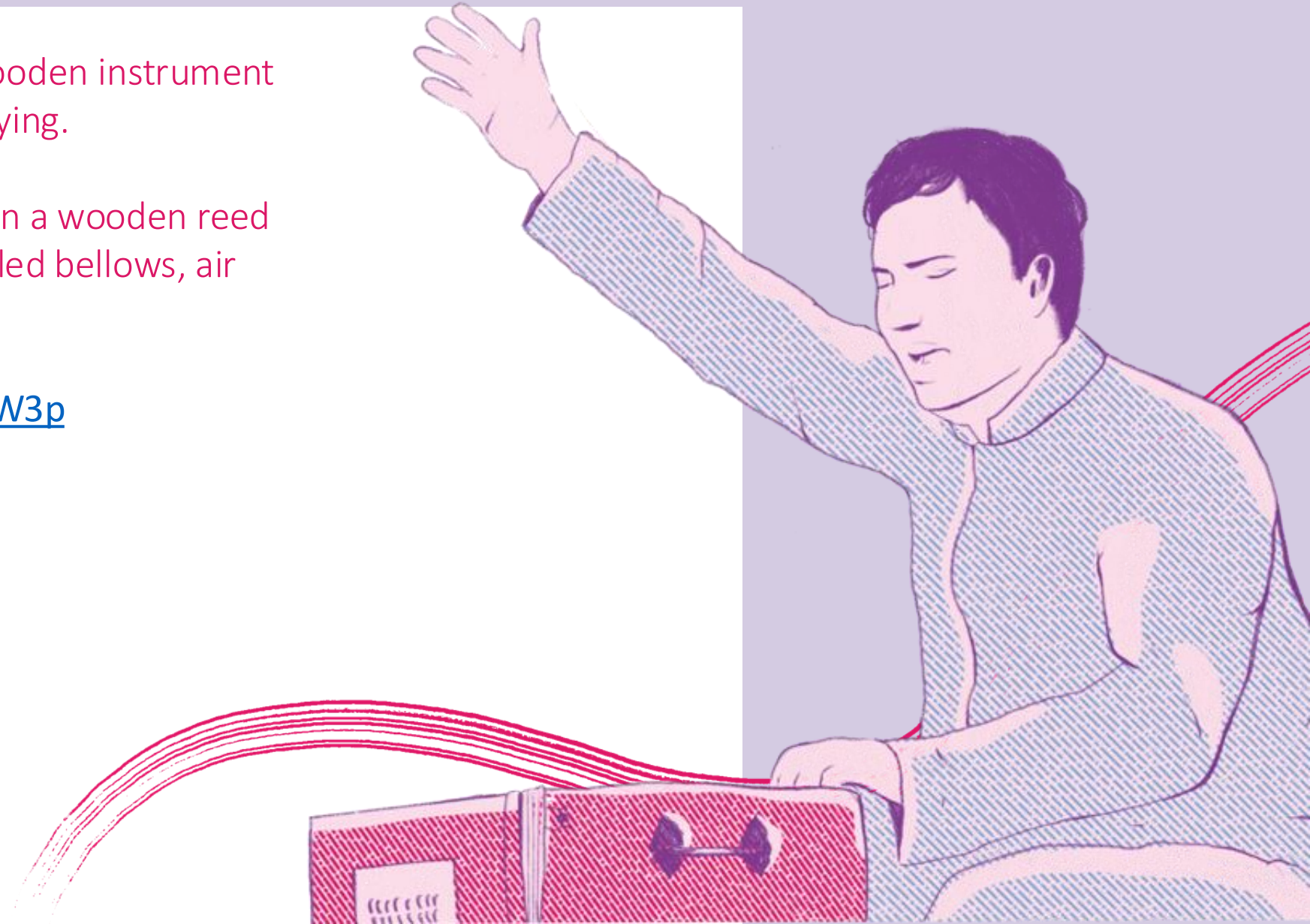


THE QAWWALI HARMONIUM

The qawwali harmonium is a wooden instrument with two metal handles for carrying.

It has banks of brass reeds set on a wooden reed board, a pumping apparatus called bellows, air stops, and a keyboard.

Listen here: <https://bit.ly/3LKRW3p>



INTRODUCTION TO SUFI POETRY

Sufi poetry is delivered through song, music, written compositions, and spoken word across cultures worldwide. The most revered Sufi poets include *Rumi, Hafiz, Farid al-Din Attar, Rahman Baba, Sultan Bahu*, and *Rabia al Basri*. Sufi poetry has been written primarily in Persian and other languages including Punjabi, Sindhi, Arabic, Turkish, and Urdu.

SUFI POETRY

Sufi poetry is usually sung in Sufi music and gatherings, such as ***Samaa', Qawwali, Kafi, Khayal, and Taraana***. Sufi poetry has influenced and been influenced by non-mystical poetry, creating a mystical-secular ambiguity in some literature.

Sufis and non-Sufis appreciate Sufi poetry for its pious feelings, rhythmic delivery, and spiritual insights.



SUFI POETRY

Early Sufi figures set the stage for developing Sufi thought and artistic expression. The Persian poet **Hafiz** (14th century) used poetry to convey the ineffable experiences of divine love and mystical union.

For I have learned
That every heart will get
What it prays for most

Hafiz



SUFI POETRY

The Persian poet **Rumi** (1207–1273), whose work is central to many Sufi traditions, profoundly influenced Sufi music and poetry.

Birdsong brings relief
to my longing
I'm just as ecstatic as they are,
but with nothing to say!
Please universal soul, practice
some song or something through me!

Rumi



Amir Khusro (1253–1325), a notable Sufi musician and poet, is often credited with developing Qawwali.

If there is a paradise on earth,
It is this, it is this, it is this

Amir Khusro

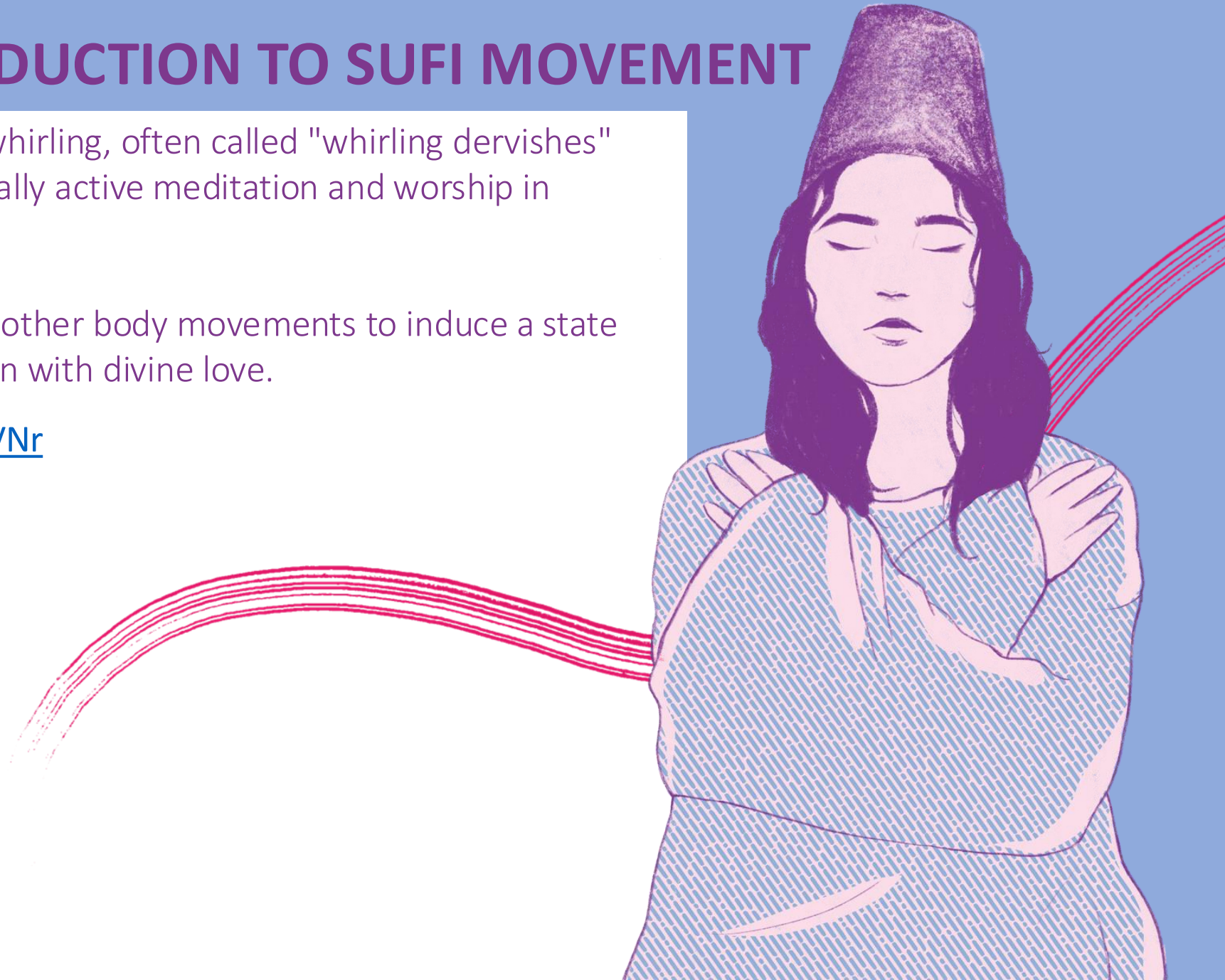


INTRODUCTION TO SUFI MOVEMENT

Sufi movement is known as Sufi whirling, often called "whirling dervishes" or "Sema" and is a form of physically active meditation and worship in Sufism.

It involves rhythmic spinning and other body movements to induce a state of spiritual ecstasy and connection with divine love.

Watch here: <https://bit.ly/4dmaVNr>



KEY ELEMENTS OF SUFI WHIRLING

The most famous Sufi whirling is performed by the Mevlevi order. Dancers, called whirling dervishes, spin in circles to represent the planets moving around the sun.

This symbolises letting go of the self and uniting with the divine.

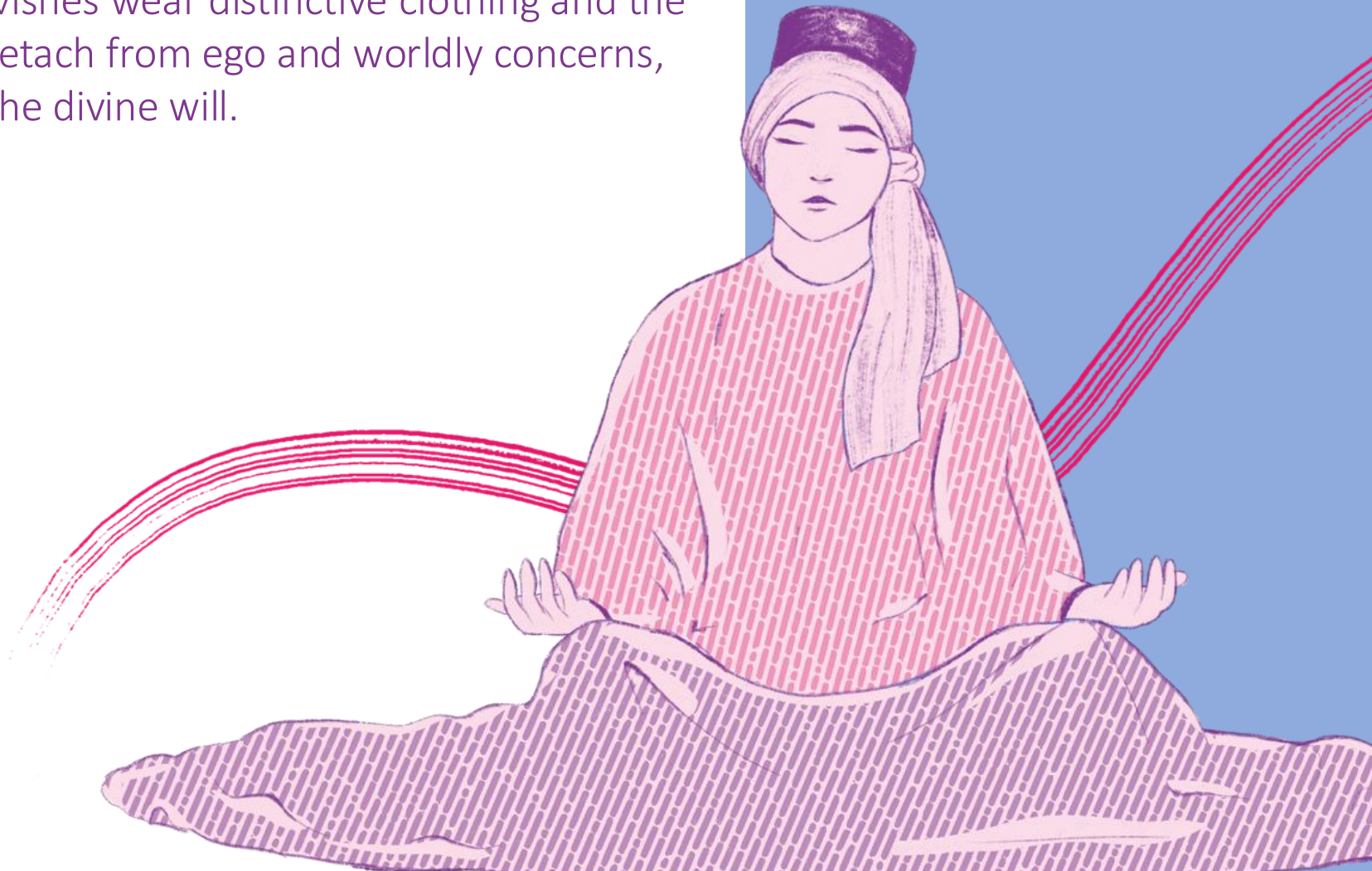
Watch here: <https://bit.ly/3yl9ekz>



SUFI WHIRLING PRACTICE

In traditional Sufi whirling, musicians use instruments like the ney, oud, and percussion. Sacred texts and poetry, notably by Rumi, are chanted during the practice. In the Sema ceremony, dervishes wear distinctive clothing and the physical act of whirling helps them detach from ego and worldly concerns, fostering humility and surrender to the divine will.

Watch here: <https://bit.ly/3yhiA0T>



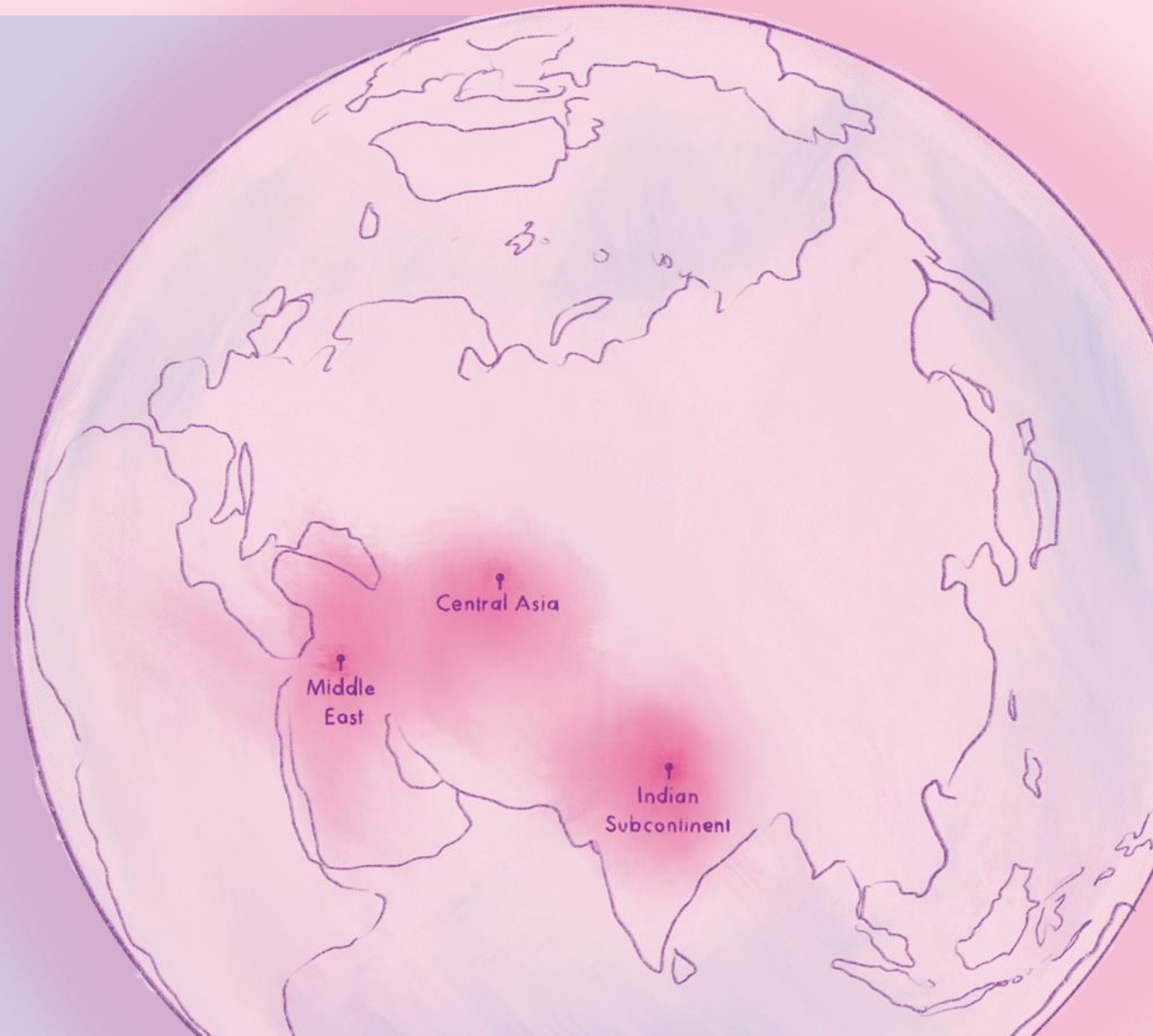
SUFI FESTIVALS WORLDWIDE

Urs Festival

This annual event in Sufi Islam commemorates the death anniversary of the famous Sufi saint **Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer**, India, and is characterised by music, poetry recitals, and communal feasting.

Mawlid Festival

Mawlid celebrates **Prophet Muhammad's birth**, incorporating Sufi music, poetry, and processions. It is celebrated in almost all Islamic countries, and in other countries that have a significant Muslim population, such as Ethiopia, India, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Iraq, Iran, Maldives, Morocco, Jordan, Libya, Russia and Canada.



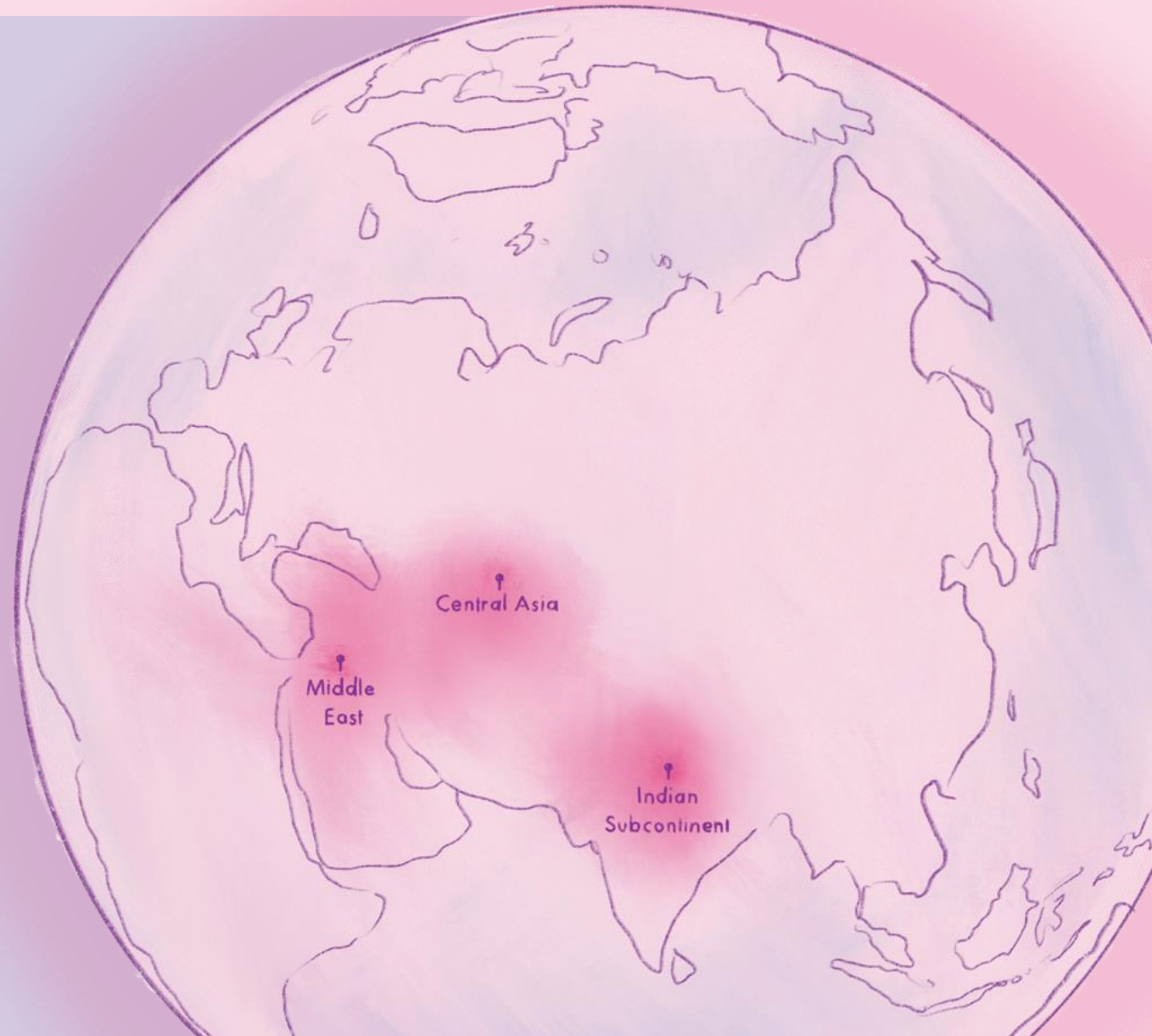
SUFI FESTIVALS WORLDWIDE

Qawwali Festival

Featuring Qawwali music, a form of devotional Sufi music originating from the Indian subcontinent. Prominent events include the annual Qawwali Night at the Data Darbar in Lahore, Pakistan.

Sufi Whirling Festival

Known as “Sema” ceremonies, they are particularly associated with the Mevlevi order in Turkey. Celebrated with whirling dervishes, music, and poetry readings, particularly in Konya during the Rumi Festival



QUESTIONS

By discussing these questions, students can gain a better understanding of the rich and diverse practices of Sufism and develop an appreciation for the profound spiritual and cultural significance of Sufi music, poetry, and whirling through peer discussions.

- ❖ *What are the origins of Sufi music, and how is it connected to the broader Sufi tradition?*
- ❖ *How does Sufi poetry contribute to the spiritual experience of the practitioner?*
- ❖ *What role does the practice of whirling play in Sufism, and how is it performed?*
- ❖ *How do different cultures within the Sufi tradition express their spirituality through music and poetry?*
- ❖ *What common themes are found in Sufi poetry, and how do they reflect Sufi beliefs?*

ANSWERS

❖ **What are the origins of Sufi music, and how is it connected to the broader Sufi tradition?**

Sufi music originates from the mystical Islamic tradition known as Sufism. This tradition focuses on seeking a personal, direct experience of divine love. The music is intended to uplift the spirit and help the listener feel closer to the divine. Sufi music is closely tied to the spiritual practices of Sufi orders (Tariqas) and often involves setting spiritual poetry to music to create a sense of spiritual ecstasy and contemplation.

❖ **How does Sufi poetry contribute to the spiritual experience of the practitioner?**

Sufi poetry uses symbolic language to express the desire for the divine and the happiness of being connected to divinity. Poets like Rumi and Hafiz share spiritual truths and encourage deeper connections with the divine through their poems. The poetry helps people meditate and reflect, allowing them to understand and embody spiritual teachings.

❖ **What role does the practice of whirling play in Sufism, and how is it performed?**

Whirling, also known as the Sema or Sama, is a form of physical meditation practised by the Mevlevi order of Sufis. It consists of spinning in repetitive circles, symbolizing the soul's journey towards divine love. The spinning is accompanied by Sufi music and chanting, creating a trance-like state that helps with spiritual union with the divine.

ANSWERS

❖ **How do different cultures within the Sufi tradition express their spirituality through music and poetry?**

Different cultures have their own variations of Sufi music and poetry, which reflect local traditions and influences. But the main purpose of Sufi practices across different cultures is to help people connect with the divine.

❖ **What common themes are found in Sufi poetry, and how do they reflect Sufi beliefs?**

“Sufi poetry often talks about wanting divine love, feeling sad when not close to the divine, feeling happy when united with the divine, knowing that the physical world doesn’t last, and believing that the soul is everlasting. These ideas show what Sufis think about the soul getting closer to the divine and how important it is to search for spiritual understanding beyond what we can touch.

Sufi poetry shares the deep personal experiences of the mystic and encourages others to start their own spiritual journey.”

THE SUFI DICTIONARY

We have identified key words connected to Sufi history, music, poetry, and movement. Below is a guide to their interpretations used throughout the resource pack:

- ❖ **Devotion:** Loyalty and love or care for someone or something.
- ❖ **Dikhr:** Remembrance. Dhikr is a kind of worship to God.
- ❖ **Fanā fi 'l-Haqq:** Reality.
- ❖ **Ghazal:** A form of a love poem or ode.
- ❖ **Humility:** The feeling or attitude that you have no special importance that makes you better than others; lack of pride.
- ❖ **Kafi:** Rhyme, a classical form of Sufi music.
- ❖ **Khayal:** Imagination or thought.
- ❖ **Maqāmāt:** Different stages in Sufism.
- ❖ **Mystic:** Characterised by secretive, spiritual, or symbolic.
- ❖ **Purity:** Cleanness.
- ❖ **Saint:** "Holy one", someone set apart for God's special purposes.
- ❖ **Sālik:** One who follows the spiritual path.
- ❖ **Sama:** Gathering to listen to religious poetry that's often sung, accompanied by dancing.
- ❖ **Scholar:** A specialist in a particular branch of study.
- ❖ **Spirituality:** Spirituality involves the recognition of a feeling or sense or belief that there is something greater than yourself.
- ❖ **Subcontinent:** A large area of land that is part of one of the world's major continuous land areas.
- ❖ **Taraana:** A Persian word meaning song.
- ❖ **Tarīqat:** Path.
- ❖ **The Divine:** Someone who believes in the existence of a God.

