The Mystic Dancers of Punjab

By Rizwan Akhtar

Rolled in orange and green chadars
dervishes dance to the metallic balls
clanging around ankles; iron-wristed,
knee-jerking, necks clogged with beads
they stamp the earth with their heels
and the earth’s heart crack

they whirl to become the circumference
of time measured in braided ringlets
touching their patched faces; children clap
to Dhamal*, and copy their limbed world;
the saintly melody turns into a solemn
crescendo as they surround their murshid,*
love becomes a cradle in which they sleep
with smoke-tinged fragrance of agarbattis*
the whole world drowns for the one Man

the kafis and songs shape
the mud-smelling Punjabi poetry.

*Sufi trance dance
* Arabic word for ‘guide’ or teacher
* a kind of incense