

## 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  
tongs-clasped chanting verses  
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