

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