

"Fakirs"

Participating Artists: Meng Ni Beh 马明妮, Felix Beyreuther, Bing Bing 兵冰, Cai Duobao 蔡多宝, Thomas Charvériat, Kong Mosha 孔墨沙, Kerry Ann Lee, Li Lingxi 李翎溪, Liu Dao 六岛, Nick Hersey, Piers Secunda 皮二丝, Rose Tang 罗丝唐, Tom Lee Pettersen, Wang Dongma 王东马, Wu Yandan 吴艳丹, Zane Melleupe, Zhang Deli 张德丽

Curator: Thomas Charvériat, Zane Melleupe
Writer: Rikimi Madhukaillya
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Venue: island6 Arts Center, 50 Moganshan Rd, bldg #6, 2F, Shanghai 200060, P.R.C.

"Fakirs" by Rikimi Madhukaillya

*Repeating the name of the Beloved
I have become the Beloved myself.
Whom shall I call the Beloved now?*

- Bulleh Shah (1680 - 1758)

A *Fakir* is not mere a word but a psychological, emotional and a spiritual power. A *Fakir* is not only indifferent to vicissitudes of material life; he is a man of strong will, who has a moral stake in the social and political life of the people around him, motivated by the love for the ideal of moral and spiritual regeneration of mankind. In the attainment of this ideal, he is ready to sacrifice everything. The word has derived from the Persian word *Faqr* which means poverty, but also an attitude of detachment towards the world, a complete negation of the self, a voyage from the outward to the inward, from the exoteric to the esoteric.

A *Fakir* is a prefix by the common mass for their favourite Sufi¹ saints. A *Fakir* discards all worldly pleasure and pains. His sole aim becomes only to get united with the one God through the path of humanity. A *Fakir* dedicates his devotion in the serving and soothing the poor and the suffering. Fearlessness is what a *Fakir* reaches with his spiritual prowess whereas the kings and the rulers always seemed to have fear towards the *Fakirs*. Powered with strong will power, the spirituality of the *Fakirs* reach a stage where they shine with an aura, a kind of a positive energy. The positive energy has been used in terms of healing people from physical, mental and spiritual suffering by different *Fakirs* for ages. Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti², Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia³ etc are some of the names which are quite popular amongst the believers and non-believers equally. *Fakir*, *Aulia*⁴, *Pir*⁵, *Qalandar*⁶ are all part of the larger Sufism philosophy of surrendering to the greatest power. And they believe in the inner strength and consider the strength itself as the God.

Fakirs always stand against any kind of ritualistic practices or religious rules-regulations and systems. Rather they stand for a very unique process of worshipping god, to get unified with the one god. The *Fakir* is considered no less than the ruler in terms of respect, reputation and being loved by the common mass. This can be proved by looking into the pages of history; where one finds the name of the kings and the *Fakirs* only. The word *Fakir* has a great space in the human psychology. Some of the terrorist

¹ Sufism is the inner, mystical dimension of Islam. A practitioner of this tradition is generally known as a *ṣūfī* (صُوفِيّ), though some adherents of the tradition reserve this term only for those practitioners who have attained the goals of the Sufi tradition.

² Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti is also popularly known as Khwaja Sahib and Khwaja Gharib Nawaz. He did it all through his own great moral power, glorious and appealing character, with love and dedication to mankind, without any worldly resources of wealth, power, force or support.

Khwaja Sahib was a scholar of great repute. He interpreted the true Islamic message of love for mankind and through that, love for the Almighty Creator. He preached the Qur'anic philosophy of unity of religion and worked out its potentialities for the whole of humanity. He was the greatest mystic of his time. He laid the foundation of the liberal Chishtia order of Sufis in India, and inspired millions of souls to be his followers, and thus served the masses of the Indian sub-continent.

³ Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia, affectionately known as Mehboob-i Elahi or "Beloved of God. Nizamuddin taught that three essential elements were necessary for the Sufi dervish: Love, Wisdom, and Gnosis.

⁴ Aulia has been described as lords, gods, protectors, supporter, helper etc.

⁵ Pir literally "old [person]" is a title for a Sufi master. They are also referred to as a Shaikh, which is Arabic for Old Man. The title is often translated into English as "saint". In Sufism Pir's role is to guide and instruct his disciples on the Sufi path. This is often done by general lessons (called *Suhbas*) and individual guidance. Other words that refer to a Pir include, *Murshid* (meaning "guide" or "teacher"), *Sheikh* and *Sarkar* (Persian/Hindi/Urdu word meaning Master, Lord).

⁶ Qalandar in Persian is referred to a title given to Sufi mystics, especially in South Asia. Some famous Sufis called Qalandar include Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalander and Bu Ali Shah Qalandar. The Qalandariyah were a sect of roaming Sufi dervishes.

groups based in certain Islamic countries are misusing this psychology of the innocent minds of the common mass. The top leaders are made popular in the region by the terrorist group as *Fakirs*, which bring a deep faith and loyalty in the minds of the local people. When army or police searches for these leaders, people blinded by the psychology of *Fakir* get ready to give their lives to save their beloved *Fakirs* not knowing the reality.

Faqr, the word also sometimes used as a synonym for being proud. Proud in the case is not related to material or superficial arrogance but the state of proudly being poor with material wealth and rich with the closeness to the almighty is what *Faqr* represents. A *Fakir* selflessly thinking and dedicated to the service of the humankind is not like social service or a part time charity but a twenty four hour duty. *Bauls* of rural Bengal and *Natha Siddhas* of Bihar region in India and its subcontinents are similar practices. All these practices involve a great deal of performance. Be it *Fakir*, *Baul* or *Natha Siddha*; their mode of unifying with the almighty also involve singing. High pitched singing helps the devotee (both the singer and the listener) to reach a certain stage of trance, for moments the god and the devotee becomes one and inseparable. The body reacts against gravity and psychologically elevates it for a divine ecstasy. For *Fakirs*, the influences of singing had come from the Middle Eastern tradition of nasal singing.

These spiritually inclined *Fakirs* are not religion biased in any sense rather they can be compared what we called as 'Secular' in modern terminology. Their urge to get unified with a formless, supreme and one power has taken different names and shapes in different parts of the world. The art of loving someone selflessly with complete devotion and dedication has taken the name of *Nirguna Bhakti*⁷ in India.

One who listens to their heart, doesn't care about rules-regulations or religious obstacles of Do's or Don'ts. All they learn and believe in their practical experiences. As Amir Khusru once wrote.

*Tum kehte Kagad ki lekhi
Mei Kehta aankhon ki dekhi*

*You speak what you read,
and I speak what I have practically experienced*

About island6

Founded in 2006, **island6 Arts Center** is an artist-founded, artist-run organization based in Shanghai.

island6 Arts Center operates on a non-profit basis and is governed by voluntary staff.

island6 is dedicated to the support of emerging artists and to the constant initiation of site-specific projects. **island6's** mission is to provide a forum for contemporary artists whose works explore social, aesthetic, and philosophical issues. Since April 2006, **island6 Arts Center** has shown 198 artists from 21 different countries, sponsored 110 resident artists, organized 37 exhibitions and helped in the creation of 1900 art projects. In 2007 **island6 Arts Center**, under the artistic direction of Thomas Charvériat & Zane Mellepe, founded *Liu Dao*, a collective of emerging Chinese and international artists. *Liu Dao* explores the cultural potential in the convergence of art, technology and science, and their discoveries are applied to the development of the artist community.

⁷ *Nirgun Bhakti* is the devotion towards a formless, all-encompassing God. The word 'nirgun' means 'devoid of qualities,' referring to the lack of physical attributes in God. It is one of the two forms of devotion prevalent in Hinduism, the other one being *Saguna Bhakti* which sees God in a physical form. These two forms of worship are given equal prominence in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The system of *Nirgun Bhakti* believes in the worship of an unseen God, who cannot be confined in the realms of a physical form. This form of worship strongly detests the belief that God abides in the heaven, it rather sees God as an inner guiding force residing inside the body of a devotee. The followers of this form of worship do not believe in the concept of reincarnation. Neither do they believe in the caste system. A prominent preacher of *Nirgun Bhakti* was Saint Kabir, one of the pioneers of the *Bhakti* movement.