

Coke Studio Sufi Singing and the New Age Spirituality: A Study via the Theory of False Signs and the Islamic Ruling on Music

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research seeks to explore Coke Studio (CS) Sufi singing (Pakistan) as a site whereby signs lie in that it consumes fake as spiritual. CS singers admix (semi)romantic and worldly lyrics, tend to accommodate and publicize various singing styles and genres, pivot more on physical signifiers such as visual locale and use female beauty as fetish in their Sufi performance. In all their videos, what stands out as the most visible and eye-catching sign, is the sacred Cola. The study examines how CS singers strategize their singing to dupe viewers into believing a didactic truth (Sufi poetry) within a lie. Selection of 10 songs is made out of a total of 32, rendered by CS singers on various Pakistani TV channels within a span of 9 seasons and 9 years. Drawing on Eco's theory of false signs, a method is devised to analyze CS Sufi singing performance as a representational sign- one type of signs as suggested by Dyer. The study demonstrates that CS singers simulate Sufi music, truncate it into a plaything or mere articulation, use it as a cover for profiteering drives and thereby enact theatricality. Via the use of New Age discourses such as spirituality, genre fusion and plurality of style and text, singers portray Sufi music as something that may be secularized, liberalized and adapted for any material end, which is incongruent to what Sufis say. The study has identified 4 main aspects which turn CS Sufi singing into a theatrical demonstration. It encourages (1) passive consumption of spiritual signs than making viewers reflect over the esoteric value of Sufi lyrics (2) represents neo-spirituality and disseminates the viewpoint that every subjective and idiosyncratic interpretation of the esoteric within the ambit of Sufi music is justified and (3) promotes new kind of entertainment culture coming via the Open Happiness recipe as conceived by Coca Cola executives long way back. Lastly, the study examines the validity of music itself via the Quranic lens and attempts to determine whether this turns CS Sufi singing into even a more fake sign.

Key Words: *Sufi music, physical signifiers, sacred Cola, simulation, neo-spirituality, theatrical, Islamic mysticism.*

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Introduction

New Age refers to a series of fuzzy forms of popular spiritual beliefs or a mélange of contemporary religious phenomena that emerged since the late 1970s. The term is though hard to define but may be understood as a kind of bag carrying mixed ingredients one is free to choose from across cultures, religions or mystical traditions such as Hinduism, Taoism, Sufism, **Gnosticism** and Western Occultism. Being a composite of spiritualities, New Age religion detaches itself from the existing religions and insists on fine tuning religious symbols according to the specific needs of individuals. It draws on aspects which are not too closely associated to religions and their theologies. The purpose is to give a religious cover over what is essentially secular or said reversely, to consume fake as spiritual. New Age is thus the manifestation par excellence of individualism, materialism and secularization of religion whereby religion becomes just a matter of individual choice.

Spirituality, for New Agers, is any notion which conveniently fits within their frame of understanding: any vague, abstract idea, any consciousness related to healing and the like, a fancy material object or a fetish to be treated with utmost adoration, care and even religion-like veneration. Coca Cola, for instance, is possessed with this power so as people are driven to have this drink with utmost desire rather “religious devotion.”⁽¹⁾ And the more the desire, the more it is fetishized by media and celebrity pop culture. Coca Cola as the “sacred fetish (is) within arm’s reach of desire,” and “has been the fetish of a global religion, as a sacred sign,” (p. 744) states Pendergrast.⁽²⁾ It is, therefore, a representative sign of the new taste, modernity and power to transfuse elements coming via religion, culture and spiritual values belonging to various cultures. This drive by Coca Cola as well as by other agencies seems to be to create a kind of Hollywood chic for the upcoming spirituality(s) industry.

New Age spirituality, as it welcomes alternative insights from all peoples & cultures in contrast to religion which does not, majority of people tend to fancy it while carefully distancing from religion. Moreover, it offers plenty of room for doubt and allows individuals to find their own ways of discerning truth, what to believe in or what to leave out and thereby become the final arbiter of truth and falsity. By granting ascendancy to an individual self to define anything as spiritual and set limits even on the very meaning of the divine, neo-spirituality attempts to secularize religion, sets the stage for fakery and simulation to dominate.

(1) David Chidester, “The Church of Baseball, the Fetish of Coca Cola ...,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (1996): 744, 750.

(2) Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca Cola* (Basic Books, 2000).

The new markets or agencies capitalize upon these notions and Coke Studio, by using Sufi music as a ploy to dupe viewers into believing a didactic truth (Sufi poetry) within a lie, does the same in that it simulates Sufi music and uses it as a cover to consume fake as spiritual. In all their videos, what stands out as the most visible and eye-catching sign, is the sacred Cola.

The study, via the semiotic inquiry, examines CS Sufi singing as a site whereby signs are false, simulated and used as a plaything. Selection of 10 songs is made out of a total of 32, rendered by CS singers on various Pakistani TV channels within a span of 9 seasons and 9 years. Drawing on Eco's theory of false signs, a method is devised to analyze CS Sufi singing performance as a representational sign- one type of signs as suggested by Dyer. It is inquired how and why singers admix (semi)romantic and worldly lyrics in their Sufi performance pivoting more on physical signifiers such as visual locale or heavy instrumentation. This is not simply to uncover how singers make a ludic play of Sufi text or truncate the text in various ways and rather oversimplify the notion of Sufi singing. What makes their singing problematic is that in doing so, the singers simulate the meaning as well as attempt to trivialize the genre, philosophy and pedagogy underpinning the Sufi music, and thereby disseminate the idea that every subjective or idiosyncratic interpretation of the esoteric within the ambit of Sufi music is to be considered adequate.

The question what Sufi music is in reality or the ambiance on which it is based as per the views of the Islamic mystic scholars, logically comes up here. The studies reviewed below answer this question and also focus on the New Age spirituality and modern tendencies to rebrand Sufi/Islamic music in various ways. Prior to it, however, a brief review of the term 'Sufi music' and 'Music controversy' is given.

Sufi Music-A Problematic Term

Concerning the word "music," two terms "mausiqi" and "ghina" with similar connotations are used as various scholars dig out. Rouget, for instance, writes that the "word *mausiqi* denoted the rules or the art of music but not music itself as a product of that art." In Islamic Peripatetic philosophy, *mausiqi* denotes strictly the theory of music which is recognized to be of Greek origin; defined as the science of the composition of melodies, it is contrasted to "ghina" which means song or musical practice⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance: A theory of the Relations between Music and Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 226-57.

Değirmenci ⁽¹⁾ elucidates the term “Sufi music” which, he says, is problematic. “The practices constituting the term *music* in Western literature are called *Sama* in Islamic literature and are associated with worship practices.” In his view, Sufi music falls in the category of “non-music” whereas *ghina* refers to “secular art music, performance and music-making that mainly takes place in the urban sphere.” Many literary works also differentiate cantus (*ghina*) from Sufi music (*sema*) which is conceived as “non-music.” Moreover, *ghina* was typically banished by most authors as Shiloah ⁽²⁾ points out. Thus “music or *Sama* connote the use of music in worship practices rather than music itself ... *Sama* involves listening or hearing God’s word, as opposed to music with a secular focus”⁽³⁾.

Shiloah, ⁽⁴⁾ a renowned scholar of Arabic and Jewish, also explicates the term “ghina” as well as “lhn” another word with similar meaning, in his famous book. He explains that *ghina* (art song & music) is derived from “gny” which signifies “to sing and also to prolong the voice in psalmody and chant, to enrich or to romance. The root *Ihn* derived from *lahn* (melody, rhythm and mode), also means “to chant in a manner pleasant to listener’s ear.”

Since the terms “mausiqi” and “ghina” both connote art song and music, Rouget⁽⁵⁾ points out referring to ⁽⁶⁾Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Al-Hassan al-Tusi that how both of them rarely use the word “music” in their writings. Al-Tusi, for instance, uses the term only once whereas Ghazali seems to deliberately avoid using the word *mausiqi* ⁽⁷⁾. Rouget further points out that Ghazali was well familiar with the word but being an advocate of *Sama*, perhaps he avoided to use the term “music” with the purpose not to mix up any music or art song with spiritual/religious singing (*Sama*.)” For Ghazali, it was essential to find moral justification for *Sama* and the distinction between two kinds of music can be drawn further by the terms “light” music and “serious” music. Only the latter, he said, is lawful. It would be aberration to confuse the two kinds or cover both by using the same term, as we see in the contemporary Sufi music such as CS singing.

⁽¹⁾ Koray Değirmenci, *Creating Global Music in Turkey* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013), 83-84.

⁽²⁾ Amnon Shiloah, “Music and Religion in Islam” *Acta Musicologica* 69, no. 2 (1997):143-4.

⁽³⁾ Ibid, 2013

⁽⁴⁾ Amnon Shiloah, *Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-cultural Study* (Wayne State University Press, 1995), 22.

⁽⁵⁾ Ibid, 1985

⁽⁶⁾ *Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, ... Abu Ali al-Hassan al-Tusi* (1018–1092),

⁽⁷⁾ Leonard Lewisohn, “The sacred music of Islam: Sama' in the Persian Sufi tradition” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 6, (1997):1-33.

Lewisohn⁽¹⁾ elucidates the kind of singing which is lawful: (1) cantillation of the Quran (2) sung poetry, on the condition that its sentiments and thoughts are sufficiently elevated, (3) use of instruments that were never associated with blameworthy musical practices- the aspect to which many renowned Sufi scholars do not agree. There is yet another restriction, states Lewisohn, “It is permissible to hear (*Sama*) only one is oneself in a certain state of inner purity. This restriction, i.e. of the listener’s disposition or intention is precisely what is conveyed by the word *Sama*. This conceptional patterning of reality to which it corresponds is comparable to no other and certainly not to that of the word “music.”

As far as Sufi music is concerned, its legality has been a matter of controversy, two groups vary in their opinions and defend their case by citing from Quran and Hadith. The section below briefly deals with this controversy.

Music Controversy

The question whether there is any form of spiritual music or whether music is permissible even if used for religious purposes as used in Sufi ritual orders, has been a topic of debate in the Islamic literature as states Değirmenci⁽²⁾. The topic is wide but it is briefly covered below.

As Gribetz⁽³⁾ provides in his article, we find two groups, for and against the music debate. The prominent among the opponents include: (1) Al-Jawazi and Ibn Taymiya; and (2) Ahmad al-Ghazali and Abu Nasr al-Sarraj are the proponents. Both groups seem to hold strong opinions proving music to be a (un)lawful activity in the light of Quran and Hadith. However, Hujwiri as well as al-Sarraj choose to abstain from *Sama*, taking the middle path.

Nicholson⁽⁴⁾ mentions that Hujwiri fell neither in opposition nor favor of music. He seemed to believe that *music is neither good nor bad, and must be judged, in effect, by its results*. Qushayri⁽⁵⁾ gives the same explanation with reference to Ibn Juray. Al-Shafi⁽⁶⁾ also did not fully approve of music although he did not prohibit it, taking up a careful middle path. He cites a number of foundational references to establish the point

⁽¹⁾ Ibid, 1997.

⁽²⁾ Koray Değirmenci, *Creating Global Music in Turkey* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013), 83-84.

⁽³⁾ Arthur Gribetz, “The samā’ controversy: Sufi vs. Legalist”. *Studia Islamica* 74, (1991): 43-62.

⁽⁴⁾ Renold, A. Nicholson, *The Kashf al-Mahjub (The Revelation of the Veiled)* (Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014), p. 86

⁽⁵⁾ Abu’l Qasim al-Qushayri, *Al-Qushayri’s epistle on Sufism* (A. D. Knysh, Trans.) (Labanon, 2007).

⁽⁶⁾ Ibid, 2014

that many adopted the middle path rather disapproved of it. It seems that the ancient Sufi scholars approached the subject very carefully and seemed to be of the view that in case such music assembly (*Sama*) is conducted, attention should be paid on the end result or the learning outcome.

Interestingly scholars, both for and against, utilize sources from Quran and some representative types of traditions that are either connected to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) or to his Companions.

The opponents, for instance, cite verses from Surah Ash-Shuaraa⁽¹⁾, “*the poets-the perverse follow them; have you not seen how they wander in every valley.*” In these verses, music is being equated with poetry and like poetry which in most of the cases has no purpose, music is largely a form of amusement and sport and so not a desirable practice. Another reference is cited from al-Furqan⁽²⁾, “*And [they are] those who do not testify to falsehood [zooraa], and when they pass near ill speech, they pass by with dignity.*” Al-Jawzi⁽³⁾ cites Quranic verses which allegedly establish disapproval of singing such as: “*And there is among the men such a one also, “who buys alluring tales so that he may lead the people astray from Allah's Way, without any knowledge”; “wasting your (precious) lifetime in pastime and amusements (singing, etc.)” (wa-antum samidun, i.e. amuse yourselves); “and excite any of them whom you can with your voice.*” The word “zooraa” in Al-Furqan is equated with *ghina* (music) and “Samidun” in An-Najm with singing and music as is cited in Gribetz⁽⁴⁾.

Al-Ghazzili⁽⁵⁾, on the other hand, gives a different interpretation to build his case in favor of *Sama*/Sufi music. A verse often cited in defense of music from Surah Al-Zumr⁽⁶⁾ reads as, “*So give good tidings to My servants who listen to the Word (al qawl) and follow the fairest of it.*” The word “al-qawl” is thought by some to refer to *ghina*/music. Also, a verse⁽⁷⁾ from Al-Anam which states, “*He has distinguished for you that which He has forbidden you.*” And hence the legality of music is justified as is cited in Gribetz⁽⁸⁾.

Both groups cite references from traditions but often draw opposite conclusions out of the same source. A tradition related by al-Bukhari and Muslim about Abu Bakr coming into Ayisha and finding two girls singing while the Holy Prophet was resting. When Abu Bakr tried to rebuke the

⁽¹⁾ Surah Ash-Shuaraa, Verses, 224-25

⁽²⁾ Al-Furqan, Verse, 72

⁽³⁾ Ibid, 1991

⁽⁴⁾ Ibid, 1991

⁽⁵⁾ Ahmad al-Ghazzili, [Persian mystic, writer, and eloquent preacher (1061–1123)].

⁽⁶⁾ Surah Al-Zumr, Verse 18

⁽⁷⁾ Surah Al-Anam, Verse 26

⁽⁸⁾ Arthur Gribetz, “The samā' controversy: Sufi vs. Legalist”. *Studia Islamica* 74, (1991): 43-62.

girls, Muhammad (PBUH) “intervenes and permits them to continue, since it is a holiday,” as cited in Gribetz. Al-Ghazzali and the group use this story as proof that singing is permissible.

In contrast, Ibn Taymiya, Ibn al-Jawzi, and Ibn al-Hajj, draw different conclusions from the same tradition. Ibn Taymiya claims that listening to music was clearly neither a practice of the Prophet nor of his Companions. He cites Abu Bakr who called music “the commotion of the devil.” The second is ascribed to Ibn Mas’ud as, “Singing causes hypocrisy to grow in the heart.”

What one can gather from the above discussion is that listening to Quranic recitation in a gathering as used to be the case with earliest Sufis is beyond any debate and the legitimacy issue arises when it is poetic/any other text which speaks of the Divine in terms of secular metaphors.

In today’s scenario, whereby we see the new tendency to rebrand or secularize Sufi poetry by many singers under the banner of the New Age spirituality.

Sufi Music & New Age Spirituality

Sufi music is underpinned with the notion of the sacred and the word “sacred,” as Nasr ⁽¹⁾ argues, is rooted in the sacred science whereby one is able to perceive and understand God as Reality. Sufi music, therefore, has pedagogical targets for those who seek to experience it in that way. Qawwali--a distinctly South Asian variety of Sufi music can be called a “ritualized performance of ecstatic Sufi poetry accompanied by music ⁽²⁾.” It is a unique genre of religious expression nurtured by the Chishti order in particular since 12th century in the Indian Subcontinent. To Qureshi, the “authentic spiritual song”-Qawwali- provides a listening (*Sama*) experience to the devotees and, therefore, it enacts as a symbolic sign for them to transcend their conscious striving and be transported to a state of ecstasy-- a mystical station of union with God. ⁽³⁾

What makes the Sufi music ritual sacred is due to what they call Sufi ambience, i.e. the observance of three rules, i.e., place, time and company. The ambience of Chishti assemblies is regulated by their spiritual teachers while disciples sit together and contemplate over what the singers perform out of *kalam* (poetic verses) usually accompanied by hand-clapping, *tabla* (drums), and harmonium. Chishtis believe that *kalam*

⁽¹⁾ Nasr, S. H. (2001). *The need for a sacred science*. Lahore: Sohail academy.

⁽²⁾ Rozehnal, R. (October 2007). A ‘proving ground’ for spiritual mastery: The Chishti Sabiri musical assembly. *The Muslim World*, 97, 657-677.

⁽³⁾ Regula Qureshi, (1986). *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, context and meaning meaning in Qawwali* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 10.

is inherently powerful. They link the sequence of poetic verses with stages of the Sufi path known as *suluk*.⁽¹⁾ In the contemporary scene, “Qawwals are often ignorant of these matters,” observes Rozehnal.⁽²⁾ They are perhaps the “new breed of professional performers of Sufi music and Qawwali,” who use Sufi music for audience “who neither know the difference between genres nor care,” as state Bhattacharjee and Alam.⁽³⁾

A senior Chishti Sabiri disciple offers a critique of popular Qawwali: “Qawwali [filmi] is not *Sama*. With these Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan types . . . there is always lots of talk about wine, and the [drum] beats go up [in intensity].” Most of the pop singers are not trained for ritual etiquettes and mystical intricacies of the Sufi verses. The reason is that modern art is free of these essential elements and formal discipline as it might stifle the artist’s “creative genius,” says Nasr. He further elaborates this shift of focus concerning art which, in his view, is a random collection of diverse ideas with no ground in any specific culture or religion. Underpinning this view is the modern belief in an individual’s expression that is free of any restraint or limit. To him, the nature of this art is that people go to the “junkyard and pick up a few pieces . . . Well, this is art.” The New Age modernization has relegated the traditional sacred music to the margins of society, to museums and to concert halls. Further damage is done via recorded and electronically amplified sounds resulting in a “musical idiom that conveys to its listeners functionally composite and portable experience of entertainment,” as states Babb⁽⁴⁾. The new forms of

⁽¹⁾ Newell, 2007, pp. 668-69

⁽²⁾ Ibid, 2007

⁽³⁾ Anuradha Bhattacharjee and Shadab Alam, “The Origin and Journey of Qawwali: From Sacred Ritual to Entertainment,” *Journal of Creative Communications* 7, no. 3 (2012): 221.

(1) Regula Qureshi, (1986). *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, context and meaning in Qawwali* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 10.

(2) D. G. Mattichak Jr. “Spirituality- The New Religion for the New Age,” (2011) 2. Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/document/149120549/Spirituality-The-New-Religion-for-the-New-Age>

(3) Amira El-Zein, “Spiritual consumption in the United States: The Rumi phenomenon,” [Published online]. *Journal of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 11, no. 1 (2010, July 14): 71-85.

(4) Yaprak Melike uyar and S. Sehvar Besiroglu, (fall 2012). “Recent representations of the music of the Mevlevi order of Sufism,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies* 6, no. 2 (2012), 146.

(5) Nirupama Kotru, “Bollywood’s been dishing out faux ‘sufiyana’ songs to us. Here’s what’s wrong,” (2017, April 02). Retrieved from

spirituality thereby offer only, “Spiritually empty amusements,” endorses Mattichak. ⁽²⁾

The tendency is to rebrand Sufi poetry as well as music for fun and commodification purposes. In USA, for instance, Jalal al-Din Rumi’s great poetic works are being taken out of the Islamic Sufi tradition and placed into an obscure sort of spiritual movement now termed as “New Sufism,” notes El-Zein. ⁽³⁾ Similarly, Whirling Dervishes of Turkey feature on many CD covers of so-called “Sufi” music recordings from Turkey. The title “Mevlevi” used on these albums has no connection with Mevlevi music, state Uyar and Beşiroğlu. ⁽⁴⁾ Similar is the case with Sufi music in Pakistan and its modern adaptations such as the *Filmi Qawwali* or *Techno Qawwali* or *Sufi Rock* and the tendency is most visibly seen from the last quarter of 20th century onwards. As Kotru points out in the context of Hindi and Pakistani Sufi songs and Qawwalis that anything with a refrain of “Maula” or “Ali” is sold to the audiences as Sufi music. ⁽⁵⁾ Moreover, fusion of Qawwali with secular genres such as film is made by producers to bring in “authenticity and quality” to their products, state Bhattacharjee and Alam. ⁽⁶⁾ Be it Pakistani, Turkish or any other context, the agencies simply lift music out of its traditional context and customize it for new markets- an attempt that seems fit in the more flexible slot of the New Age religiosity/spiritualism.

New spiritualism is what **Pannke** calls “new-age nonsense” in his **lecture on Sufism and Sufi music in terms of the threats it has brought in.** ⁽⁷⁾ **Writing in the Moroccan context,** Lovesey ⁽⁸⁾ observes **how renowned bands** such as Beatles and Incredible String Band bring in “culturally-threatening” material in their spiritual and folk singing. Piatt observes some “distortions” of the traditional ways of doing *Dhikr* in Syria. He pinpoints the “ways in which certain modern Western framings of spirituality, mysticism, music, and art serve within liberal sensibilities.”

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/music/bollywood-s-been-dishing-out-faux-sufiyana-songs-to-us-here-s-what-s-wrong/story-YqlplrTpDh8rPH303PJ3tO.html>

- (6) Anuradha Bhattacharjee and Shadab Alam, “The Origin and Journey of Qawwali: From Sacred Ritual to Entertainment,” *Journal of Creative Communications* 7, no. 3 (2012): 221.
- (7) Peter Pannke, “Sufism and New Age Nonsense,” (2012, Nov 8). Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/762460>
- (8) Oliver Lovesey, “The 'world' before globalisation: Moroccan elements in the Incredible String Band's,” *Popular Music* 30, no. 1 (2011): 128.
- (9) Jeffrey McCullough Piatt, *Memory, social authority, and composition in Damascene dhikr* (University of California, Berkeley, 2014), 20.

⁽⁹⁾ New Age spiritualism, therefore, has distorted the representational value of signs, either displacing the **reality of** signs or substituting them with fake copies/non-sense.

Researches by Bageshree and Jawed⁽¹⁾ are significant regarding their focus on new trends to intermingle genres by referring to *Junoon*- a Pakistani band who did the task by combining elements of modern hard rock and traditional folk music with Sufi poetry to “invent” Sufi rock. Ironically a Sufi rock song, called “Bullah Ki Jaana” released by Rabbi Shergill in 2005 became “a chart topper in India and Pakistan.”⁽²⁾ These studies dig out is how values are being commodified and even spiritual signs are being used to no other end but entertainment and the new culture seems largely popular as can be see through their higher rating on social media.

Another aspect of the new Age is that it assigns primary value to signs themselves or objects so much so that they have attained the status of worship or religion such as Coca Cola bottle is made the most visible and eye-catching sign in all Sufi video songs under study. Sinno’s⁽³⁾ article on Chreiteh’s *Dayman Coca-Cola*, a story written in Beirut context, talks of the global discourses and their marked impact on religion, culture and self-perceptions of local people and their inclination towards materiality. The article implicates that amidst other newly emerging trends or signs, Coca Cola appears to be the sign of desire of the young generation, a sign of new taste, modernity, freedom and an absolute space which accommodates all kinds of heterogeneous elements, e.g. religion, culture and esteemed values belonging to specific cultures.

In another article, Coca Cola itself is characterized as a “sacred object” carrying religious power and perhaps religion itself. Chidester, in his article reports an exciting comment by one of the advertising directors of Coca Cola in the wake of introducing a “New Coke” formula in 1985. The public response, he says, was more like a “religious devotion to the drink” and seeing the huge public outcry, the remark that he made reads as,

⁽¹⁾ Zeeshan Jawed, “[Soundscape for the soul](#),” *Calcutta: The Telegraph*, (2005, June 4): Retrieved 2008-04-23.

⁽²⁾ Bageshree S, “[Urban balladeer](#),” *The Hindu*, (2005, March 26): Retrieved 2008-04-23.

⁽³⁾ Nadine Sinno, “Milk and honey, Tabbūleh, and Coke: Orientalist, local, and global discourses in Alexandra Chreiteh’s *Dāyman Coca-Cola*,” *Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures*18, no. 2 (2015).

“They talk as if Coca-Cola had just killed God.”⁽¹⁾ The Coca Cola image was thus made adorable rather consecrated gradually and a product which was introduced as a patent medicine got developed into a unique “sacred formula.” Pendergrast⁽²⁾ argues, it is Coca-Cola--the sacred name, the sacred formula, the sacred object-which has been the fetish at the center of a popular American system of religious symbolism. In the early 1950s, Delony Sledge, one of the advertising directors of Coca-Cola pronounced, “Our work is a religion rather than a business.”⁽³⁾

Berger pinpoints the act of forgery in another way by differentiating between signs of truth and falsehood. Citing Eco, he writes how “people can and often do lie with signs,” e.g. men and women who cross dress or who dye their black or brown hair as blond. Ekman focuses on facial expressions as signs and defines some categories e.g., anger, disgust, fear or surprise but in the present consumer culture, these signs are often simulated to represent what they are not in reality. In the present capitalist culture wherein materiality of signs and not their substance or symbolic worth is of prime importance, semioticians pay more attention to “read” people, their body language, their gestures or the way they use their voices in order to “gain insights into their truthfulness, temperaments, personalities, and values.”⁽⁴⁾ The underlying implication is that people do hide, simulate and pretend and use signs for that purpose. Eco, therefore, rightly said that signs are being used to lie and to mislead. Present study as it draws upon Eco’s theory examines the truthfulness/falsehood of the message being communicated through CS Sufi singing.

Eco’s Theory of False Signs

Eco⁽⁵⁾ suggested that since signs can/may be used to tell the truth, they can also be used to lie. He argued that If something cannot be used to

⁽¹⁾ David Chidester, “The church of baseball, the fetish of Coca-Cola, and the potlatch of Rok and Roll,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (1996): 744-750.

⁽²⁾ Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola: The Definitive History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company that makes it* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 744.

⁽³⁾ [Ted Ryan](https://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/a-genius-at-work-delony-sledges-indelible-mark-on-coca-cola-advertising), “A Genius at Work: Delony Sledge’s Indelible Mark on Coca-Cola Advertising,” (2017, Sep 27): Retrieved from <https://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/a-genius-at-work-delony-sledges-indelible-mark-on-coca-cola-advertising>

⁽⁴⁾ Arthur Asa Berger, *Media analysis techniques* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2012), 11-12.

(1) Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Indiana University Press, 1976), 7.
doi:0253359554

tell a lie, logically it cannot be used to express the truth as well; rather it cannot be used “to tell” anything at all. Eco’s theory of signs is significant in that it is suggestive of a wider scenario in the present times wherein the sham prevails as a predominant sign. Fakery, fraud, simulation and deception are some of the ways people use to lie and mislead others.

Berger ⁽²⁾ elaborates Eco’s theory of signs by specifying and defining ten broader areas of signs which people use to pretend, to simulate and to mislead others. His explanation is useful in that it makes any reader see its relevance to our routine discourses and we see people lying not only to hide their identities but to simulate and pretend to have specific beliefs and feelings which he calls theater. In the CS singing, for instance, the performance of the singers is not underpinned by a sense of the tradition and the words they sing (Sufi poetry) do not co-match with their bodily discourse, i.e. it lacks spiritual depth and devotion, I draw on Eco’s term “theater” to highlight this incongruity.

Keeping the digital transgressions in view, the theatrical signs may also be traced in the TV advertisements, e.g. in candy ads. In these ads, the positive function of sweets is shown as real and a reality it appears out to be, the agencies thus play theater, by making viewers consume the fake as real. Theater also plays well in the new digital media, television and film. The purpose is to hoodwink the viewer into believing it to be new real, be it the real which lacks substance, any usefulness or intrinsic function. In the new media, no matter whether the icons being imitated are fake since they hardly matter, the cameras doing other things but not shooting, light not for the purpose of lighting and direction an empty enactment but what all this conspires to create is a plaything, an imitation for the sake of imitation. This is how the actors in the current scenario use signs to lie and dupe others.

Masquerading is done in yet another way, that is, by using and substituting one’s identity via the use of signs which represent another person’s identity. This, in Berger’s view, is impersonation which may be exerted by adopting overtly all signs belonging to some other person or may be the other sex, e.g. style or manner of talking, or dressing as, for instance, in CS, singers cross-dress or utilize Sufi singing resources for their own promotion. Substitution in Berger’s view is not a simple or straightforward matter, it has the potential to “displace traditional ethnic and cultural traits” of the society one belongs to. The consumer societies as we have currently grown out to be, we make many choices every day that

(2) Arthur Asa Berger, *Semiotic Analysis* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2004), 33.

(3) Evelyn Stubbs, *Intersections: Baudrillard's Hyperreality and Lyotard's Metanarratives* (University of South Africa, 2011), 2.

center on our growing brand consciousness or lifestyles. Berger ⁽³⁾ adds that branded “lifestyles are not merely superficial veneers on deeper identities but have to some degree become substitute identities—forms of acquired character that have the potential to go all the way down to the core.” They displace our cultural traits and traditional ways of thinking we belong to and push us into a world of simulation, fakery and deception wherein only sham prevails.

Coke Studio, Pakistan

CS, sponsored by Coca Cola, world’s largest beverage company, and Frequency Media, is a Pakistani music television series which features live studio-recorded music performances by stars. Produced by Rohail Hyatt in 2008, it was taken up by the Strings Band in 2014. Led by its producers, “CS’s musical output typically combines Sufi and folk poetry with pop and rock song lyrics and traditional musical formats with more contemporary and Western rhythms. A new set of songs and other footage is released every year in a series of ‘Episodes’ that together comprise a ‘Season’ ...,” states Mukhtar. ⁽¹⁾ The artists of each show or episode are usually backed by a house band, backing vocals and guest artists from countries such as Italy, Turkey and Morocco.

CS music performance is interesting in many ways. Singers perform in a multi-semiotic space whereby music, rhythm and instrumentation dominate. Sitting in (semi)circle, with stunning light, color and sound effects in the backdrop, singers perform with fusion of blows, plucks, clonks, strikes, throbs intermixed with electronic raps and taps and a lot more. In addition to its visual appeal, what makes CS singers more popular

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- (1) Najia Mukhtar, “Using love to fathom religious difference – Contemporary formats of Sufi poetry in Pakistan,” *Contemporary South Asia* 23, no. 1 (2015): 30.
 - (2) Jay Moye, “‘Music transcends everything’: Coke Studio fuses genres and cultures, creates International franchise” (2014, December 21): Retrieved from <https://www.coca-colacompany.com>
 - (3) Natalie Zmuda, “Pakistan’s Image hits Positive Note: Thanks to Coke Studio,” *AdAge* (2011, June 13): Retrieved from <https://adage.com/article/global-news/pakistan-s-image-hits-positive-note-coke-studio/228100>
 - (4) Hafsa Sarfraz, “I’m 75 now. I want to retire: Anwar Maqsood,” *The Express Tribune* (2015, December 27): Retrieved from <https://tribune.com.pk>
 - (5) Rehan Ahmad, “Even Google Officials were surprised at Coke Studio’s popularity on Youtube,” *Techjuice* (2015, December 31): Retrieved from <https://www.techjuice.pk/19324-2/>
 - (6) Ben Sisario, “Jugni, got ‘eight million’ views on You Tube,” (2012, April 26): Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/27/arts/music/arif-lohar-performs-at-asia-society.html>
 - (7) Ibid, 2014

is the way they draw on a number of new discourses such as genre fusion, adaptation and plurality of style as well as text. They even make bold admixtures by using secular and spiritual lyrics in their Sufi songs. The innovative combinations of, for instance, hip hop, rock and pop music with *qawwali* or Sufi music is something they call “new music genre” which in the view of GM, Coca-Cola Pakistan, is meant to bridge barriers between East and West and thereby fuel optimism, “positivity” and “Open Happiness”—which is what Coca Cola stands for, states Khan.⁽²⁾ What the Cola executives claim to bring in Pakistan via CS music, i.e., “positivity,” ironically does not match with their expansion plan in Pakistan, says Zmuda.⁽³⁾

CS’s immense popularity over a time of 9-10 years is certainly more than what we can call a game of numbers. This even amazed the Google officials who recently met CS team as they noticed, “How a show originating from a country where YouTube is blocked went so viral that it has 72 million downloads and is watched in 120 countries,” Ahmad⁽⁴⁾ and Sarfraz.⁽⁵⁾ Many of its Sufi numbers have been rated as the top hit songs. For instance, “Alif Allh Jugni” (radiant love of *Alif* Allah) by Lohar & Shafi, got [14 million views on YouTube](#), making it the most-watched online video in Coca-Cola history, say Sisario⁽⁶⁾ and Moyer.⁽⁷⁾

With its novel musical and genre fusions as well as digital sampling techniques, CS has pioneered new cultural trends in the music industry of Pakistan. With its width and breath, international franchise, a large body of sponsors, amount of visibility and tremendous increase in popularity rate, CS makes a befitting choice for a scholarly inquiry. In addition to its musical and genre fusions, CS, by using digital sampling, has not only pioneered new entertainment trends in the music industry of Pakistan but has also made forays in the genre of Sufi music- something which has hardly engaged academia. Moreover, works done are mostly from the perspective of Qawwali. The present study, therefore, is significant in that it addresses this gap and argues for its being a serious issue.

Sample

The sample of the present study comprises 10 Sufi songs rendered by CS singers within a time frame of 9 years and 9 seasons. Out of a total of 32 Sufi numbers aired on Pakistani TV channels, 10 are selected on the basis of a four-unit criterion, in terms of gender, age, professional expertise and popularity. The rating/popularity taken from two popular social media sites, You Tube and Sound Cloud is given below along with sample details.

Sample Details

S.No	Season	Episode	Release	Artist(s)	Song/ <i>Kala'am</i>	Poet	Rating
1	2	1	June 14, 2009	Saeen Zahoor	<i>Aik Alif</i>	Bulleh Shah	24, 443
2	2	2	June 28, 2009	Ali Zafar	<i>Daastan-e-Ishq</i>	Bulleh Shah	11, 556.5
3	3	1	June 06, 2010	Arif Lohar Meesha Shafi	<i>Alif Allah Jugni</i>	Sultan Baho	74, 367.5
4	3	5	Aug. 01, 2010	Sanam Marvi	<i>Manzel-e-Sufi</i>	Sachal Sarmast	7,638.5
5	5	1	May 13, 2012	Hadiqa Kiyani	<i>Kamli</i>	Bulleh Shah	1,272.5
6	5	2	May 27, 2012	Atif Aslam Umair Jaswal	<i>Charkha Neolakha</i>	Bulleh Shah	13,500.5
7	6	1	Oct. 14, 2013	Fareeha Pervez	<i>Jogi Mairy Naal</i>	Bulleh Shah	8, 264
8	6	2	Oct. 24, 2013	Abrar-ul-Haq	<i>Ishq di Booti</i>	Sultan Baho	7,970.5
9	9	3	Aug. 27, 2016	Ahmed Jahanzeb Umair Jaswal	<i>Khaki Banda</i>	Bulleh Shah	22, 501.5
10	9	6	Sep. 17, 2016	Rizwan Butt Sara Haider	<i>Meri Meri</i>	Bulleh Shah	8,033

Note. Table above shows sample detail as well as rating (average) collected from two social media sites.

Structure of the Analysis of Songs

Present study draws on Dyer's representational category of signs to systematically study one unit selected for this article, i.e., Music & Singing Performance of CS singers.

The analysis goes in line with the format of the songs, i.e., intro, bridge (middle) and the outro parts, slightly touching the verse-to-chorus structure and the role of male and female vocal ensemble (backing vocals/chorus) in the singing, if relevant.

Analysis is done mainly from two aspects: (a) song as an aesthetics rendition in general and (b) how far it is compatible with the Sufi ethos of singing wherein form (signifier) and meaning (signified) are blended. The analysis below is done under two themes: (1) consuming fake as spiritual (2) funk, groove & female singing, which cover various aspects of the performance of singers how fun and ludic treatment of the Sufi text creates

a gap between signifier and signified and thereby generate a simulated and fake product. Five songs have been analyzed below.

Consuming Fake as Spiritual

Sufi lyrics used in CS songs speaks of Allah, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and Sufi saints, is sacred and evokes holiness. It thereby sets a line of thought for the viewers and so expectations from the singers. Many singers, however, intermix famous catch phrases from folk songs, key words from the register of film and treat the text in a way that gives a secular feeling. *Jugni* is made to wear a secular robe and is used only as a musical motif or an expressionistic groove to be repeated with variations. They direct the main thought and flow of the song and overpower Sufi lyrics used in the songs. Two songs *Alif Allah Jugni*/radiant love of *Alif Allah* and *Khaki Banda*/A mere human made clay), are analyzed under this heading.

Alif Allah Jugni

The song, الف الله جگنی /*radiant love of Alif Allah*, Season 3, Episode 1 of CS, is performed by Arif Lohar, Meesha Shafi & female vocal ensemble.

Theme & Structure of Song

The song starts with Sultan Bahoo's verses which talk of the disciple's love for his/her Mentor whose guidance leads the way to God. The rest of the song speaks of the radiant love (جگنی) of the Prophet (PBUH), of his companions and of all God-fearing people and the ending lines suggest to seek love of those who sought Allah's Love, since no salvation is possible otherwise.

It contains 6 stanzas of varying length and a refrain- one stanza followed by a lyrical phrase that is repeated by the chorus at the end of each section of the song. The song is mainly vocalized by Lohar but complimented by Shafi and female vocal ensemble. The lyrics are not purely a Sufi poetry, but a blend of Sufi and folk lyrics based on the elusive *Jugni*/جگنی which was popularized by Alam Lohar-- a famous folk singer from the region of Punjab, formerly British India. The ending verses of the song are borrowed from a famous *qawwali* track sung earlier by different singers. The song follows a verse-chorus form with *Jugni*/جگنی providing the central motif, musical variation, style as well as thematic colors.

Singing Performance

Lohar begins the song with Sultan Bahoo's famous verses, الف الله چنبے دی بوٹی میرے



Figure 1. Lohar & Shafi singing Alif Allah Jugni with an air of jubilation, their gestures & bodily actions demonstrate a contrast with the Sufi lyrics they sing

مرشد من دج لائی۔۔۔ /My master has planted the fragrant seeds of love in my heart, [Stanza 1, Verse 1].⁽¹⁾ His musical and vocal composition of these verses demonstrate seriousness and focus on the content or emphasis on words makes us reflect over the meaning of words for a while. The seriousness however, does not continue as a viewer would expect it to be like because the next few seconds reveal the artist in his usual style of performance, i.e. in his usual, a little rowdy and entertaining style, something which one would never see in a serious Sufi singing, for instance, in that of Zahoor or Perveen's songs.

In Lohar's case, what he sings, i.e. the lyrics imbued with sacred meanings demonstrate a contrast to what his actions, i.e. his gestures and bodily language imply or speak of and which engage us in some other way leaving little space for us to concentrate on the signified meaning embedded in the verses. With this funny flavor, the song seems more a *Jugni* (جگنی)⁽²⁾ performance in its typical sense, a display of folk singing and its musical aspects, e.g., rhythm, beat and choral features also fit well into this genre. The vocalist's own outlook, e.g. long, wavy hair in lieu with fashion and style, a peculiar wild smile in eyes, flickering apparel and bodily actions all indicate a bubbly tinge, an air of materiality and a desire for starship that fits into the folk or funk but not Sufi singing [See Figure 1]. As a consequence, a gap is created between what was supposed to be the intended focus (the signified reality) and the view of reality (secular) which is being demonstrated. The signifiers therefore point out a discourse which is not compatible with what is mystical and meditative and therefore is a representation of counterfeit spirituality.

Seen at exoteric level, however, some aspects of Lahor's song seem significant in terms of the meaning that are traditionally assigned to them such as the use of *chimta* or even *Jugni* (spirit/radiance) which has a symbolic and historical significance as state Gummi. *Chimta* clanking has been/is associated with our folk traditions and may be regarded as a representation of modest singing and in this very context may be related to Sufi singing as well. Moreover, the green robe as the *Ektara*⁽²⁾ player

(1) Alif Allah Jugni (Song # 3): Stanza 1, Verse 1

(2) Saleem Khan Gummi, "Jugni," In Saeed Bhutta, *Saanjh Vichar* (Lahore: A.H. Publishers, 1997), 51-57.

(1) Ektara: one-string instrument, often used in traditional music from Bangladesh, India, Egypt & Pakistan

(2) Prammi Bai, "Folk Fervour," (2014): Retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/chandigarh/folk-fervour/story-AvzXRwMfl8TZm0koQrgv9O.html>

[Intro of the song] in the video is clad in, may be interpreted within a wider religious and devotional context. Green, being the dome color (built above the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH) and also the color used on many Sufi tombs, may perhaps be regarded to be Sufic in nature as well as an emblem of veneration of those who sought Allah's Love. This aspect is good but as all Sufis maintain that the exoteric is only one dimension, the outward or the apparent and unless it comes as a reflection of the esoteric or the inward, it will remain superficial, meaningless and fake. In Lohar's song, the esoteric remains absent.

The other aspect *جگنی /Jugni* which, in simple terms, is a folk song of Punjab (Bai, 2014) ⁽²⁾ but authors such as Gummi, ⁽³⁾ Sidhu ⁽⁴⁾ and Dutt ⁽⁵⁾ trace the origin and definition(s) of the term. Sidhu traces its origin from North India about 2000 years back but Dutt states that *Jugni* came into being in 1906 as a song of protest against the British imperial rule. These authors trace *Jugni* as an elusive figure which fits into any situation- from literal to allegorical. For instance, a Pakistani Punjabi film titled as *Jugni* (2011), ⁽⁶⁾ released in 2011, reveals the story of three men seeking love of one woman, "Jugni" -- the heroine of the film. The *jugni* in the film evokes literal meanings- the sexual allure of a woman. In the song under study, it is suggestive of allegorical meanings. As the lyrics of this song clearly speak, *Jugni* is used as a metaphor of the sacred, namely, it is associated with the Holy Prophet (PBUH), Hazrat Ali (the 4th caliph) and Sufi saints and all sacred names are narrated in the song in terms of their radiance/spirit (*Jugni*) in the refrain sung by the chorus [Stanza 1-6].

The lyrics of the song evoke holiness and the meaning is easy to read and this sets a line of thought for the viewers and so expectations from the singers. For instance, the lyrics which are sung time and again by the chorus, *اے وے مولا علی والی جگنی جی / اے وے نبی پاک دی جگنی جی* / *the Spirit of the Holy Prophet, the spirit of Ali and his followers*, it would be natural to expect the vocalists, the musical chords and every outward manifestation in the Studio turning to its lowest or subdued so as to let the esoteric light of the words flow outward and touch the listeners. And that could give a memorable mystical experience to the listeners/viewers. Moreover, the choral singing of the

(3) Ibid, 1997

(4) Balraj Singh Sidhu, *Jugni* [Blog post] (2013, September): Retrieved from Balraj Singh Sidhu U.K. Author & Lyricist: <http://balraj-lekh.blogspot.co.uk/2013/09/jugni.html>

(5) Nirupama Dutt, "Folk for future [Jugni]," *The Tribune* (2011, December 4): Retrieved from <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2011/20111204/spectrum/main1.htm>

(6) *Jugni* is a Pakistani Punjabi film, directed by Syed Noor & released in 2011

(7) Ibid, Stanza 2, Verse 2

lyrical phrase- دم گنگوں/*my heart flutters the moment I think of you, my God-* could be made a mystically enjoyable experience. Instead we see fun in the rhythm of *dum gutkoon*/دم گنگوں, and excitement, thrill in the vocal diction of the female vocalist (Shafi) and other vocal ensemble when they repeat lyrics after Lohar such as “*So I recite the Kalma when I think of God*”.⁽⁷⁾ Words are not meant for any serious reflection in the performance nor do the music and instrumentation direct us towards that and thereby turning their performance theatrical.

Choral singing is another feature that is done in two different styles in the song, first by the main vocalists and second by the backing vocals. Other than various contexts, this style is also seen in religious and devotional songs whereby the singing is done in the chanting manner. In this *Alif Allah*/الف اللہ song, chorus appears after the “*Jugni*/جگنی” with the singing of Verse 4, *Peer meriya jugni ji*/I have the spirit of my guide, followed by a sequence of its repetition in various ways [Appendix A]. This element, though adds eloquence and a unique touch to the song nonetheless becomes an explicit sign of counterfeit spirituality. The glee and excitement evident in the bodily actions of CS singers does not co-match with what the “*Jugni*” itself is speaking, as stated above. This *Jugni* is far from being any symbolic quest for the radiance of the Prophets and Sufis and it is nothing but as the CS singers call a “*fusion number ... with the alluring intervention of Dum Gutkoon*/دم گنگوں or simply a narrative device that is in keeping with the age-old narrative style used in Punjabi folk music.”⁽¹⁾

Religious symbols of Sufi poetry or of lyrics taken from other sources are consumed by many CS singers for fun and celebration of their singing style, or for projection of the self and starship or other gains but not spiritual. The New Age movement as it has given rise to these trends such as the worship of the self which is a form of neo-paganism which appropriates and consumes religious symbolism for its survival. This worship of the self, a progeny of the New Age movement, is a form of Neo-paganism which survives through appropriation and consumption of religious symbolism. The symbols become entities free of any reference or meaning (loss of the signified meaning) to be used for any purpose and in this case for the projection of the secular, states Ghilan.⁽²⁾

(1) Ibid, 2011

(2) Mohamed Ghilan, “What was Rumi Talking about?” (2014, April 19): Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/04/what-was-rumi-talking-about-201441816134209701.html>

(3) Muzaffar A. Ghaffaar, *Masterworks of Punjabi Sufi poetry: Shaah Husayn within reach* [Vol. 1] (Lahore: Ferozsons, 2005). 1/9.

(4) Ibid, 2005

In the song under study, it seems as if the content and the manner of its presentation (singing performance) are two separate entities and it matters not what words are being sung and what underlying reality the words suggest. Quite the opposite, for example, when the lyrics talk of this world as an ephemeral place as, *چھڑ دنیا دا جھنجھال / Remove yourselves from worldly concerns* [Stanza 3, Verse 2], the demonstration at every level becomes superficial and even secular: sounds become faster, music heightened, beat and rhythm more intense and the vocalists lead to turn their performance into a sensational event, an experience of fun and entertainment. Again this is a demonstration of the spiritual in secular terms, i.e., consuming fake in terms of spiritual.

The outro of the song “*جگنی جی / jugni ji*” is made in the typical *thumri* (a light romantic form) style, in a very fast tempo and repeated thrice, no less an amusing touch is given to the song, a celebration of the secular through spiritual. This entails that inner and outer signs conflict with each other and the external glaze plays a role to conceal the reality and takes the viewer away from it. *Jugni/جگنی* is made to wear a secular robe and is used only as a musical motif or an expressionistic groove to be repeated with variations. In contrast, language that Sufi poets use in their poetry is suggestive of a much layered world of reality-having rich auditory power as well as depth of meaning. Ghaffar’s words enlighten us in this regard.

Sufi poetry is rich not only in meaning but also in auditory sensations which make the verse flower ... it is a layered verse and moves at several levels. Music and words, imagery and structure, fuse into an organic, poetic whole. ⁽³⁾

Ghaffar ⁽⁴⁾ further argues that the fusion of any other text into Sufi poetry would make little sense because it is hard to create poetry which is dense and a “*play with the sounds and meanings of words simultaneously using various tones and pitches of meanings.*” CS singers, by admixing new expressions or lyrics of their own, truncate Sufi lyrics in terms of the depth of meaning as well as lyrical richness they are written with. Singers thereby are able to only sensationalize their performance with no devotional effect. As a consequence, their performance becomes theatrical and this elicits other signs such as fantasy, pleasure and fun is the most noteworthy sign in the overall discourse of this song as is the case with CS performance in general. And the more the pleasure, the more space for simulation and fakery is created.

Khaki Banda

The song- *خاکی بندہ / A mere human made of clay-a CS production Season 9,*

Episode 3, is a duet performed by Jahanzeb & Jaswal. It centers on the idea of a sincere effort on part of a human to adorn the soul via examining

the self, solitary vigil and weeping for Allah's forgiveness while keeping away from the glitters of material world. Man is made of mere clay and the desire to become invincible or godly would be inane.

Singing Performance

The track *خاکی بندہ* seen as a whole, i.e., inclusive of Ahmad Jahanzeb's singing performance as a co-vocalist, seems to acquire even more a secular color. The lyrics that he sings are the ones written by Shuja Haider (director of song) and interlaced with Bulleh Shah's poetry in order to



make the song innovative and stylistically appealing. *Figure 2.* Jahanzeb & Jaswal showcase through a notanki/hilarious, entertaining singing & bodily swings; Jaswal [on right] moves to and fro in his signature rocky style

(1) The inserted parts do have innovative quality but also have the drive to drag the listener away from any meditative thought since they are inherently sensual and come from the register of film and also used in famous Indian musical numbers. They do not fit well with the Punjabi Sufi poetry that is a specific genre on account of lyrical and thematic composition.

Lyrics fused by singers of this song are far from being a text which is dense or is underpinned with thought and meaning. For instance, the structure “*satrangi re*/سترنگی رے” part of the refrain, that throbs in the centre of the song, is picked up from a famous Indian musical film *Satrangi*/سترنگی رے⁽²⁾ and employed to hook viewers and listeners and thereby feed them with something memorable.

نوٹنگی رے من مانی تیری / سترنگی رے نادانی تیری

You are fooled by the bright spectacle of this world/ your proud willfulness is driven by nothing but conceit

The expression “*satrangi*/سترنگی” used in rhyme with “*notanki*/نوٹنگی” seems to have been adjusted well in the lyrics and attempt is made to assign it

(1) Khaki Banda (Song # 9): Stanza 2, 4, 6, 8, 11 (Appendix B)

(2) *Satrangi Re*: a Marathi language musical drama film directed by Aditya Sarpotdar, released in 2012

(3) Ibid, 2005

spiritual meaning. This, however, is ironical because both words in terms of their common usage or the register they come from and thereby the meaning attached to them, all suggest the worldly flavor they are underpinned with. The lyrics fused this way, per se, communicate giggles, fun and smiles than anything serious or worth-reflective. Moreover, the vocalist, Jahanzeb, has the professional knack to deliver words in a way that would make viewers/listeners read between the lines, i.e., the funk and the lure, sweetness and romance embedded in the novel text [Appendix B]. Eventually what the track outthrows is fun and hilarity whereby music becomes more sweet, alluring and frolicsome, sounds whether acoustic or electronic overlap, beats intense and hilarious, flutes jazzy-sweet and strings atmospheric and romantic.

Amidst the virile voices of singers, Ahad Niyani, the drummer and Sajid Ali, the flutist among others [post-bridge sections] get almost supercharged releasing plethora of emotional energy and amidst the magic of amusement, the backing vocals showcase their style through *notanki/hilarious or entertaining claps and bodily swings*. All this is wonderfully mesmerizing, cheerful and imbued with romantic sunshine but far away from any kind of spiritual milieu or the atmosphere a Sufi text is meant for. Sufi poetry as says Ghaffar wherein, “*Music intermeshes with words. So does meaning*”⁽³⁾, whereas the text that singers employ in this song, not only demeans Sufi lyrics being sung in between but also corrupts meaning underlying the verses. Concerning how Punjabi Sufi text has been corrupted, Ghaffar highlights as under:

People such as minstrels, bards, and qawwals add, deduct and synthesize various poems (often fusing verses by different poets) in order to convey ‘message’ or to fit the verse into the music they have composed. They sometimes add the products of their own creative urges in their presentations ... its consequence has been the corruption of the original texts.⁽¹⁾

Funk, Groove & Female Singing

In CS Sufi singing, there is another way fake is consumed as spiritual. Amidst the flair of the musical, there is allure of the female or what Dyer calls, “female celebrity space” that is used to bring in more fun amidst the rocks and beats of various musical ensembles used by CS.

Jogi Mery Naal

The song *نال میرے ناں/Jogi is always with me-* a CS production Season 6, Episode 1, is performed by Fareeha Pervaz. It speaks of a mystical notion

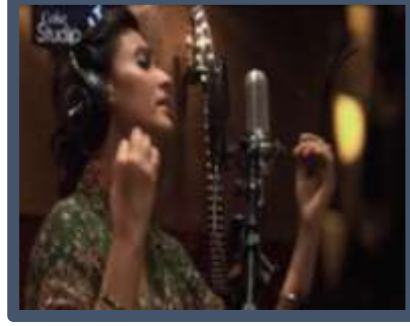
(1) Muzaffar A. Ghaffaar, *Masterworks of Punjabi Sufi poetry: Shaah Husayn within reach* [Vol. 1] (Lahore: Ferozsons, 2005) 7.

(2) Jogi Mery Naal (Song # 7): Stanza 1, Verse 1

of how one's being desires to be connected back to its Essence. The poet, Bulleh Shah, speaking in a female voice, longs for the company of the Mentor (جوگی /Jogi) and desires to surrender her will to her spiritual authority.

Singing Performance

In the song *Jogi*, by Pervez is an instance of her peculiar style and musical singing. The composition unfolds the beauty of her art, the way she combines notes and their variant sounds into modulations, enhancing the beauty of her melodies with glides, jerks and with pacing up (ascending) or slowing down (descending) of the notes and gracing the CS show with the beauty of her art as well as demeanor [See Figure 3]. Consider, for instance, the beginning of



the song, the vocalization of Refrain (Asthai in Indian music) نئی میں جاناں جوگی دے / I want to go along with the Jogi: (2) her style is evocative but measured and the pitch and volume of her voice moderately falls between middle and former part of the higher octave (upper Sa in the Indian classical scale) and thus notably good and appealing.

Figure 3. Fareeha Pervez shows up with the beauty of her singing art- her glides & jerks- but is least expressive in terms of a spiritual performance

Her skill of improvisation is also noticeable in the ending section of the song where she ventures for a blend of classical and modern *ghazal* style and instead of ending with intense and faster tempo the way as e.g. Abrar does in his song, she makes it likeable and unique. She reverses the order of the theme line, جوگی دے نال/نی میں جاناں and thus shifts emphasis onto the latter part as shown through the slash, on “جوگی دے نال” and even treating “جوگی دے” as a separate entity repeating it thrice. The meaning is easy to infer that it is none other than “جوگی /Jogi” whose companionship (نال /naal) is being intended for and who is the object of the speaker's veneration and love. The vocalist thus elaborates the theme of love, love as an experience of both fulfilment and longing, of beauty and tragedy--a story poignant ever and also makes it appealing and moving for the viewer via its rhythm, music and style. The show, therefore, seems filled with a gusto of stylistic and aesthetic connotations and thereby her singing is likeable to a great extent.

Coming to the rhythmic aspect of Pervez's performance and what function, if any, it seems to play in the delivery of meanings the lyrics are filled with. As a listener when I closed my eyes and listened to the song just aurally, what I heard was the strokes, the rocking beat and rhythm of the percussion and other musical ensembles which were clearly perceived to be the overpowering feature of the song. On the other hand, when I listened to it with opened eyes, what appealed to me most was the artist herself, her feminine charms, her glamorous outfit and the music of her voice and hence I tended to view it in that way. Musicality and rhythm are the two key words I would use to speak about this song. Music is sensually appealing here and never engages the viewers spiritually rather it diverts their attention away from grasping the realities underpinning the text.

In Pervez's show, rhythm stands out as an amusing feature in various ways. For instance, some funky tunes, blend of keyboard, percussion and horn, provide the bass line for the song which nonetheless distract us from focusing on the content, i.e., it simulates reality underpinning Sufi lyrics. The song starts with a keyboard stroke to let the vocalist take on and then comes in an exciting sample of recorded sounds to be intermixed with various sounds of brass, string and *dhol* (double-sided barrel drum) instruments forming a full-fledged musical context for the show. Minus the Moroccan, there is the Serbian House Band, three ever-present vocals including the famous Rachel Vaccaji who provide backing to the lead vocalist.

Last, not the least, the most amusing feature of the show comes around the second half of its composition (bridge) which lasts for about 1 minute, from 00: 02: 42 to 00: 01: 40 out of the total span of the song being 00: 07: 03. The tunes of the musical ensemble, of trumpet and *dhol* in particular form a groovy combination almost to a magical extent so much so that it carries Vacciji, one of the backing vocalists, to dance, or perhaps make her dance to the tune. Caught in a moment of thrill and excitement, she brings in fun and sensation. The musical variations or permutations of Moazzam Khan, the Qawwal, do not seem to fit anywhere except that they add an interesting groove in the overall musical setting.

There is yet another aspect of Pervez's performance which indicates that she presents a spiritual text in a style which is very secular. Consider, for instance, her body language, the hand movement in particular which though fits into the classical style of singing is not expressive in terms of a spiritual performance or any kind of Sufi singing. In addition, the singer, via her appearance, attempts to evoke the love imagery of the Sufi song, at literal level, and perhaps portrays the female lover who longs to be united to "Jogi." Her dress behavior seems to underscore though in a very subtle way, a narcissistic portrayal of herself and it seems as if the artist herself is

celebrating her charms and beauty [Figure 3]. Costume thus speaks for ourselves and, at times, plays “theatre,” i.e. it brings to light what we seemingly hide and thereby it is called “an active sign when it is worn by a performer.”⁽¹⁾

Hers is a highly stylized way of presentation, a celebration of the “female celebrity space,”⁽²⁾ and used as a sign to engage viewers into sensory pleasure, fun and entertainment by the CS itself. Female agency thus plays an important role in Studio singing and also enacts as a discursive sign for the agency to promote the liberal agenda of the New Age spirituality.

Kamli/Crazy

This Sufi song *ڪملي* /*Kamli*- a CS production Season 5, Episode 1, is a solo rendition by Hadiqa Kiyani. It focuses on the theme of critical evaluation of one’s own self and asks for a combat against the evils of heart since God can be found only by those who are pure at heart. The lyrics underscore how materialism and affectation block our vision to understand the real truth.

Singing Performance

Kiani’s song is another case which may be studied from its melodic aspects, for instance, the beginning⁽²⁾ that she takes is worth noting for its lyrical quality. Though it is pretty lengthy a start (kind of bandish) spanning more than two minutes [00: 02 :33] and hence unexciting also but she plays well with octaves, moving from middle to the former notes of the higher octave. The aspect which makes it less appealing is not only the length but also the improvisation of musical notes that she combines lack resonance and does not reach a higher level of inventiveness if compared with Pervez’s performance.

The non-linguistic signs, e.g. facial and bodily expressions are equally unsettling, if not crazy, though they match well with the overall CS setting, the colors, lights and the instrumental tunes. The loud and vividly marked hand movements while repeating the line “Ni men kamli aan” do not contribute to emphasize the underlying meaning of words, rather reduce it to a

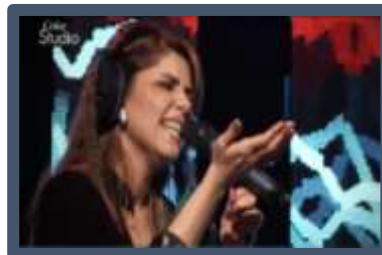


Figure 4. Kiani performing “Kamlee” with loud and vividly marked hand movements

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- (1) Thom Hecht, “The phallic swan lake: A semiotic Appraisal of Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake,” *Theatre Arts Journal* 1, no.1 (2009): 61.
- (2) Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (Psychology Press, 2002). 2.
² Kamli (Song # 5): Stanza 1

rhythmic effect or a formulaic piece designed to enact a musical exercise. Her bodily actions seem appropriate for a mixed kind of modern musical style or they might fit well into a purely secular concert than Sufi singing which requires a measured use of enthusiasm and energy and a tranquility of mood.

Visually powerful as the Studio is, it does evoke sensory pleasure in various ways in its Sufi singing. In Kiyani's case, this peculiar feature is centrally present and even a louder form of the fused music, sounds and tunes of various instruments which play a role in downplaying the Sufi lyrics reducing them to an ordinary plaything to be used in whatever fake and superficial way. The light drone sound of the intro [Stanza 1] is later intermixed with heavy jingles, beats, blows and clonks creating an impact so loud that the drone effect is greatly undermined and so do the lyrics being rendered. This aural mediation of sounds is further heightened with an overly use of visual elements, the mise en scene, the fluid and flickering lights.

Meri Meri

This song, Meri, Meri/ O human, leave off this battle for worldly possessions- a CS production Season 9, Episode 6, is performed by Rizwan Butt & Sara Haider. The central idea of the song is that unless we learn to control our worldly and base desires, spiritual connection with God is not possible.

Singing Performance

Steady but cool guitar music opens the composition of song *میری میری* by Bulleh Shah and in 13 seconds mixes up with the melodic clinks of a shaker instrument played by a member of the House Band. This musical riff leads on to a catchy groove, a set of lively notes sung with speed and colored with various instrumental shades. The catchy note continues for 17 seconds giving pace, rhythm and melody to the track and an air of warmth to the Studio environment [Pre-Verse 1]. The percussion in lower but steady notes, drums, guitar, bass, shakers, hand claps together embody a thrilling and amusing upshots which get intense in the coming moments of the track. The groove stays in the centre, brings in fun and also forms musical equivalent to the key verses *Meri, Meri* vocalized by Rizwan through the course of singing the song. Music with its funky beats, disco and rock elements in instrumentation and singing performance, thereby prevails and fills the air.

Sara Haider, the co-vocalist who showcases in her stylized outfit at 00:02:15 of the video track, makes an impressive performance. With glint in eyes and creative spark, she employs a range of vocals, using runs and

riffs, soft glides, shakes and jerks and at times ornaments the notes with nasal edges and thereby adds resonance to her part of singing.

Improvisations that she makes with notes and syllables and by giving distinct nasal edges she builds the tempo of the song and carries it to the climax admixing jazz and rock elements -from light airy to intense-to- exaggerated and demonstrate a chromatic range of her voice timbre. Though she sings in beauty, flair and chic, she remains calm and composed without being profound and flutters through syllables with ease



Figure 5. Sara Haider with her twiggy eyes ... has yet to take over & Rizwan Butt vocalizing in highly intense,

and eyes closed when she takes over but with the vocalization of words “*na teri... na meri/nothing belongs to you nor me,*”⁽¹⁾ in coming few seconds, she demonstrates force and energy; her eyes smile, face aglow, right hand in bracelet moves upward emphatically and thereafter she moves to a higher register. Her singing style seems surrealistic, voice unique which she employs for sizzling and stylish vocal effects and word-plays. More so, the magic that she plays with her twiggy, awesome eyes transforms her singing into something exotic. Her vocals however, become highly intense, exaggerated, honky to the growling extent whereby the exotic is taken over with ding-dong music, explosive beats, loud rhythm and claps which culminates into the singer’s own hopping and dancing.

The show altogether becomes a jovial singing of Sufi lyrics, a site of hilarity and fun to the extent of being a pratfall comedy wherein all, singers, backing vocalists and instrumentalists, consume energy to make it a commercial success. Music loud, overly charged and honky with high percussion beats in particular, a continuous outthrow of jingles, tunes, feminine sizzles and shrieks, smiles, bodily commotion, calypso, hip-hop twisting and in the midst of all this, Rizwan’s vocalization of verses,

چل بلہیا چل اوتھے چلے جتھے سارے انھے

Come, Bulleh Shah, let’s go to a place where everyone is sightless,⁽²⁾ makes little sense; rather inverse is the effect and the impression that one could gather is of derision, a secular treatment of the spiritual, i.e., Sufi verses by Bulleh Shah. The bridge part of the song is also a site whereby music prevails, music dominates for 1 minute and 10 seconds and remains occupied by the orchestra- the plucks and bows, strums, beats and buzzes, hits and strikes, scrapes and shakes- which is magical and provides food

(1) Meri Meri (Song # 10): Stanza 4 (Appendix E)

(2) Ibid, Stanza 6

for sensory pleasure and far away from creating any meditative effect. The outro section is again imbued with mechanical voicing of “میری میری میری میری *O human, leave off this battle for worldly possessions*” whereby styles vary and voices overlap resulting in a pratfall comedy and fakery.

In addition, CS setting, colors, lights, the vocalist’s glamor reflecting through her sleeveless tops & alluring looks, hip hop singing and her vocals- intense, exaggerated, honky to the growling extent, music with explosive beats, loud rhythm and claps-- the show altogether becomes a site whereby signs lie in that it consumes fake as spiritual. Even the singer’s costume evokes signifiers such as pleasure, fun, starship or figure-flattery turning her performance into a site of female beauty and pulchritude whereby only the simulated or fake can take over the “real” (Sufi singing). Her outfit and style perfectly match with the new “showbiz” world which is underpinned by the philosophy of “open happiness” and seen in this particular context, seems to en-cash “Sufi” music. In the present scenario, the idea of being free to go for various alterations or cutting the edges anywhere, be it fashion, faith or spirituality, or playing magic and fun by bringing various things out of their context, Sufi singing for instance, are the actions much liked by those who tend to fit into the New Age modernity.

In CS video songs, the female body like the “sacred” Cola, is used as a fetishized image, a plaything in the digital market of simulacra as most of the video songs studied above reveal. At an overarching level, CS itself turns out to be a material sign using female currency as a cultural capital in the midst of the new material games taking place within the digital context and guerilla marketing. And perhaps it aims to use this currency as the only option or way out to be a part of the global within new systems of representation and meaning.

Concluding Discussion

The present research has attempted to explore CS Sufi singing (Pakistan) as a site whereby signs lie. It has examined how sign in CS singing is not important what it stands for and it is the outward form or physicality of signs which is forefronted. The focus is on the exoteric, i.e., it is music, rhythm and instrumentation which dominate and eclipse the spiritual reality or message Sufi verses contain. CS singing, therefore, is a sign which simulates Sufi music and uses it as a ploy to confuse people between reality and irreality and dupe them into believing a didactic truth (Sufi poetry) within a lie. It thereby is a simulation and a representation of false signs.

The study has argued that CS singing upends any difference between Sufi singing and any other kind of singing meant solely for pleasure and

fun. The performance of CS singers is not underpinned by a sense of the tradition and the words they sing (Sufi poetry) do not co-match with their bodily discourse, i.e. words do not serve any purpose here as they are intended for by Sufi poets. CS singers admix (semi)romantic and worldly lyrics, tend to accommodate and publicize various singing styles & genres, pivot more on physical signifiers such as visual locale and use female beauty as fetish in their Sufi performance. In all their videos, what stands out as the most visible and eye-catching sign, is the sacred Cola.

This kind of treatment of the genre of Sufi music on part of CS singers creates gap between the signifier (poetry) and signified meaning (message) in their singing performance. Since their focus is not on communicating the meaning of Sufi lyrics, words remain empty signifiers and thereby enact distraction from the signified meaning or reality emphasized by Sufis. And the more the distraction, the more simulation and fakery prevail.

The study had demonstrated that CS singers simulate Sufi music, truncate it into a plaything or mere articulation, use it as a cover for profiteering drives and thereby enact theatricality. Via the use of New Age discourses such as spirituality, genre fusion and plurality of style and text, singers portray Sufi music as something that may be secularized, liberalized and adapted for any material end. The study has identified 4 main aspects which turn CS Sufi singing into a theatrical demonstration. It encourages (1) passive consumption of spiritual signs than making viewers reflect over the esoteric value of Sufi lyrics (2) represents neo-spirituality & disseminates the viewpoint that every subjective and idiosyncratic interpretation of the esoteric within the ambit of Sufi music is justified and (3) promotes new kind of entertainment culture coming via the Open Happiness recipe as conceived by Coca Cola executives long way back. Lastly, the concluding discussion on CS Sufi singing as a false sign can be made more insightful if the notion of singing/entertainment and fakery is examined via the Quranic lens. Though the discussion below is brief, it still carries twofold reflection for the reader (1) what the word 'singing' connotes and (2) the impact 'singing' makes on the mind/imagination of the one indulged in this act. In Surah Luqman, the Quran makes use of a specific expression which carries abundant food for thought particularly when we draw on the interpretation of the exegetes who speak with reference to the Tradition. The verse reads as follows:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَشْتَرِي لَهْوَ الْحَدِيثِ لِيُضِلَّ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّخِذَهَا هُزُوًا
*And there is among the men such a one also, who buys alluring
 tales so that he may lead the people astray from Allah's Way,*

without any knowledge, and make a mockery of the invitation to it.⁽¹⁾

Ibn Jareer At-Tabari mentions in his Jaamiul Bayaan ⁽²⁾ that the Quranic exegetes rendered the meaning of 'لَهُوَ الْحَدِيثُ' in different ways. One category, for instance, conveyed the meaning of the term as: (a) singing & listening to songs, (b) purchasing of professional fe/male singers and (c) purchase of the instruments of amusement such as drum (*tabla*). This view was held by a number of Companions such as Ibn Masood, Jaabir and Ibn Abbas. Ibn Masood is related to have sworn to establish the meaning as, "This, by Allah, refers to singing [ghina]" and he repeated it thrice. Similarly, Ibn Abbas and Jaabir are reported to view the meaning of the verse as singing and listening to songs. The same view was also held by a great number of taabi'een, such as Mujaahid, Ikrimah, Makhool and Umar bin Shuayb, to name a few.

The 2nd category conveys that 'لَهُوَ الْحَدِيثُ/Idle talk' means *all kind of false talk, conceits, gossip, tales, jesting & joking, singing & merry-making*, all that is meant to divert people from Allah's remembrance. Ibn Jarir and Al-Hasan Al-Basri ⁽³⁾, among many others, are reported to say this. In chapter 53, An-Najm, Verse 61⁽⁴⁾, which reads as, "وَأَنْتُمْ سَلْمُذُونَ" /while you amuse yourselves [proudly] in vanities," again the Quran mentions 'idle play' and 'amusement.' As Al-Qurtubi refers to various meanings derived from the root 'samada' such as raising one's head up proudly or staying idle; 'sumood' (noun) means leisure or idle play and 'saamid' is the one who plays idly with musical instruments or other objects of play. To Ibn Abbaas, the word "سَلْمُذُونَ/samidoon" refers to specifically the mushrikeen's (idol worshippers) habit of singing and playing noisily whenever they heard the Quran being recited and generally to all who indulge in this kind of act. The same opinion was held by a number of Companions and some taabi'een such as Ikrimah and Ad-Dahhaak ⁽⁵⁾.

In the above verse, the Quran uses the expression "Lahw-al-Hadith," in the context of those who make a mockery of Allah's verses when they

⁽¹⁾ Surah Luqman, Verse 6

⁽²⁾ [Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Tafsiṛ al-Ṭabarī](https://kitaabun.com/shopping3/selections-from-quran-tafseer-tabari-english-p-6363.html): Retrieved from <https://kitaabun.com/shopping3/selections-from-quran-tafseer-tabari-english-p-6363.html>

⁽³⁾ ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (839-923): Retrieved: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/al-Tabari>

Al-Hasan Al-Basri Al-Hasan al-Basri (642-728): <https://www.britannica.com/biography/al-Hasan-al-Basri>

⁽⁴⁾ Surah An-Najm, Verse 61

⁽⁵⁾ Abul Ala Maududi, *Tarjman-ul-Quran* (Lahore: Idara Publications, 1949) <http://www.iqbalcyberlibrary.net/en/TQ4.html>

are recited unto them and turn away in pride, as if they heard them not or as if there were deafness in their ears. Moreover, the word *يَشْتَرِي* /purchasing, as Qatadah⁽¹⁾ says, means the buyer likes it, namely, “Lahw-al-Hadith” and the more they like it, the more they prefer falsehood to the truth. The Ayah basically focuses on specifically to address the question as to why after all should a person be deaf to the word of God. The Quran answers, as noted in the verse above, by making us see the difference between two types of people: (1) those who choose to benefit from Allah’s verses and (2) those (the miserable ones) who prefer falsehood over truth, choosing to avidly indulge in idle, false deeds & empty amusements/singing whose purposes are to also turn others away from Allah’s path. The former, who choose to benefit from Allah’s verses, the Quran, in Surah al-Furqan, Verse 72, specifies their characteristic as those who keep away from unreal, false or purposeless things. The verse reads as, *وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِرَامًا*, “And [they are] those who do not testify to falsehood [zooraa], and when they pass near ill speech, they pass by with dignity.” The word “zooraa” is equated with *ghina* (music) as “samidoon” with singing and music, as cited in Gribetz.⁽²⁾

Having briefly said how the Quranic exegetes interpret ‘music/singing’ and its role as a medium of digression (in most cases) from Allah’s path-- Allah who is the ultimate Reality, it also seems relevant to say a few words on how Sufis view reality. That can also be put in contrast to the confused state of reality to which the title ‘Sufi music’ is attached in today’s scenario. The discussion in section two above elucidates that the term ‘music’ is based on Zikr to which all Sufis agree and their opinions differ only when it comes to the matter of singing/reciting poetry. This latter aspect is something which in a way gives leverage to people to construct false & fetish things and use them under the cover of ‘Sufi music’ such as CS singers enact. Whatever claims these singers make, their musical demonstration of Sufi lyrics (intermixed with semi/romantic stuff) is something which is against what Sufi poets are mainly concerned with, i.e., using language as a tool to express their love for the Real signified. Moreover, their demonstration is something that can easily be interpreted under the Quranic term “Lahw-al-Hadith.” As a matter of fact, what these singers demonstrate is a representation of fake, false and a confused state of the reality of ‘Sufi music’ which can better be understood in the light of

⁽¹⁾ Tafseer Ibn Kathir Retrieved from: <http://www.fiqhulhadith.com/ibn-e-kaseer/list.htm>

⁽²⁾ Arthur Gribetz, “The samā' controversy: Sufi vs. Legalist”. *Studia Islamica* 74, (1991): 43-62.

what Hujwari stated. Sufism, he said, had formerly been a reality without any name and now a name without reality. ⁽¹⁾ The second part of what Hujwari stated implies that “reality” which was once the basis of Sufism is largely consumed by a newer “version” of Sufism whereby spirituality is enacting an agentive role for people to do material things.

Carl Ernst ⁽²⁾ cites a few more words with reference to Hujwari who said that in our times this science [Sufism] has been in reality eliminated because people are all occupied with pleasure and have turned away from satisfying God. This statement reinforces the same idea how the only reality which is adored and acknowledged as “reality” is pleasure and quest for iconic meanings is no more a prime concern in the present times.

⁽¹⁾ Ahmreen Malik, “Mysticism-A parallel religion?” *Al-Hikmat* 33, (2013): 3-24.

⁽²⁾ Carl Ernst, *The shambhala guide to Sufism*. (Boston: Horticultural Hall, 1997), 7.