Fizzy Drinks and Sufi Music: Abida Parveen in Coke Studio Pakistan

By
Zainub Beg

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Approved: Dr. Syed Adnan Hussain
Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Reem Meshal
Examiner

Approved: Dr. Sailaja Krishnamurti
Reader

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Abstract

Abida Parveen, often referred to as the Queen of Sufi music, is one of the only female qawwals in a male-dominated genre. This thesis will explore her performances for Coke Studio Pakistan through the lens of gender theory. I seek to examine Parveen's blurring of gender, Sufism's disruptive nature, and how Coke Studio plays into the two. I think through the categories of Islam, Sufism, Pakistan, and their relationship to each other to lead into my analysis on Parveen's disruption in each category. I argue that Parveen holds a unique position in Pakistan and Sufism that cannot be explained in binary terms.

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Table of Contents

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Chapter One: Introduction

Pakistani Islam, in all its complexity, has been catapulted into the 21st century through Coke Studio Pakistan. Coke Studio is a television program, also available on YouTube, developed by the 80's and 90's pop icon Rohail Hyatt. As one of the founders of Vital Signs, an iconic Pakistani brand owned by Pepsi co, Hyatt, was the perfect brand turncoat to revitalize Pakistani traditional music by combining it with Western pop. The marriage of a commercial brand, Western arrangements, and traditional music was extremely successful amongst domestic and diasporic Pakistanis, such as myself. Before YouTube, traditional music from Pakistan was difficult to access outside Pakistan or cities such as Toronto with large diasporic communities. With traditional music's turn to the internet, I watched simultaneously with my friends and family in Pakistan.

An example from my own life helps illustrate the allure of Coke Studio. Qawwali had little appeal to me in my childhood. I distinctly remember listening to Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's "*Allah Hoo*", the sound of the instruments was unfamiliar to my ears, the harmonium was piercing, and the *tabla* felt jarring. The way Khan's body moved – as if he were possessed – further added to my discomfort, not understanding the significance of the words he sang. I was accustomed to listening to playback singers whose performances were marked by a calmer demeanour and could not fathom that music could bring about such passion the way qawwali does. Coke Studio's reimagining made these traditional forms available to me. It was songs such as Rahat Fateh Ali Khan's (Nusrat's nephew) performance of "Afreen Afreen" in Coke Studio that first gave the program its local legitimacy and made qawwali familiar to my ears. My friends in the

local community felt the same way. Coke Studio unlocked a part of Pakistan hidden by the conservatism of much of our local community.

Like many Pakistanis living in Canada, my parents had to negotiate the boundaries of home, culture, and religion. I attended a private Muslim academy in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where Islamic Studies, Qur'an classes, and the Arabic language were mandatory. I learned Urdu at home through YouTube, movies, and family. Western Popular music was discouraged, and we were cautioned against it as it could lead to a "slippery slope." Qawwali, although I did not listen to it while growing up, was not discouraged. My father was always a fan of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, so I was aware of the genre's existence, but I was not ready to listen to it myself just yet. Sufism was unexplored as many felt that it might lead to a corruption of "Islamic values."

In our Islamic Studies and Qur'an classes, we were taught Islam in a simplified fashion in which the five pillars were incorporated into every aspect of our lives and taught that the *sharia* should shape our approach to the world. Islam was reduced to a formula for life that resulted in an afterlife of bliss when lived well. Qawwali specifically mocked this rigidity and pushed us to imagine union with God in the here and now. Abida Parveen, performing Punjabi Sufi poet Bulleh Shah, would taunt, "you have read a thousand books, but have you ever read yourself?" (Bullhe, Puri, & Shangari, 1995, p. 219). Our school Imam would often warn of the dangers of intoxication, even in music, and taught us that anything that fell outside of Sunni orthopraxy was wrong.

Although I was aware of qawwalis existence, it was only in the last few years that I began listening to it with genuine interest and understanding its value after taking classes at Saint Mary's University with Dr. Hussain, exposing me to Sufism as a field of

study in religious studies. I began experimenting with traditional music and engaging with it as something religious in which the performer's cries transformed into a plea for union with the beloved. I began to *experience* the performance differently as a religious ritual. Initially, I was not ready to experience qawwali for the first time, let alone wrapping my head around the fact that music could be a part of religion in a language of passion that conceded nothing to Qur'anic Arabic.

The field of religious studies examines phenomena in a particular way. It is devoted to research on religious beliefs, behaviours, and institutions. Its scholars examine religion using systematic historical and cross-cultural perspectives. Scholars attempt to study religious behaviours and beliefs by drawing upon various disciplines and methodologies such as anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and history. I also draw upon such disciplines to look at my subject.

In Pakistan, qawwali is part of the traditions of love in Islam that imagine and encourage God's direct experience. Qawwali, with its simple language and powerful imagery, is designed to appeal to everyday unlettered people. Coke Studio, then, targets an audience that may be familiar with the verse or for whom modern technology would make these modernized forms available such as people like me. Although I was excited by Rahat Fateh Ali Khan and other qawwali luminaries in the first two seasons of Coke Studio, I felt my world shifting when I watched Abida Parveen take the stage in the third season. I was fascinated by the way that she claimed and dominated the space of the studio. Although she is not the only individual that performs qawwali in such a manner, she is the only celebrated female qawwal.

Abida Parveen is physically imposing, wild-haired, her singing brimming with power and demanding attention. She is exceptionally unusual in Pakistani society and culture, not just because she defies conventions of beauty and prevalent behaviour in her performances, but because of the very nature of this style of music and space of performance. There is not anything that Parveen does that ought to be acceptable to mainstream audiences, and yet it is.

There are a few questions I intend to answer through this thesis. Firstly, is Abida Parveen an authentic representation of Sufism? Is what she does real and if it is, why is she successful when she is so different? I am also concerned with examining whether this is an authentic representation of Islam in history and modern-day Pakistan. Is what I am watching – Coke Studio – the real Pakistan, Islam, or Sufism? Additionally, questions surrounding gender norms in Pakistan must also be raised because Parveen is a woman, disrupting the space she occupies.

This thesis explores Parveen's career and recent performances for Coke Studio through the lenses of gender theory and modern scholarly work such as those of Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Saadia Toor. I attempt to understand why Parveen is such a celebrated singer given the complexities she brings with her and the space in which she performs. I frame my analysis with Judith Butler's explorations of gender performativity combined with Saba Mahmood's approach to women's agency in Islam. This thesis will include an investigation of Sufism in South Asian Islam and how Abida Parveen's performance on Coke Studio fits firmly within Sufism.

To answer my questions regarding authenticity, I will first examine research on the history of Islam and Sufism in South Asia, and refer to Orientalist understandings of

the two. I will also explore what the two traditions are like in the 21st century and the relevance of gender to them. Furthermore, I will apply the works of theorists such as Butler and Mahmood to further my analysis of Parveen's disruption of gender norms because their work provides me with the ability to examine my traditions through critical eyes without relying on insider literature. Both theories are an ideal fit for the questions I am attempting to answer, and they are theories that I am familiar with before this thesis.

Abida Parveen - an arresting presence

Some of the earliest memories I have of Abida Parveen are of her performances to songs such as "Mann Kunto Maula", engulfing her in the emotions brought on by the words she is singing. They are not mere words and it is not merely a performance, that much anyone can tell. Parveen is a Pakistani Sufi singer, composer, and musician dubbed as the "Queen of Sufi music," she is referred to as one of the world's greatest mystic singers. Parveen has a unique position in Sufi music in that she is an exception to the male-dominated genre of qawwali music, subverting gender norms on and off stage.

These are a few reasons why she is the ideal person to examine how Sufi music pushes the boundaries of gender in Pakistan. To me, she is much more than a subject. She has an arresting presence that can be felt even through a TV screen. Listening to her live performances, from what I have heard, is a life-altering experience. Some of the audience members are observed dancing or swaying to the music. On the other hand, I find myself unable to move, her voice drawing me in, forgetting to breathe. There is a gracefulness to her, yet her personality is bubbly, humble, and filled with love for the Divine.

Sufism has been in Sindh's soul for centuries, and places such as Larkana and Sehwan – home to one of Pakistan's most important Sufi shrines – contribute significantly to the Sufi culture of the province. Parveen herself was born and raised in Larkana, Sindh, beginning her lifelong vocation for singing at the age of three. She was trained by her father, Ustad Ghulam Haider (1908-1953), and later trained by Ustad Salamat Ali Khan (1934-2001) – one the most notable singers of the Sham Chaurasia Gharana[1] (Parveen, 2018; Iqbal, 2013). At the age of five, her father decided that Parveen would inherit the long-held family tradition of classical Sufi music rather than his two sons. But Later, her husband, Sheikh Ghulam Hussain, retired from Radio Pakistan to mentor and manage her career. Following his death in the early 2000s, Parveen's daughter, Maryam, took on the role of the manager (Culshaw, 2001).

Parveen mainly sings *Kafi* music, a classical form of Sufi poetry, mostly in Punjabi and Sindhi. *Kafi* is a solo genre accompanied by percussion and harmonium instruments. *Kafi* is a genre of Sufi mystical songs popular in Pakistan, based on regional folk melodies. It refers to heroes and heroines of well-known regional romances where the heroine typically symbolizes the soul that seeks union with the Divine beloved. The union, separation, and trials of the heroic couple represent different aspects of mystical experience in ways that appeal to a popular audience. This poetic form, derived from the Arabic *qasidah*, is a mono-rhythmic ode, always meant to be sung (Hannabuss, 2003). She also sings *qawwali*, *ghazal*, *sufiana kalam* in qawwali-like style, and *Raag*, singing in Urdu,

[1] The Sham Chaurasia Gharana is a family's style of singing in Hindustani classical music known for singing vocal duets.

Sindhi, Saraiki, Punjabi, Arabic, and Persian. For Parveen, the lyrics and the music are her prayers, through an emotional commitment to understanding the message her music conveys – love and compassion (Parveen, 2018).

Some of Parveen's earliest performances go as far back as when she was 12 years old. In her performances – and other public appearances – she is seen in androgynous clothing. She wears long, simple tunics buttoned to the top with a coat or the occasional *shalwar kameez*, always coupled with an *ajrak* shawl from Sufi saint Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's shrine in Sindh. Her clothing tends to consist of neutral colours such as black, grey, or brown with the occasional orange, purple, or yellow but always solid colours. She chooses not to wear any makeup, but if she does, she only opts for a red or nude lipstick (Parveen, 2018).

Background on the Chishti order

Sufism is often described as a path to knowledge of the self. It is mediated through a master-disciple teaching relationship, associated with the Islamic traditions of metaphysical thought and practices. Sufism believes in intuition, creativity, and less of a literal or fundamental interpretation of scripture. For many, the word "Sufi" recalls an image of a whirling dervish, best known in the West by the practices of the Mevlevi Sufi order in Turkey. This whirling is part of a formal ceremony known as *sama*, rooted in Konya, Turkey and is credited to Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273). Islamic mysticism is called *taṣawwuf* ("to dress in wool") in Arabic; however, it has been referred to as Sufism in Western languages since the early 19th century. Sufism, an abstract word, derives from

the Arabic term for a mystic – Sufi. In turn, this is derived from *soof*, "wool," possibly a reference to the wool garment of early Islamic ascetics (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 209-210).

Sufism consists of countless orders or *tariqa*, each practicing Sufism through their understandings. The Chishti Order is a Sunni Sufi order, known for its emphasis on love, tolerance, and openness as practice. Founded by Khwaja Abu Ishaq Shami Chishti, it originates in Chishti Sharif district, a small town in Afghanistan, dating around 930 CE. Although arising in Afghanistan and spreading into Iran, the order's primary sphere of influence was India and Pakistan (Ernst & Lawrence, 2002, p. 1). The order's fundamental principles and methodology were laid down from this order and its systematization of *"tasawuuf"* (becoming a Sufi). Of the 40 major Sufi orders, the Chishti order is one of the oldest and well-known. It is the first of four major Sufi orders to be established in South Asia – Chishti, Qadiriyya, Suhrawardiyya, and Naqshbandi.

Like other Sufi orders, Chishtis trace their origin to Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad's cousin, who is regarded as the first imam by the Shi'a. Ultimately, Sufi orders trace their origins to Muhammad, believed to have instructed mystical teachings and practices alongside the Qur'an. It is the most widespread and famous of all the Sufi traditions in the region since the settlement of the mystic Mu'in ad-Din Chishti in Ajmer, Rajasthan, at the end of the 12th century. Mu'in ad-Din Chishti is known for having been one of the first prominent Islamic mystics to formally permit the incorporation of music in religious devotion, making Islam more relatable to India's indigenous peoples whom he sought to convert.

Chishti Sufism is both an experience and a memory. It is the experience of remembering God so intensely that the soul is destroyed then resurrected. It is also the memory of those who remembered God, devoted to discipline and prayer, but remembrance, whether they recited the Divine name *(dhikr)* or evoked God's presence through song. While the Chishti experience of remembering God is possible, it is rarely attained. Only a few have been able to focus their whole beings on God, remembering God's name and evoking God's presence in pursuit of the path of love, the Sufi ideal. These saints, the masters and captains of spiritual destiny, drew countless others to God through their exemplary lives and passion (Ernst & Lawrence, 2002, p. 2).

Contrary to Sufi groups such as the Qalandar or Madari, the Chishti Order conformed to the traditional Islamic norms of social conduct. Their display of non-conformism was reflected at the level of defiance of the strict interpretations of Islam by Sunni scholars. The core of Sufi transmission was prayer and meditation practices associated with the recollection and recitation of the names of God mentioned in the Qur'an. In the past – and present – *dhikr*'s practice continues to be central to Sufi tradition regardless of order. Sufi orders such as the Chishtis use song and dance techniques for concentration and for creating spiritual ecstasy. They played a significant role in the development of vernacular languages and literature.

What is qawwali?

In South Asia, *sama* takes on a different form that is called qawwali. Qawwali was born inside the Sufi circles of the Chishti brotherhood that flourished between the 12th and 16th centuries on the outskirts of the Muslim courts of Northern India. This music

genre has always had a double function: to simplify religious preaching through the beauty of the chanted poetry and to bring listeners to ecstasy during *mahfil-e sama* (spiritual gatherings). The word qawwali itself comes from the Arabic word "*qawl*" (utterance) and is the rendition of philosophical verses in several languages by male Sufi singers (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 209; Abbas, 2002). The term qawwali denotes the Sufi song itself and the implication of the occasion of its performance. Principally, it is performed on the *urs* (death anniversary) of a Sufi saint at their *dargah* (shrine) or anywhere their devotees gather. However, qawwali's musical assembly is also held throughout the year with less extravagance as on the *urs* of a revered saint (Qureshi, 1972).

Qawwali plays in a call-and-response style, supported by musicians and handclapping, typically performed with a lead singer and chorus. Traditionally, only males can perform qawwali songs, and females perform *sufiana kalam* that lacks the turn-taking, classical structure. For the most part, the female is an abject viewer of the qawwali performance and not an active part of the proceedings (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 218). From the early beginnings of Islam, the public sphere had been exclusively a male domain, restricting females to their homes' privacy. Women did take part in scholarship and even warfare. Nonetheless, the realm of religious worship permitted equal but separate action at best. Women were allowed to enter the sanctum of a Sufi dargah, but a gathering intended for qawwali had only men in its attendance. Such restrictions have not changed very much today, although there are some notable exceptions with the arrival of female qawwals such as Abida Parveen.

The bulk of folk poetry written by the Sufis in South Asia was sung by village women while carrying out household chores. There are several versions of this, such as the *charka-nama* (while spinning cotton), *chakki-nama* (while grinding grain), *lun-nama* (lullaby), *shadi-nama* (marriage songs), and *suhagan-nama* (married women's songs). The first three activities here are mundane, although rhythmic, and the Sufi verses could be sung to their rhythm, whereas the latter are meant for specific occasions (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 218; Sharaf, 2015, p. 36).

The story of Heer Ranjha, one of several popular tragic romances of Punjab – an epic poem – is one that everyone in the subcontinent knows to some extent. Other stories include Sohni Mahiwal, Mirza Sahiban, Jind Mahi, and Sassi Punnhun. Waris Shah's *Heer* tells the love story of Heer and her lover, Ranjha, on the east bank of the Chenab river. Tragic love stories such as these have often been the subject of Sufi poetry, such as "*Ranjha Ranjha Kardi*" by Punjabi Sufi poet Bulleh Shah.

Song and dance techniques are central to most forms of devotional religion, including qawwali. The religious context of qawwali functions as a means to bring its members into a trance-like state, making them aware of their relationship with God (Aquil, 2012, p. 22). Many professionals perform it in a less traditional style at the various shrines. The poetry emphasizes mystical love or praise of God, Muhammad, and saints or imams. Traditional qawwali combines group and solo singing, accompanied by various musical instruments such as the drum, harmonium, percussion, and the occasional handclapping. Its most traditional performer – a qawwal – is a hereditary professional that traces their lineage and performing tradition to the 13th century (Qureshi, 1972). Specific

features of qawwali are the incessant repetition of text phrases that serve to build towards or maintain the state of *haal* (ecstasy) – intending to end with *fana* (annihilation of the self) – and an indication towards both evident and hidden content. Thus, a spinning wheel transforms from a household instrument used by women into the wheel of life or hope. Often, this element transcends linguistic barriers (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 217-218).

Introducing Coke Studio Pakistan

Of the many adaptations of qawwali, there exists in Pakistan a television programme and international music franchise. In 2008, Coke Studio Pakistan was produced by an elite group of urban musicians based in Karachi, Sindh. Conceived by Rohail Hyatt, Coke Studio's musical output consists of combinations of Sufi and folk poetry with pop and rock lyrics and traditional musical formats with contemporary rhythms. Every year, a series of episodes of songs are released that comprise a season. They are broadcasted on multiple Pakistani television channels and are accessible through YouTube by Coke Studio's international audience consisting of over 7.5 million subscribers (Mukhtar, 2015, p. 30).

Through songs and behind the scenes footage, Coke Studio's message consists of the ideational themes of love, peace, and embracing Pakistani cultural heritage. However, Coke Studio's producers are hesitant to be associated with any definitive ideational agenda. There exists an intention to critique the dominant monolithic understanding of Islam. This does not imply that they are Islamic scholars of any sort and lack a sense of authority. Moreover, they do not seek this authority to speak about Islam, merely disdain towards such authority. Instead, ambivalence and obliqueness inspired by the Sufis of

Pakistan are important aspects of Coke Studio's ideation regarding religious differences (Mukhtar, 2015, p. 30). Coke Studio intends to present a "softer" Islam, easily mistaken to be an apologetic move on their part, to reinvent a Muslim and Pakistani identity that they can pride themselves in. This is an essential consideration in Pakistan, where there are numerous claims about what comprises "true" Islam. Under the attempts to singularize Islam, the reality is that the discursive context is fractured across countless versions of Islam in Pakistan – and beyond – ranging from the Shia, Sunni, and their sub-groups.

It is important to note that as well as wanting to display Islam in their identities, Coke Studio's producers operate within a predominantly Muslim society where religiosity is an inherent feature of quotidian life. Coke Studio's self-positioning in the realm of proper Islamic knowledge in Pakistani society puts their authority into question. Due to their Westernized social backgrounds, the producers belong to a class of society that is typically not considered to lack "good" Muslim values because of their "liberal" secular notions of religion on the margins (Mukhtar, 2015, p. 33). Moreover, Coke Studio producer credentials are questioned even more through their association with music due to its continued debate of being permissible in Islam or not. Sufi poetry allows Coke Studio a way out of this dilemma and enables them to argue that they are not "godless." They seek to revive Sufism as a desirable understanding of Islam in Pakistani society. This revival seems to be just enough to avoid condemnation from those that are critical of such practices.

Sufism emphasizes love for God and is often seen as a form of “Islamic mysticism.” But this interpretation of Sufism, separating it from so-called “normative” traditions of Islam, is rooted in Orientalist beliefs. It describes Sufism as a pacifist and moderate version of Islam, implying that “normative” Islam is intrinsically oppressive, violent, and incompatible with modernity. One of the first European articles written about Sufism explicitly praised the tradition for its rationality and disregard for Islamic rituals and law. Sufism was presented as a “Westernized” Islam that was not fully Islamic and closer to the American beliefs of individualism, liberalism, and capitalism. These sorts of Orientalist constructions of the “good Muslim, bad Muslim” justified various colonial adventures in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (Amin, 20119).

Following 9/11, Sufism's “Western” notions emphasized its tolerance and universalism even more, in contrast to “normative” Islam. The reason behind such discourse was to produce an “Americanized” Islam that is docile and does not challenge the West, an Islam that freely complies with Western capitalism, and even legitimizes imperialist adventures against those “Islamic extremists” construed as the “bad Muslims.” As per Western projections, “normative” or normative Islam itself is the threat that Sufism is meant to neutralize (Amin, 2019).

Chapter Two: Islam and Sufism in Pakistan

Both traditional Islam and Sufism have a deep-rooted history in South Asia, and one cannot be understood without the other. Therefore, to understand the mystical tradition, one must look at its history and Islam's history. Islam entered India in 711 CE under the Arab Commander Muhammad bin Qasim (695-715 AD) by conquering Sindh and Multan's regions. This connected South Asia to the Muslim empire, allowing for trade and the caliphate's Muslim culture to permeate through the subcontinent. Lahore became the first center of Persian-inspired Muslim culture in India, with names such as Ali Hujwiri – an 11th century Persian mystic – becoming known. The full impact of Sufism, however, was felt in the late 12th and early 13th centuries after the strengthening of the main Sufi orders in the central provinces of India (Schimmel, 1975, p. 344).

Islam's mystical tradition gained significant ground through its spread into South Asia, asserting an equal claim to legitimacy in the subcontinent as Sunni Islam. The most significant representation of this movement of Sufism is of Mu'in ad-Din Chishti (1143-1236). The Chishti order spread rapidly and most conversions to Islam in India at the time were due to the order's activities. Their preaching and practice of the love of God appealed to the locals (Schimmel, 1975, p. 345).

History of Islam & Sufism in Pakistan

By 711 CE, the Arabs had established a military presence in Sindh, eventually leading to Islam's spread throughout South Asia. Islamic influence reached its zenith under the Mughals, but from among the early rulers, neither Babur (1483–1530) nor Humayun

(1508-1556) ruled over North India long enough to influence the future of India. It was Humayun's son, Akbar (1542-1605), who established institutions and created conditions during his forty-nine-year-long reign (1556–1605) that enabled his son, Jahangir (1569-1627), grandson, Shah Jahan (1592-1666), and great-grandson, Aurangzeb (1618-1707), to rule over India. One hundred thirty-three years after Akbar's succession to the throne, the empire remained a rock of stability for most South Asians, and Muslim power reached its apogee during those years (Avari, 2012, p. 101).

It was during Akbar's long reign that his top-down liberal religious policies changed India. Initially, he faced various challenges, meanwhile adopting the public face of a traditional Muslim ruler by following daily rituals, supporting many Islamic charities, funding the hajj pilgrims, and visiting the shrines of Sufi saints. Akbar encouraged many theological discussions at his court, listening to various Muslim interpretations of Islamic laws. In 1575, he commissioned a multi-religious *Ibadat khana* (house of worship). After becoming increasingly frustrated with Muslim theologians' arcane rhetoric, he decided to turn the *Ibadat khana* from an Islamic centre to a centre for inter-faith discourse. He took an interest in learning from religious figures from various religions in India. Moreover, Akbar put forward the *Deen-e-Ilahi* (Divine Faith) to merge multiple religions' elements in his empire to reconcile the differences dividing his subjects. Akbar never abandoned Islam, but from the late 1570s onwards, he began to show a distinct coolness towards its more traditionalist varieties (Avari, 2011, p. 112-113).

Following Shah Jahan's (1592, 1666) reign, his son Aurangzeb (1618-1707) ruled over India for nearly 50 years. It was near the end of Shah Jahan's reign when a war of

succession between Dara Shikoh and his brother Aurangzeb began. Dara Shikoh appealed to those who were committed to Akbar's ideologies and policies, and the preferred heir of Shah Jahan. Dara Shikoh was an active member of the *Deen-e-Illahi* circle of scholars, a circle that was abolished upon Aurangzeb taking the throne. Dara Shikoh is often associated with Sufism and juxtaposed to Aurangzeb, who is often presented as conservative. This is not entirely accurate. Aurangzeb, although interest in dismantling cornerstones of Akbar's "intoxicated" path, was a devout supporter of the Naqshbandi Sufi order – a sober, *sharia*-minded order. While his reforms were extensive, his Sober Path[2] was not restricted to legalism and Sufism was still employed to legitimate his style of rule and ascension to power (Richards, 1993, p. 151-155; Pirbhai, 2009, p. 67-116).

The Sufi tradition consists of Sufi orders such as the Chishti, Naqshbandi, Suhrawardi and Qadiri, influenced by the writing of Sufi *pir* (saints) and traces their chain of successive teachers back to Muhammad. In Pakistan, Sufi practice includes a belief in negotiation through saints, the veneration of their *dargah*, and forming bonds with a saint. Many rural Pakistanis associate themselves with saints, and often, women tend to have a higher presence in shrines. Lastly, there is also a diminishing population of *faqirs* that have taken vows of poverty and worship, renouncing all relations and possessions (Ahmed, 2009, p. 142-160).

[2] "Intoxicated" expressions of Sufism, such as annihilation of the self and ecstasy, predominate in Sufi poetry. On the other hand, "sober" Sufism offers methodical, specialized discussions of ritual, behaviour, morality, and presents a *sharia*-oriented practice.

Sufism came to India when Sindh was a province of the Abbasid Caliphate.[3] However, Sufism only became a powerful spiritual force in Indian Islam after consolidating the Ghaznavid[4] power in Punjab (977-1186). Many Sufis made India their home and were also the early missionaries of Islam in India. Mu'in al-din Chishti, the founder of the Chishti Order in India, arrived in India during the 13th century and chose Ajmer as his Chishti hospice – away from Delhi, the capital of the Sultanate. He began the Chishti tradition of devotion in the direction of a life of poverty, intending to dissociate from the ruler and the state, leaving the conservative *ulema* (religious scholars) unopposed and in power in the court (Ahmed, 2009, p. 142).

The Chishti Order abided by the principle of pride in poverty, avoiding the court and nobles' company. They refused to accept gifts, pensions or any other personal favours from the state. Instead, they were allowed two means of livelihood: Cultivating a piece of wasteland just enough to keep their family alive, and the other was to accept unsolicited gifts from disciples such as *waqf* (land endowment). On the other hand, ordinary disciples were permitted to earn an honest living, including state service or service at the court.

[3] The Abbasid Caliphate was the third of the Islamic caliphates, succeeding the Islamic prophet, Muhammad. It was founded by a dynasty descending from Muhammad's uncle, Abbas ibn Abdul-Muttalib (566–653 CE), from whom the dynasty takes its name.

[4] The Ghaznavid dynasty was a Persianate Muslim dynasty of Turkic *mamluk* origin and was founded by Sabuktigin upon his succession to rule of the region of Ghazna after the death of his father-in-law

What is Sufism? The Orientalist conception

In his essay, "Religion, Religions, Religious," J. Z. smith emphasizes how scholars shape the field of study, often using definitions (of religion) to suit their intellectual purposes (Smith, 1998). When confronted with the reality that religion is not a native category to the world, Smith encourages scholars to see this diversity as our study's very object. What do people say about religion? How do they use it to define their world and understand the people before them? When it comes to understanding Sufism, academic interests in the tradition have been extensive. Sufi texts are often translated into English by influential Western scholars such as Annemarie Schimmel and Carl Ernst.

"Religion is not a native category. It is not a first-person term of self-characterization" (Smith, 1998, p. 269). As a category, religion is imposed on an aspect of native culture by an outsider, such as a colonialist or Orientalist. It is believed to be a universally human phenomenon and its characteristics appear natural to the outsider. What is authentic or inauthentic is often defined by the other. This method of defining religion is flawed. The field of religious studies approach examines the works of Orientalist scholars when looking at Sufism. Moreover, religious studies have evolved out of Orientalist scholarship and are vital in understanding how religion is thought.

In Talal Asad's first chapter in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*¸ he establishes that there can be no universal definition of "religion" since all such definitions are themselves the historical product of culturally specific discursive processes. Asad explains that models of religion as an autonomous entity serves the purposes of secular liberals that seek to confine religion and religious liberals who seek to defend it against state power. He then takes on Clifford

Geertz's attempt to define religion[5] which he faults on its stress on symbols, dispositions, and affirmations as it implies a believing individual as a main point of religion. Moreover, Asad states that Geertz is inattentive to terms such as disciplinary practices and systems of institutional authority that have importance in many religions (Asad, 1993, p. 27-54).

The simplest, most prevalent definition of Sufism is that it is a path to knowledge of the self, mediated through a master-disciple teaching relationship. Sufism is experienced through repetitive and rigorous ritual practice to seek to answer questions regarding the self and of God (Rozehnal, 2017). In its earliest forms, Sufism was distinctly broken down into sober and drunken varieties. The difference between the two was conformity to the law versus drunkenness in ecstasy by experiencing the Divine. Both forms of Sufism sought union with God; however, their approaches differed.

The problem with thinking of Sufism as a distinct mystical exercise is that it tends to ignore the popular ways of culturally engaging with Sufism. The term Sufism itself is not organic to the tradition itself. Instead, it comes out of Western scholarship and has become a broad category for non-traditional practice (Ernst, 1997, p. 14-26; Suvorova, 204, p. 1-34). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how Sufism, as we know it came into formation and why. To do so, the relationship between Orientalism and Sufism must be examined as initial studies of Sufism in South Asia went through the valorization – and simultaneous defamation – of the tradition for their purpose.

[5] Geertz argued that religion should be studied as a symbolic system in terms of which believers interpret the world and live their lives. These symbols act to establish power, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and mitvations in people.

Orientalism, as stated by Edward Said, is defined as the acceptance in the West of "the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny and so on" (Said, 1994, p. 2-3). Orientalism was the study of the East, written to subjectify and dominate by agents of the West. It provided a rationalization for European colonialism based on a self-serving history in which the West constructed the East as significantly different, uncivilized, and inferior; therefore, in need of Western intervention or rescue. The Orient (the East) has aided in defining the Occident (the West) as its "contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (Said, 1994, p. 1-2). It is an essential part of European material civilization and culture, representing that part culturally and ideologically as a mode of discourse supporting "institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, and even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" (Said, 1994, p. 1-2).

Said argues that the Orient's study provided Western scholars with power over the subject they studied. Michel Foucault – whom Said draws inspiration from – also claimed that power is based on knowledge and makes use of knowledge. On the other hand, power reproduces knowledge by shaping it. To Foucault, knowledge is not *just* knowledge; it is only considered knowledge if it has relevance to a dominant discourse in a given social structure. One must speak the concepts relevant in the group and express what the group says to gain popularity. Gaining the upper hand in the group occurs when there is an unequal distribution of dominant discourses. In the case of South Asia, Western scholars

placed themselves in a position of power through knowledge of the East, using knowledge to rule (Said, 1994).

The very concept of Sufism is always contested among Muslims and non-Muslims. What is referred to as Sufism today was not of global or European interest before modern times. Only in the past two centuries did Europe turn its attention to the world's religions as a subject that is worth investigating. Colonial administrators believed that knowing about the "native" religions was useful in exercising power over them. This scholarship, referred to as Orientalist, was carried out by specialists in the East's languages and cultures. directly or indirectly advancing the colonial project. The comparison between internal and external understandings of Sufism led to inconsistencies. Orientalist scholarship focused on the exoticism, peculiarity and divergence of the mystical east (Ernst, 2002, p. 11-26).

The terms *faqir* and *dervish* encapsulate early European attitudes about today's Sufism. Both words have similar meanings: *faqir* is Arabic for "poor man," and *dervish* is the Persian equivalent. The 16th-century descriptions of *dervishes* being equivalent to Catholic monks or friars were enough for Protestants to convict the *dervishes* of gross religious error. These groups became known as the dancing, whirling, and howling *dervishes* and, in the absence of context or explanation, Europeans viewed them as typically exotic Oriental customs. However, the term faqir was more complicated in that the Mughal Empire in India used it to describe non-Muslim ascetics, such as yogis, along with Sufi ascetics. The terminology was then inherited by the British when they conquered most of India. In contrast to outsider definitions, the original context of *dervish* and *faqir* signified spiritual poverty, being poor to God, and being dependent on God. Poverty was, for the

Sufis, a way to turn away from the world and its distractions and instead focusing on Divine reality (Ernst, 1997, p. 23-39).

In Arabic and Persian, there are countless terms for Muslim mystics with distinct – sometimes conflicting – meanings, all of which are absorbed by the singular English word Sufism, which has now become the standard. The word Sufi's historical origin is well established, derived from the Arabic word for wool (*soof*), used in the garments worn by ascetics in the Near East for centuries. The creation of the term Sufi in its prescriptive sense was a 4th century Hijri achievement. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami is one of the leading formulators of this concept. Sulami constructed a historical interpretation of the Sufis as the prophets' heirs and followers, drawing a portrait of Muslim spirituality and mysticism that stretched over the previous three centuries. He acknowledged that the term Sufi did not originate at Muhammad's time but came into existence later, reflecting the increasing specialization of Muslim religious vocations (Ernst, 1997, p. 14-26; Knysh, 2017, p.28-31).

Internal understandings of what Sufism might differ. However, most can agree that Sufism is concerned with putting forth an effort to analyze the way of God. Through practices such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and *sama*[6] (a ceremony performed as *dhikr*, which means "listening"), it is understood that one does not have to wait for the next world

[6] *Sama* is a Sufi ceremony performed as dhikr. *Sama* means "listening", while dhikr means "remembrance". These rituals often include singing, playing instruments, dancing, recitation of poetry and prayers, wearing symbolic attire, and other rituals.

to see God. Instead, one can experience the presence of God through the ecstasy felt by *dhikr* and with love for God. Although numerous Sufi orders exist, they developed out of a shared appreciation for the love for God. The simplest definition of Sufism may be that it is a path to knowledge of the self that is mediated through a master-disciple teaching relationship and experienced through routinized and rigorous ritual practice. It seeks to answer questions regarding the self and of God (Rozehnal, 2017).

Although Sufism's exact origins are disputed, some state that it is the inner dimension of the teachings of Muhammad. The term Sufi itself came into existence later, but the spiritual practice of Islam existed long before. The introduction of the element of love into Sufism, changing it from asceticism into mysticism, is ascribed to Rabiah Al-Adawiyah (713-801 CE), who formulated the idea of a love for God that was unconditional – without hope for paradise or fear of hell (Anjum, n.d., p. 25-26). The golden age of Sufism came later, at the end of the Abbasid caliphate and invasion of Mongols into the East. The spread of Islam and Sufism to South Asia took a different approach.

In South Asia, Islam itself was spread to appeal to the natives through their practices. Sufism's arrival from the West took its form of ritual practices and beliefs. Rather than focusing on structured *sama* such as the Mevlevi *sama*, Sufi practices by the Chishtis in India were focused on the vernacular, folk traditions, and local practices such as Bhakti. With less of an emphasis on rules of ritual, it was and still is qawwali performances that dominate Sufi gatherings, free to express their passion for God how they deem appropriate. South Asian Sufism is distinct from Sufism in the Arab world. It is not merely the

combination of Arab and indigenous practices but instead practices often expressed through rituals such as qawwali.

Inner and outer dimensions in Islam

> "One day we were sitting in the company of Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) when there appeared before us a man dressed in pure white clothes, his hair extraordinarily black. There were no signs of travel on him. None amongst us recognized him. At last, he sat with the Apostle (peace be upon him). He knelt before him placed his palms on his thighs and said: Muhammad, inform me about al-Islam. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: Al-Islam implies that you testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and you establish prayer, pay Zakat, observe the fast of Ramadan, and perform pilgrimage to the (House) if you are solvent enough (to bear the expense of) the journey. He (the inquirer) said: You have told the truth. He (Umar ibn al-Khattab) said: It amazed us that he would put the question and then he would himself verify the truth. He (the inquirer) said: Inform me about Iman (faith). He (the Holy Prophet) replied: That you affirm your faith in Allah, in His angels, in His Books, in His Apostles, in the Day of Judgment, and you affirm your faith in the Divine Decree about good and evil. He (the inquirer) said: You have told the truth. He (the inquirer) again said: Inform me about al-Ihsan (performance of good deeds). He (the Holy Prophet) said: That you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, for though you don't see Him, He, verily, sees you […]"
> - Muslim ibn Al-Hajjaj

This hadith, commonly referred to as the Hadith of Gabriel, has been narrated by Muslim ibn Al-Hajjaj. It is referred to as such because it is believed that Gabriel was the man "dressed in pure white". It discusses concepts such as *islam* (submission), *iman* (faith), and *ihsan* (spiritual excellence). The hadith also discusses *qiyamah* (the day of judgement); however, that is not relevant to this discussion. What is pertinent to discuss is the relevance of *islam*, *imam*, and *ihsan* to the *sharia* and the *tariqa* (spiritual path) in Islam.

The *sharia* and the *tariqa* characterize the inner and outer dimensions of Islam. The *tariqa* focuses more on an inwards reflection and is the spiritual dimension of Islam,

forced into the private or personal sphere over time. *Tariqa* is an order of Sufism or a concept for the mystical teachings and practices that aim to seek the "ultimate truth." This is something Parveen is interested in practicing as a Sufi herself. While she is interested in Islam's inner dimension, the individual I will compare her to further on – Farhat Hashmi – is concerned with the outer dimension of Islam – *sharia* (Prinz, 2004). When it comes to *sharia,* it is often associated with the term "law" and can be misleading in this context as "law" – in English – "implies a set of rules of human origin collected together in the legal system of the state" (Herbert, 2019).

The *sharia* deals with many aspects of public and private life, including religious rituals and family life. Only some parts of the *sharia* can be described as "law" whereas others are better understood as conduct which tend to be interpreted by jurists. Orientalist understandings of *sharia* claim that it is the Divine law, given to people so they may live according to God's will. This is not true. Scholars such as Hallaq have shown that much of Islamic law is not found in the Qur'an or the *hadith* but in *fiqh* (jurisprudence), developed through human reasoning (Hallaq, 2009, p. 5-30).

The spiritual path of union with God is the second stage – *sharia* being the first – that rises from a unified life within God's will. Not all individuals are capable of the spiritual path that leads to this mystical union with God, but all can unify their lives under God's will. The most mundane of activities become a form of worship when they are done in fulfillment of God's will. This leads the believer to integrated religious life experience, including work as much as worship. All activities become one unified expression of the Divine will, and in submission, it unifies the believer's life. The law is

not a comparative addition to the religious agenda but is inherent in its formulation because it is developed around understanding obedience to God (Prinz, 2004, p. 173).

The *tariqa* is defined as "the path of approach to the innermost truth of revelation; the inner dimension of the *sharia*." *Tariqa* is the spiritual path in Islam; however, it is not spiritual in the Western sense. Instead, the use of the term spiritual is ambiguous in an Islamic context. It is understood as an inherent and inseparable expression of the outer dimension of the *sharia*. The *tariqa* is a journey through the *sharia* and with the *sharia*, to turn away from the world and turn to God (Prinz, 2004, p. 174).

The relationship between *sharia* and *tariqa* has often been compared to a wheel. The *sharia* is the rim of the wheel from which the spokes are directed into the center. The spokes are the *tariqa*, which connects the hub with the rim and the rim with the hub, creating the path. The wheel's hub is the *haqiqa* (the Truth), generating spokes and a rim, *tariqa* and *sharia*. The wheel is only complete and functional if all its parts are intact, linked, and working together.

It is the state of being that makes the believer's religious expression in Islam a holistic expression, rather than a sacred act in a dualistic sense of separation between action and being. The relationship is similarly holistic between *islam* (submission), *iman* (faith), and *ihsan* (virtue). While the religion itself is referred to as Islam, it is only through the living practice of *iman* and *ihsan* that it is a religion in the Islamic sense, as explained in the *hadith* mentioned at the start of this chapter. This state of being that signifies existing in conformity with the *haqiqa* is also realizing the *haqiqa* in oneself. This realization can only be achieved through doctrine and spiritual virtues, the two indispensable elements of the *tariqa*.

Heavenly ornaments and pious women

A useful way of understanding the difference between *sharia* and *tariqa* here is to compare women who belong to these categories – Abida Parveen and Farhat Hashmi. Before any comparison can be done between the two categories regarding the two women mentioned above, an important question must first be answered. What is expected of a pious woman? For this thesis, the woman that is of concern is Abida Parveen. In contrast to her is Farhat Hashmi, a female religious scholar. Where do the two then stand in terms of this question? Are they similar to each other or at opposite ends of the spectrum? Lastly, is there anything radical about Hashmi?

Bihishti Zewar – translating to heavenly ornaments in English – was written by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (1864-1943), who was a leader of the Deobandi reform movement that formed in north India in the late nineteenth century. The religious leaders at the center of the Deobandi movement believed that the world they lived in was skewed. They set out to reform the world through religious leaders' education, preaching and teaching public debate, and countless pamphlets and books. The *Bihishti Zewar* was meant to provide primary education for what they described as a respectable Muslim woman. The book quickly became a typical gift for Muslim brides, entering their husband's homes with the Qur'an in one hand and the *Bihishti Zewar* in the other (Thanvi & Metcalf, 1990, p. 1). This book is an example of what some scholars believe is a pious – or good – Muslim woman.

The book represents significant changes in the themes and emphases in Muslim religious life in recent times. It illustrates a new concern for ensuring the Muslim women

are also educated about Islam, departing from the view that only expected women to be familiar with the most basic teachings. Women were not regarded as the guardians of virtue and tradition. Instead, it was men in public settings such as mosques, courts, schools, and Sufi hospices, that preserved and spread the tradition. Therefore, the book itself is a part of an important cultural transformation (Thanvi & Metcalf, 1990, p. 1-3).

Thanawi argues that for women to act the way they should, they must be instructed. Women are essentially the same as men, "neither endowed with a special nature for spiritual or moral virtue nor handicapped in any way by limitations of intellect or character" (Thanvi & Metcalf, 1990, p. 2). The does not elaborate on physiological or intellectual differences between women and men. Instead, it poses no need for distinctive literature for women and that they are better off reading the same Arabic text that men do, taking Muhammad as their model (Thanvi & Metcalf, 1990, p. 2).

Thanawi's emphasis on women's education is not selfless. According to him, it is vital to educate women as they are co-partners in a marriage. They are mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives, responsible for the next generation. If women receive an Islamic education, they will educate their children better, resulting in a generation with a stronger faith. Metcalf interprets Thanawi's understanding of women's roles as progressive, so long as Western standards do not measure them, although she deems him to be regressive overall (Thanvi, & Metcalf, 1990). Thanawi may be progressive by the standards of his geography but for the benefit of God, not women. Instead, he believes there is honour in women's subjugation, which is why women must learn to conduct themselves.

The objective of the Deobandi reform – and this book – was to create a society where people knew their place, fulfilled their responsibilities, and received their dues. According to Thanawi, the "correct" hierarchy is the subordination of women to their family's men. He states that women can exercise moral leadership, create social alliances, and manage economic resources. Historically, Islamic discourse regarding women has been based on the *sharia* and sustained by codes of honour and shame internalized by women and men. Thanawi attempts to articulate what he believes are the *sharia*'s correct teachings in terms of specific local contexts. He also insists that adultery extends beyond actual sexual relations, including thought, sight, hearing, and touch. Jurists demanded that women be secluded to the point that their voices and jewelry were not to be heard. To keep sexuality in check, women's control has been done by a division of space, removing women from the public space, including mosques (Thanvi, & Metcalf, 1990, p. 3-6). Women have not only been marginalized but also deemed ignorant of knowledge, which is something Thanawi believes his book brings about changes, bringing women into the "high standard of Islamic conformity that had been the purview of educated religious men" (Thanvi, & Metcalf, 1990, p. 7).

Female representations of *sharia* and *tariqa*

Abida Parveen

To experience Parveen's singing, with her overwhelming presence, is to enter a space of blurred gender identification. Her appearance on stage, with her unruly mop of curls adorning her bare face, introduces audiences to the beauty and power of devotional music. For those listening for the first time, her androgynous presentation of herself can

throw the listener off guard because it is so uncommon for women to appear this way. Her music celebrates Divine love's quest through earthly metaphors of desire in which male singers perform using feminine language. On the contrary, Parveen takes on traditional male forms and feminizes them. Since she was trained within the male tradition and by male performers, her style is exceptional (Abbas, 2002).

By using *dohra* or bait – short two-line verses – within her narrative's main body, Parveen possesses a uniquely male style that no other woman in Sindh, if not Pakistan, has (Abbas, 2002). In her performance of "*Jab Se Tune Mujhe Deewana Bana Rakha Hai*," the lyrics she sings are the embodiment of both the male madman and the female beggar. Here, the beggar and the madman are interchangeable as both the desirable subject and object of desire, male and female. Therefore, in both her appearance, style of singing, and choice of material, Parveen embodies the blurring of gender and class hierarchies.

It does not take much to deduce that Parveen does not resemble the "typical" woman. This does not mean that she is less of a woman merely because she is not as "feminine." The assumption that Parveen ought to appear "feminine" no longer holds when the notion that her identity is an extension of her sexual body is deconstructed. By separating her biological sex and her gender, Parveen is no longer dependent on being perceived as essentially feminine – or masculine (Butler, 1999). Instead, she can disregard such norms and redirect attention toward her performance. It is not that it does not matter whether she is female or male, but it is not what she wishes to direct attention

to. Moreover, blurring her gender in this manner disrupts the male-dominated space she is in.

Reflecting upon male singers embracing female voices through the practice of falsetto as well as female Sufi singers' response to issues of gendered identity, Parveen – the leading contemporary female voice of qawwali in Pakistan – believes God is the centre of everything. In an interview with The Guardian, Parveen stated: “The concept of being a man or a woman doesn’t cross my mind. I’m neither on stage, I’m a vehicle on stage for passion” (Iqbal, 2013). She believes that being a male or female is not even part of the conversation because everything comes back to God. Moreover, God does not have a fixed gender and is often referred to with gender-neutral terms. If Parveen is not a man or a woman on stage, then what is she? A negation of her gender concerning her existence on stage is something profound. By making such a statement, she considers herself merely the medium through which the words come – a vehicle. As a Sufi, being a “vehicle for passion” is a transcendent experience, creating a trance through performance. Allowing herself to be such a vehicle may even be a surrendering of her agency. However, this is separate from her life off stage, where she is a woman, mother, and wife – or widow – and yet, defies norms.

The position of women in qawwali is precisely why Parveen's existence is so significant. Not only is she a female Sufi singer, but she is a female qawwal that comes from a family of male qawwals. She was chosen by her father over her brothers to be trained by men in a male-style of singing, making her singing style unique. Moreover, she is accepted as an equal performer at religious gatherings such as an *urs* or a *dargah*. In a

patriarchal society and genre where men are protected by societal norms, Parveen is not decentered in how most women are – at least when it comes to qawwali. Why is Parveen accepted in society, given the norms she subverts? How is it that religious leaders that frown upon women being in the public eye do not worry about her? Both these questions can be answered through Butler and Mahmood's theories.

Parveen – off stage – fulfills the societal requirements of what it means to be a woman. She has taken part in the custom of marriage and has born three children. Nonetheless, she is not entirely a conventional woman. Firstly, she is not restricted to the home's private walls, as Weiss suggests most women of that society are. Although she is not part of a workforce, she is a musical icon, so much so that her husband chose to retire from Radio Pakistan to help further her musical career. Secondly, Parveen deliberately eschews femininity on and off stage. One can assume that she maintains her androgynous persona off stage because it is so deliberate and in line with her Sufi beliefs. As she progresses through her career in qawwali, with age and her husband's loss, she begins to blur her gender increasingly.

Throughout her career, Parveen chooses to change a few aspects of her physical appearance. These changes are most apparent in her most recent period – Coke Studio Pakistan. In the earlier stages of her career, Parveen dresses quite differently. She is wearing the same style of clothing that is monochromatic; however, her clothes attract some attention in that they are lustrous. As she ages – and after the loss of her husband – her clothes no longer are lustrous, and instead, she opts for subtler colours. Not only are her clothes loose-fitting, but they are unisex or androgynous, including long tunics and suit

jackets. Such a choice in clothing is deliberate, defining her existence with her own rules, finding a sense of agency in doing so.

Another notable change that Parveen brings about in her physical appearance is her hair and makeup. During the earlier stages of her career, Parveen styles her hair short, and it is well kept. Additionally, Parveen also applies makeup when in the public eye. Whether it be on stage or in an interview, she is seen wearing a small amount of makeup to display her femininity. As she progresses later into her musical career, it appears that Parveen deliberately begins to reduce such practices and instead chooses to eschew her femininity. Whether or not such an eschewing of femininity is due to her widowhood, age, or Sufi beliefs is uncertain. What is apparent is that there is an intentional negation of gender so that attention may be directed towards the passion rather than the vehicle. Both her use of makeup and lack thereof are very deliberate, both requiring intent and effort.

Parveen's demeanour is also incredibly unique and perhaps even conflicting with her physical appearance. For one, when singing, her voice is more "masculine," occasionally confused for a man for first-time listeners, and her behaviour is also more expressive. However, off stage, Parveen is exuberant, has a softer voice, and is very shy. Although she negates her gender on stage and continues to dress the same on and off stage, Parveen performs most, but not all, female gender norms.

She maintains her appearance off stage but seems to perform according to her assigned gender role due to her Sufi beliefs. A lack of materialistic interest and a general lack of interest in vanity is not uncommon for Sufis, especially the former. Therefore, it seems logical that she would continue to dress the same way. It even makes sense that

Parveen would dress more androgynously because she also performs qawwali, which is highly androcentric in terms of performers. However, off stage, Parveen does not feel the need to behave the way she does on stage and perhaps that is why she is accepted by society compared to someone who continuously always negates their gender through clothes and behaviour. Her practice of Sufi beliefs and piety shield her from critique as she acts in the name of religion, a celebrated notion.

Another way of looking at Parveen's negation of her gender is that she is not her gender; instead, she is in a perpetual state of performing her gender. She is not a woman or a man. She is merely in the state of doing as there is no stable or coherent gender identity. Parveen's argument that she is neither woman nor man supports Butler's theory that gender is fluid and endless. Over time, Parveen continues to change how she performs her gender, displaying more subversive behaviour and proving that gender is not limited to one or the other. Although Parveen chooses to subvert many gender norms and undo normative conceptions of gendered life by performing the other, she does not entirely remove herself from the social and cultural structures of femininity, nor can she. While she cannot completely remove herself from such ideologies, she still works within them to challenge such ideologies.

Oddly, Parveen's existence and her subversion of gender norms are not frowned upon in Pakistan or across the globe because of the space in which she disrupts said norms. Although her subversion of femininity comes as a surprise to those listening for the first time, she is a celebrated singer. Many singers aspire to sound like Parveen – Natasha Baig being a prime example – but most do not aspire to match her physical

appearance. When it comes to most celebrities, most admirers aspire to be like them or to be with them. Circumventing such "requirements" of fame, Parveen redirects attention to her performance and the words she sings.

For Butler, challenging the "hierarchical binarism that sustains heteronormativity" through subversion is the only path to agency (Butler, 1999, p. 185). Scholars such as Mahmood would argue that performing piety does give the female subject a form of agency (Mahmood, 2004). It becomes exceedingly difficult to argue, in a predominantly Muslim society that integrates religiosity into mundane life such as Pakistan, that piety should be discouraged. This provides the individual with a sense of agency. Parveen, however, does both – piety and subversion.

Traditionally, qawwali performed at a *dargah*, live concert, or *urs* requires the individual or group to be in the spotlight. Their voice must be loud enough to be heard across the entire venue and heavy enough to have such a powerful effect on the audience. Moreover, the *mohri* – who is surrounded by other singers – is the center of all the attention. The entire group participates in creating a rhythm and ecstasy state for the listeners, including raising their voices when singing, flamboyant handclapping, and swaying to the performance. Reaching the point of ecstasy allows the performer(s) to create a sort of trance. Such features of qawwali are all indicative of male domination in that it is only socially acceptable for men to behave in this manner. It is not "feminine," so to speak. Abida Parveen gets away with this to a certain extent (Qureshi, 1986).

Typically, blurring gender the way Parveen does would result in ostracization from society. This is not to say that she faces no consequences, but that she is popular

despite them. Similar to Mahmood's ethnography on the women in the Islamic revival movement, Parveen can use piety to her advantage. Whether or not she is specifically interested in challenging patriarchal structures is unclear. She may be focused on what her gender blurring does for her as a Sufi; however, it also results in challenging patriarchal structures. Her piety gives her agency because it goes unquestioned and is preferred in Pakistani society the way secular practices are.

Parveen's display of femininity, or lack of it, is unique and ever-changing as gender is non-binary and exists on a spectrum; it is near impossible for her to adhere to all gender norms. Instead, she performs some and chooses to ignore others deliberately. Parveen's performance of her gender allows her to fit into her male-dominated space of qawwali with ease. Had she attempted to perform qawwali while appearing "feminine," she may not have the same success due to the space in which she performs.

In Sufi practice, many Sufis tend to focus on the love of God rather than worldly matters, and so, adorning oneself is often left behind. Where Sufism is concerned, Parveen is not doing anything unique; she is merely taking her practices seriously. Although she does not necessarily challenge heteronormativity per se, she does challenge social norms. There is still some level of subversive behaviour at play, given that she belongs to a male-dominated genre, to begin with. It is only when separating her from qawwali that her behaviour is genuinely subversive to society.

Although Parveen's existence in qawwali and overall Sufi music goes unquestioned, people rarely aspire to be like her. Parveen's acceptance in society and her fame do not result in individuals seeking to mimic her appearance. Many singers do

attempt to sing like Parveen or are honoured when their voices are compared with hers. It is uncommon to see anyone dressing similar to her. This is perhaps because, for women, behaving anything different than feminine can be consequential. Femininity itself can result in poor consequences, but lack of it is guaranteed to have some sort of pushback. Many women do not have the privilege that Parveen does of belonging to a traditional Sufi – or upper-class – family.

Farhat Hashmi

Due to her Sufi beliefs and practices, it can be said that Parveen follows – and perhaps even represents – the *tariqa*. To get a sense of how subversive she is, it would help pit her against another "piety celebrity" such as Farhat Hashmi. Hashmi adheres to *sharia* in her practices and preaching and is a preferred "role model" by elders for Muslim women and girls – especially in the diaspora. Although Parveen and Hashmi both practice a form of piety, Hashmi's piety is more appealing to the diaspora attempting to hold on to their identities. By using Hashmi as a model for a "good woman," the homeland is portrayed in a specific manner. It is easier to build a specific understanding of Pakistan in the minds of diasporic youth than answering questions about Pakistan's complex identity, where individuals such as Parveen reside.

Hashmi received her initial religious education from her father – Abdur-Rehman Hashmi – who, along with her mother, was an active member of the religio-political organization, the Jam'at-i-Islami. Hashmi herself was involved in the student wing of the Jama'at while pursuing her Masters in Arabic from Punjab University in Lahore. After spending several years teaching at the International Islamic University in Islamabad, both

she and her husband, Idrees Zubair, left for Glasgow, Scotland, where they earned their Ph.D. degrees in Islamic Studies with a specialization in *hadith* sciences. She rejoined the International Islamic University but soon left it and established Al-Huda, which has now become an international institute (Ahmad, 2013, p. 365).

Al-Huda International is a Pakistan-based Sunni Muslim women's organization, founded in the 1990s, working to bring about social reform through women's religious education. Created and led by Hashmi, Al-Huda approaches religious interpretation and praxis in a way that challenges that of the male *ulema* who have historically exercised a monopoly over the production and dissemination of religious knowledge in Pakistan. Al-Huda advances a piety model that casts women as moral, religious actors anchored in, but not confined to, their domestic roles and invested in building religiously educated families and communities. The group has gained unprecedented popularity among urban Pakistani women, influencing the ways that women practice and participate in religious discourse in everyday life (Ahmad, 2013, p. 363).

Hashmi states that she is not a product of the *madrassas* (religious schools). Instead, she comes from an academic background and has studied abroad. According to her, *ulema* do not believe the masses can understand the Qur'an – only *ulema* can understand it. Furthermore, *ulema* cannot accept that a woman could understand, interpret, and teach the Qur'an and Hashmi's purpose is to debunk such a myth (Shaikh, 2013, p. 63). The institute – and social movement – is unique in that it has made progress in the middle and upper classes of urban Pakistan. (Ahmad, 2013, p. 363).

She makes it clear that her goal is to re-educate women who, according to her, have historically been particularly ignorant of religious matters. She believes that educating women will lead to religiously educated children, households, and communities because women are thought to be the family's cornerstones. Hashmi's discourses resonate with early modern Muslim reformers — particularly around their interest in defining an appropriate role for Muslim women in a modernizing world. Although Hashmi may have a "revolutionary" impact on individual women's consciousness, her model for ideal Muslim womanhood is linked to nation-building processes, both draws on and expands a discourse articulated by its reformist forebears more than a century ago (Shaikh, 2013, p. 69).

Hashmi states in an interview:

> "My point of view is that a woman's primary responsibility is her home after she has fulfilled that it is up to her to go into whatever field suits her best. I have no agenda to take away women's rights. *Al-Huda* holds evening classes, especially for working women. But, peace in the home depends on the woman, and that aspect should not be ignored at the cost of working outside the home. A woman's role as a home-maker should not be sacrificed at the altar of ambition." (Ibrahim, 2001; Shaikh, 2013, p. 71-72).

Although she may appear supposedly "radical" or new in terms of what she preaches and her overall existence, she is not much different from what already exists. She may be more open to the idea of women existing in public spaces, such as the workplace, but she still prioritizes the domestic – private – space, stating that the home should be the priority for a woman. Only after she has fulfilled her duty towards her

home, her husband, and children should she venture into the workplace. Such ideologies are not much different from what Thanawi preached. He, too, believed that women ought to be educated about Islam in the same manner as men. The reason behind this was so that the woman may better educate her children. The only difference between Hashmi and other *ulema* is that she is a female, interested only in educating Muslim women on Islam and the *sharia*.

Parveen then stands in contrast to Hashmi in many ways, although they both hold religious beliefs of some sort. While Hashmi believes in practicing her faith through the *sharia,* Parveen takes on a more spiritual dimension by adhering to the *tariqa*. Moreover, Parveen also subverts certain gender norms through her adherence to Sufi practices. While Hashmi may seem like a revolutionary figure in her field, she is not. She preaches the same content to a similar group of people. What is different is that she is a female Islamic scholar and directs her attention solely towards women's Islamic education. Moreover, Hashmi occupies space in the public realm, drawing attention to herself. The fact that she conforms to normative religious practices allows her the freedom to begin with.

Hashmi believes women should also have access to the same knowledge that men do and ensures she directs her attention solely towards this mission. However, her beliefs are still normative regardless of her gender. Hashmi would most likely view Parveen's existence as a violation of what the "real" Islam ought to be like. For Hashmi, regardless of Parveen's profoundly spiritual and religious practices, she would be considered "too liberal" for Hashmi's liking – as most Sufis are thought to be. On the other hand, Parveen

would view Hashmi with indifference as she is more concerned with her relationship with God.

Hashmi's religious practices may be more conservative than an average Pakistani woman, but they are not strange. She does choose to adhere to more conservative practices and has a specific definition of what a "good" woman is, but they still fall in line with hegemonic ideas of gender identities. Hashmi may not discourage women from adorning themselves, but, according to her, this should only be done within the *chaar deewari* (four walls). "Good" femininity is reserved for the private realm, but this is not to say a woman cannot be in public. Instead, in public, a woman must be in *purdah* (veil) and behave accordingly.

Parveen and Hashmi are both comparable from within their traditions. Nevertheless, outside the traditions, there is also something to be said, particularly based on Butler's theory on agency. Although her theory works well for gender performativity, it falls a bit short concerning agency and subversion. Both Parveen and Hashmi's sense of agency is derived from within their respective traditions, which fall in line with Mahmood's theory on agency. Both women demonstrate what Mahmood states in her work: Women can claim agency from within by resisting traditions and denying men the ability to assert their agency by choosing how they practice their traditions and gender. Parveen and Hashmi do indeed claim their agency by pushing the boundaries set by men and, in turn, find their place in a world that would typically disapprove of the two.

Chapter Three: Gender and Sufism in Pakistan

Your love has made me dance to a fast beat!
Your love has taken aide within my heat!
This cup of poison I drank all by myself.
Come, come, O physician, or else I breathe my last!
Your love has made me dance to a fast beat!

(Bulleh Shah, "*Come O Physician*") (Bullhe, Puri, & Shangari, 1995, p. 191)

This beautiful (*Kafi*) poem by Bulleh Shah (1680-1757) highlights many of the key themes in this thesis, such as gender roles, love, and the ways in which Sufism is married to music and dance. The apocryphal story behind this poem is that Syed Abdullah Shah Qadri's (Bulleh) master, Inayat Shah (1643-1728), was annoyed with him. When Bulleh failed to pacify his master by all other means, he put on the clothes of a woman dancer and began to dance. When Inayat Shah laid eyes on Bulleh dancing, he chuckled, and his resentment vanished. Bulleh Shah danced publicly for him, singing that his love has compelled him to dance (Bullhe, Puri, & Shaṅgārī, 1995, p. 191).

Bulleh Shah is considered one of the greatest mystic poets of the Punjabi language and geographic regions that spans India and Pakistan. Pakistanis readily recognize his verse and the shorthand for his name, just Bulleh, is instantly recognizable. Most Pakistanis could recite at least a verse from his poetry. Even today, famous Pakistani singers such as Hadiqa Kiani and Mekaal Hasan Band have performed modern renditions of his poetry. However, information on his life is vague. Most historians agree that he was born to a Syed[7] family in Uch Sharif, Punjab, and lived between 1680 and 1758. A Mughal-era Punjabi Islamic philosopher and Sufi poet, Bulleh Shah, was equally popular among all communities, often

[7] Syed is an honorific title signifying people accepted as descendants of Muhammad through his grandsons, Hasan and Hussain.

referred to by edifying titles such as "The Sheikh of Both the Worlds." His first spiritual teacher was Inayat Shah Qadri (1643-1728), a Sufi of Lahore, also known as *Pir Dastgir*. He belonged to the Arain[8] caste and was also referred to as Inayat Shah Lahori, owing to his residence in Lahore (Bullhe, Puri, & Shaṅgārī, 1995, p. 1-21).

I had watched to Parveen's performances of this poem many times and was always taken aback by its impact. When I read this poem, I began to understand the depth of the words. At first glance, it does appear to be a homoromantic poem filled with an ever-consuming love. To many unfamiliar with Sufi poetry and its metaphors, this poem may be horrifying. It would seem that Bulleh Shah is writing about how his love for his master has caused him to dance, his willingness to drink poison for Inayat Shah, and this sort of drunkenness that consumes him. On the surface, none of these actions would appeal to a conservative Muslim. In school, we were taught that Islam forbids all three – homosexuality, suicide, and alcohol consumption. This poem poses a challenge by using the three metaphors for Divine love, which is quite perplexing and worth examining. Below is my analysis of the poem.

The verses I cite above are perhaps the most significant in the poem. Bulleh Shah does not say that he danced because of Shah Inayat's love. Instead, he says that Shah Inayat's love *made* him dance, that it was beyond his control and that he had to dance because the love consumed him. This is perhaps the easiest way in which the word *nachaya*

[8] Arain are a large Punjabi agricultural tribe with strong political identity and organisation, found mainly in Punjab – both India and Pakistan – and parts of Sindh.

can be translated from Punjabi. Moreover, it could be said that Shah Inayat's love *danced* Bulleh Shah, that he was so overcome with love that his body began to dance on its own.

There is no exact translation of the word that does the word *nachaya* justice. The word *nachaya* also invokes the idea of *sama* and the drunken nature of Sufi dance, filled with a desire to be united with the Divine. *Sama* is a means of meditating on God through music and dance, bringing out one's love for God, purifying the soul, and finding God. The goal is to reach a trance-like state of ecstasy but also "spiritual drunkenness." Some Sufis are *literally* drunk, whereas others use drunkenness as a metaphor for Divine love and the ecstasy of experiencing such love.

Bulleh Shah then says that falling in love with Shah Inayat was like taking a sip of poison. To someone who is not a Sufi, this would make it seem like Shah Inayat's love was toxic. This love and this poem are not just directed towards Shah Inayat but also God. However, here the poison is regarded as desirable as death itself is desirable to a Sufi in the literal sense and metaphorically. Not only is there a desire to die so that one can meet one's creator, but there is also a constant effort towards killing one's ego and preparing themselves for the next life instead of getting caught up in the distractions of this world. Therefore, this poisonous love is what Sufis, like Bulleh Shah, seek their entire lives. Not only is his love "like taking a sip of poison," but he is also Bulleh Shah's healer.

He then writes further, saying, "The sun has set, the reddish tinge of dusk lingers; I shall be a sacrifice to you if your face again appears before me. Forgive me, that I did not go with thee". The sun here signifies Bulleh Shah's master, Shah Inayat, and, therefore, the setting sun is the departure or absence of his master. Later, Bulleh Shah says, "Oh, Bulleh,

the Lord has brought me to the door of Inayat, who has given me garments green and red, to wear." These bright colours are indicative of the spiritual bliss Bulleh Shah has obtained through the grace of his master, Shah Inayat. The colours also signify the dress of a bride who, in this case, is Bulleh Shah, presenting himself to his master. However, this is not merely symbolic as the story says that Bulleh Shah puts on the garb of a female dancer and dances for his master (Bulleh, Puri, & Shaṅgārī, 1995).

Another point regarding this poem is that both the poet and the subject are male. Moreover, Shah Inayat is the beloved whom Bulleh Shah dances for. It is odd that a man is dancing and that too, for another man. Moreover, in South Asian Sufi poetry, God – or the Sufi master – is written as the disciple's beloved. The beloved tends to be written as male, whereas the lover assumes female characteristics to be more accessible to those foreign to the concept of Divine love. Although it is not as evident in this poem, it is still understood that Bulleh Shah takes on a more feminine role by learning how to dance for his master and confessing his love. Such gendered play is often used in vernacular Sufi poetry. The play on gender in this poem and others can only make sense when contextualized within what Pakistani gender constructions are.

Gender roles in Pakistan

For myself, any trip to Pakistan begins with one particularly important question: Do I have the right type of clothes for a visit? If not, there is a rush to buy longer, looser, and weather-appropriate clothes. Only a pair or two of jeans are tossed into the mix because, primarily, I will be wearing the clothes that I have bought or *shalwar kameez* that my grandmother has had stitched for me before my arrival. Partially because the heat is

unforgiving in the summer months, but mostly because of traditions, I tend not to wear any makeup or dress *too* nicely. It is also because I fear what I may face as a woman when I step out of my grandmother's house to go to the market.

From stares to eve-teasing[9] to "accidentally" brushing against a woman in the market, women's existence in the public space, although common, is still policed or restricted. Being from abroad and, therefore, unfamiliar with navigating life in Pakistan the way a native would, I only leave the house when accompanied by an elder, typically a male or my grandmother herself, as she is the family's matriarch. When I go out, I am cognizant of my surroundings at all times – something I tend to take for granted when in Canada. Predatory acts such as eve-teasing are often used, not in hopes that it may woo the woman – as seen in films and dramas in South Asia. Instead, such acts are rampant in society because they are a means to control women and remind those that dare to step out into the public sphere that this sphere belongs to men.

If the public sphere supposedly "belongs" to men, then the private sphere – the *chaar deewari* – is where women "belong." It is challenging to capture mainstream perceptions of what the private sphere looks like in Pakistan as communities differ dramatically based on urban and rural locations and class and religious beliefs. Nonetheless, there are commonalities concerning the traditional position of women in Pakistan that provides a basis for the mainstream perception.

[9] Eve-teasing is a euphemism used in South Asia, referring to public sexual harassment or sexual assault of women by men.

The most significant identification that women in Pakistan are associated with is as members of their family. They are the ones who run the household affairs, raise the children, care for their husband and, by extension, his family. Mundane decisions such as meal planning, how the house will be decorated, and helping the children with schoolwork are in women's hands. However, more significant decisions such as where to send the children to school, what major purchases to make, and where they will live are taken by men. Of course, each household is different, and this does not apply to everyone. Nonetheless, it is the primary breadwinner, the eldest earning male, or the matriarch, gets to make significant decisions. Taking this into account, even the private sphere does not "belong" to women.

Islam has become subject to an increasingly conservative interpretation. In the patriarchal opportunism playing out in Pakistan, when invoking Islam undercuts the patriarchal imperative, tradition takes precedence, especially where gender is concerned. Legal and institutional changes put in by Pakistan's sixth president, general Zia Ul-Haq, under the guise of Islamization, has led to a sharp fall in the status of women and religious minorities in Pakistan. Zia's *Nizam-i-Mustafa* [10] was a heavily gendered initiative, with changes that reduced women's legal and social worth while amplifying their sexual regulation. One of the effects of the Zina Ordinances has been the eroticizing of women's bodies so much so that their mere presence in the public space becomes sexually charged, thus creating a situation where men had inordinate power over women.

[10] The system of the Prophet Muhammad, a nine-party movement in Pakistan that begun in the 70s by the Jamaat-i Islami to overthrow the secular government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, establishing an Islamic system of government in Pakistan.

These policies strengthened public and private patriarchies, rendering women's presence in the public sphere as transgressive. Furthermore, this led to an immediate and indirect increase in the control families and communities had over "their" women (Toor, 2011, p. 162-168). Of course, these practices did not begin with Zia, but they gained new traction under his gendered regime.

Following the women's movement against Zia's Islamization project, Islamist discourse has constructed "the feminist" as the Other of a moral order, claiming they lead young women astray. In cases of women's rights such as Saima Waheed's marriage [11], the court's decisions highlighted the anxiety, to the extent of a national crisis, that is produced by female agency and women's movement beyond the *chaar deewari*. Both Justices of the Supreme Court referred to Islam as a "natural" religion, stating the "nature" of women required their sexuality to be controlled. Acknowledging women's *sui juris* status was equivalent to granting them complete sexual licence, tearing the nation's social fabrics and affecting the general standing of a family in the broader community (Toor, 2011, p. 170-190).

Under Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)[12] ratified through accession by Pakistan in 1996. Pakistan opted for accession rather than ratification to bypass

[11] Saima Waheed's marriage to Arshad Ahmed in 1996 led to her father filing criminal charges and claiming his daughter had been "abducted". The courts ruled in Waheed's favour, not because it was her right to marriage under Islam and the law, but because invalidating a marriage would entail serious consequences.

[12] Described as an international bill of rights for women, CEDAW – adopted in 1970 – seeks to address the continued discrimination of women in all areas of life occurring around the world. It seeks to aims to create equality for women in political, civil, economic, social, health, and educational rights.

parliament to avoid potential political issues within the nation. Even with accession, Pakistan declared that it is "subject to the provisions of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan" to set a pre-emptive "safety net", to avoid creating a crisis in the international commitments that do not comport with the constitution (Brightman, 2015, p 338). This highlights tensions in Pakistan between international and domestic commitments and managements of local politics; women's affairs are an issue at all levels.

Although the CEDAW and the Pakistani constitution prohibits discrimination against women, the patriarchal system that adds to the likelihood of such discriminations persists. The practice of tribal councils or *jirgas* is one of many sources of violence committed against women in Pakistan. These *jirgas* are composed of elders of the tribe, lead by the tribe's head, and have the ability to address issues such as property claims, questions of inheritance reconciling killings. Women are excluded from the *jirgas* at all levels even in situations where the decisions have an impact on the woman's life – i.e. divorce or honour killings. This lack of control over their own lives leaves women with little recourse other than those prescribed by their own culture – tribal or otherwise. The tribal system is so imbedded in Pakistani society that the lines between it and the state can often be blurred. This link makes it difficult to abolish the practice of the *jirga* gives credibility to the notion of state involvement in crimes against women (Brightman, 2015, p. 342).

When it comes to Muslim women in Pakistani society, how they perform their gender varies according to religiosity and class.[13] Women can be seen wearing the hijab, niqab, a dupatta, or no head-covering at all, their clothing coordinated with their choice of covering. Some lead a more traditional or conservative life, while others prefer a more liberal lifestyle.[14] Although some women participate in the public workforce, most women remain in the home's private life. This private life creates a space in a Muslim society where a specific vision of femininity is projected, segregating women from the outside world. However, not all women adhere to such norms in Pakistan and instead choose to subvert gender norms.

Most women that choose to disrupt such norms are frowned upon in one way or another. One of the most public examples of such subversions in Pakistan is Abida Parveen, who has often performed for Coke Studio Pakistan. She is one of the very few women in Pakistan that are not shamed or faced with disapproval for going outside the norm, perhaps because she does so from within the tradition. However, Parveen is not the first female to disrupt gender norms in Pakistani society.

Malala Yousafzai is another significant disruptor. Malala, who has a name so famous it almost operates as a mononym, was born in Mingora, Pakistan. In Mingora – much like other places in Pakistan – the birth of a girl is not always celebrated, if at all, in the way

[13] In Pakistan, the *Khwaja Sira* are officially recognized as a third gender, being considered neither completely female or male. In South Asia, the term was used as a title for a chief eunuch of the Mughal harem, also serving army generals and imperial advisors until the consolidation of British rule in India. It was only in recent times that their identity was recognized on official documentation under the Transgender Persons Act.

[14] A prime example of religious and class differentiated gender performance is Al-Huda Institute – a women-only institute concerned with conservative, religious schooling.

the birth of a boy is. Although she spoke out on the right to education for girls before her attack, it was only afterwards that she became globally recognized. Female education has always been an issue across the world. In Pakistan, there is an ever-present question surrounding the education of young girls and their value. Not all households prioritize a girl's education or even consider it equal to her brother's education. It is either unnecessary, of lesser value, or somehow considered *haram* (forbidden).

"*Itna parh ke kya kar lo gi?"* What will you do by studying this much? "*Ab bas bhi kar do, warna rishta kese milega?"* That is enough now; otherwise, how will you get a good proposal? These are questions that I have personally received countless times as someone who *has* had the privilege of obtaining higher education. What then of those girls who are pulled out of school to "help around the house" or are married off at an early age? Having someone like Malala speaking out, saying that they cannot be stopped from thinking, is empowering and terrifying to those opposed to girls receiving an education and being in the public sphere.

Malala does not do anything subversive per se and continues to adhere to many gender norms. She does challenge women's social norms by being visible and vocal in a public space. This is not to say that she does not engage in subversive behaviour at all. To some, she is engaging in disruptive behaviour because of where she comes from. At least to the West, what Malala does is not subversive at all; it is good, but it is not different. On the other hand, in Pakistan, not everyone approves of her, and the attack on her life can attest to that.

Although societal gender norms are challenged in Pakistani society, as seen in Parveen and Malala, the masses' lived reality does not change. For many, navigating their path in life while adhering to societal gender norms is how they find a sense of agency over their lives. Traditionally, Pakistani gender roles are incredibly rigid, and anything out of the ordinary is met with ostracization. Poems such as Bulleh's and individuals such as Malala and Parveen challenge these rigid roles from within the tradition itself. To understand how someone like Parveen can exist the way she does in a society such as Pakistan, we need scholars such as Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood, whose theories on gender hold across the world.

Gender Theory

Parveen's performance of gender is subversive to Pakistani and Islamic norms on many levels. The theories I use to examine Parveen are Judith Butler's gender performativity theory and Saba Mahmood's agency theory. Both theories must be combined here as Butler's theory takes a Western liberal view on agency. Butler's theory is a Western liberal understanding of gender and how it is performed; however, the theory holds in all traditions across the world. Not only is the gender performativity theory universally applicable, but the theory also looks at gender differently than any other theory on the subject.

Gender, according to my use of the term, refers to socially constructed characteristics, norms, and roles attributed to individuals. These characteristics vary by society according to what society deems appropriate and can be changed. Butler argues that gender identity is not a manifestation of intrinsic essence, but, instead, the product of

actions and behaviours – in other words, performance (Seregina, 2019). The difference between a performance and performativity is that the former is an act carried out, and the latter is defined as the capacity of language and expressive actions to perform a type of being (Butler, 1999).

Terms such as females and males refer to biological sex rather than gender, a socially constructed category that stems from social and cultural practices. Gender, according to Butler, is the predominant cultural agent that operates on the body, thus constituting the concepts of masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1999). Here, I use femininity and masculinity to describe behaviours and roles attributed to women, girls, men, and boys. One does not have to belong to a specific sex or gender to be feminine or masculine. Such attributes exist on a spectrum and can change at any time as they do not have fixed categories. People may choose to associate themselves with certain feminine – or masculine – attributes and dissociate from others and still be conforming gender norms. Furthermore, normative and subversive differences differ according to context, society, age, and class.

Butler believes that the only way for an individual to achieve any form of agency is through a subversion of gender, which Mahmood argues is not always the case. There is a difference between agency in queer politics and agency in the piety movement that Mahmood discusses. This proposition implies that there is no pre-existing being or norm behind the performance of gender, but it is created as it is performed. Nevertheless, this does not imply that gender is non-existent or that it is baseless. Gender is socially

dependent because it is always created through a relationship with and dependence on other individuals.

Furthermore, this implies that gender is fluid and not as restrictive as society has structured it (Seregina, 2019). When Butler defines gender, she specifies that gender is not a noun but always a doing. It is the doing that produces the endlessly gendered subject (Lloyd, 2007, p. 31- 42). Since gender can be done, it can also be undone by undoing restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life. A central way through which individuals can undo gender is by performing the other through direct bodily performance (Butler, 1999).

Butler's gender performativity theory proposes that undoing gender must be a subversive – and therefore, resistive – act, but it is insufficient in analyzing Parveen's performance of gender. When it comes to Parveen, she engages in both subversive and non-subversive behaviour. Therefore, to analyze Parveen and the context from which she comes, Saba Mahmood's application of Butler's theory to the women's piety movement in Egypt is key. Mahmood challenges Western liberal views on freedom and agency in Muslim societies. She builds on Butler's work on the significance of performativity as a theory of agency. Butler is interested in the subversive potential of performativity, whereas Mahmood is interested in ways in which performance creates agency when it is non-subversive. Agency as a concept is further complicated by a religious authority that lies outside of the individual in the mosque movement and in Parveen's case, Sufism (Mahmood, 2004).

Agency tends to be synonymous with being a person in Western liberal beliefs. It is used interchangeably with such concepts as freedom, autonomy, rationality, free will, and moral authority. An individual can act independently and make their own free choices. Agency, according to Butler, is intimately connected with signification and subversion. If agency is involved in becoming a gender, it must be a form of agency embodied (Lloyd, 2007, p. 40). Butler focuses on the significance of performativity as a theory of agency and is interested in performativity's subversive potential as a form of resistance to gender norms.

According to Butler, signification refers to the process that establishes the terms of intelligibility or meaning and is thus a practice based on repetition. The possibility of producing "alternative domains of cultural intelligibility," particularly in the non-heteronormative domains, rests on the necessity to repeat gender and the potential to repeat differently (Butler, 1999, p. 185). This is where Butler's concept of subversion comes into play. For Butler, it is only within the practices of repetitive signification that subversion of identity – and therefore, agency – can challenge hierarchical binarism that sustains heteronormativity (Butler, 1999). Butler focuses on the significance of performativity as a theory of agency and is interested in performativity's subversive potential as a form of resistance to gender norms. This leads to an understanding of the body as a meaningful entity.

On the other hand, for Mahmood, agency is not founded on performativity, but instead, it is a bodily understanding that focuses on desire and sensation. Butler is interested in performativity's subversive potential, whereas Mahmood is interested in

what the potential performance creates when it is non-subversive. Agency, as a concept, is further complicated by a religious authority that lies outside of the individual in the mosque movement. She contends that, although Butler's theory of agency is preferable to accounts of agency that take the subject as being foundational, her theory is not universal. Agency in queer politics – according to Mahmood – is often practised in terms of subversion or re-signification of social norms. Through an attempt to develop piety, women do reaffirm social norms, but they still possess agency. They take on norms and enact them through teaching and learning and an embodied practice (Mahmood, 2004). Therefore, Mahmood claims that Butler's theory of agency is appropriate to the context in which it emerged, but in the latter context – i.e. the Islamic Revival Movement – agency is enacted "in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms" (Mahmood, 2004, p. 15).

Mahmood's theory of agency is different from Butler's theory of agency since, for Butler, the question of agency focuses on whether norms are consolidated or re-signified through their citation. This implies that the question of agency is always juxtaposed to the meaning of a performance that must be interpreted and recognized by another individual. In contrast, Mahmood explores agency beyond the discussion of subversion and consolidation acts to include the multiple ways that norms are embodied. This allows Mahmood to write a theory of agency that does not understand the practice of agency as occurring only within practices of signification, but also within registers of corporeality (Mahmood, 2004; Clare, 2009, p. 52-55).

Through my use of Mahmood and Butler's theories, Parveen's expression of gender can be explained as a cross between subversive and non-subversive. By going

against gender norms, Parveen brings the sacred back into conversation with the secular through her performances on love. Singers such as Parveen inhabit uncomfortable spaces in their societies, thus disrupting a heteronormative worldview. Sufis' spiritual quest is to merge the self or body with the other and, by doing so, experience the oneness of divinity through love. This relationship between body and world beyond the confines of heteronormative gender hierarchies is worth examining concerning gender in Sufi ritual practice, including qawwali (Abbas, 2002). When it comes to Parveen, the space she exists in needs to be considered when determining whether she engages in subversive behaviour. Although she does go against heteronormative norms, she does so from within the Islamic tradition, albeit in a hegemonic way.

Gender in Sufism

Asma Barlas, in her book "*Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, asserts that the Qur'an does not elevate males over females. She states that God does not proclaim to have a gender. God is incomparable; therefore, God cannot be correctly interpreted by using male pronouns. Thus, the Qur'an uses terms that are gender-neutral such as Allah and Rab that have no human equivalent (Barlas, 2002, p. 104). Muslim theology invested in the term "God" with a specific, patriarchal meaning, assuming that "God's Transcendent Reality" was male. While attempting to do away with the notion that God possesses human attributes, God has been masculinized. Attempts to de-anthropomorphize God's images have failed in finding appropriate theological language to speak about God (Barlas, 2002, p. 105).

Terms such as Allah and Rabb are often translated as “Lord” or “King,” which are not only androcentric but also fail to deliver the feeling of “creatorship and sovereignty” that are implied (Barlas, 2002, p. 105). Likewise, terms such as “He” and “Himself” that are confused with God’s reality – also delivered through gender-neutral terms such as “We, Us, and I” – subvert the pluralism of scriptural language and reduce God to one term or attribute. According to Barlas, even when the Qur’an does refer to God as He, it does not mean that God is male. Instead, God’s representation as He is premised on attributes we associate with the male gender. As the Qur’an suggests, humans cannot comprehend nor define God; however, defining God according to human language is meant to communicate with us in words we can understand. Unfortunately, the inability to think or speak differently about God, given the real – and symbolic – value of androcentric images, there is a sustenance of male privilege. Masculinizing God posits a hierarchy in which males situate themselves beneath God but above women, implying a symbolic range between God’s rule over humans and male “rule” over women.

Presently, Sufi shrines in Pakistan have no space for a female performer. Both Abbas and Qureshi address the absence of females from the *dargah,* and Qureshi says that during her brief interaction with women at the *dargah*, she had to remain behind the *purdah*, segregated from the leading performer. This segregation from the rest makes research difficult, sealing women behind the *purdah,* restricting her ability to have her voice heard. According to Abbas, as far as Sufi poetry and the interaction with the Divine goes, there is no religious basis for exclusion of the feminine voice from the performance (Abbas, 2002).

According to the Persian mystic, Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922), the creation of humans —specifically of Adam—was driven by Divine love. Al-Hallaj understood Adam as a singular Divine image, not mentioning Eve at all. Before Eve appears as a separate being, she is encompassed within Adam as much as "human nature is contained within the Divine." Nonetheless, just as humanity moved away from God, from Truth, similarly, Eve moves away from Adam, signalling a collapse of the single Divine Truth (Lings, 2015). Therefore, despite Sufi commentators on creation rooting their spiritual understanding in love, they still use the creation of Eve to signify patriarchy, with Adam appearing more "original" than her. If a man is considered to be more "original" and, therefore, more Divine – the Divine being a symbol of love – then masculinity is connected to the highest priority of Sufism (Sondy, 2015, p. 155).

Although the idea of common submission appears equal to females and males in terms of sexuality, this is only at a surface level. In terms of practical implementation, because of how society is patriarchally laid out, the burden placed on women by marriage, household responsibilities, and childrearing, there is little time or energy to dedicate to devotional exercises. The Sufi doctrine of mysticism begins based on ungendered notions such as love, submission, and subservience. However, these have been gendered by believing that such acts are more fitting to men (Sondy, 2015, p. 156).

There have been cases of women – such as Rabia Basri – that have taken vows of celibacy as a vehicle to oneness with God. The degree to which societal gender roles can also be abstained from varies as they were often unable to completely remove themselves from household duties. Nonetheless, women have followed the Sufi path by transforming their femininity and, instead, becoming more "masculine." Femininity and masculinity

are still built as a means to the beloved in Sufi thought and the doctrine is based on ideas of submission and subservience. However, it replicates the patriarchal structures that are prevalent in broader society. Sufi thought becomes so engrossed in seeking love and the beloved (God) that its teachings on marriage and celibacy can become a means to use women as commodities. Ibn al-Arabi's [15] concept of *al-insan al-kamil* (the perfect man) might be precisely that (Sondy, 2015, p. 162-164).

Sufis do not hold a singular position on gender. As practices in various historical contexts, Sufism has been characterized by tensions between patriarchal inclinations and egalitarian impulses, much like other areas of Muslim though and practice. While varying levels of spirituality and asceticism form a vital part of religious life for all Sufis – women included – the lifestyles of female Sufis ranges from traditional gender roles as mothers or wives to non-traditional roles as disciples and mystics. In the case of the latter, Sufis accept such non-traditional roles because they prioritize the individual's inner state and do not give significance to gender identity for the spiritual path. In principle, Sufism presupposes that everyone can pursue and achieve the same goals. Gender is not an obstacle or an advantage to these goals (Shaikh, 2009).

Sufis presents the options of marriage or celibacy, indicating that they view masculinity as greater than femininity. In both marriage and celibacy, there is a sort of "marriage" that takes place – one with a partner and one with God. Whether the marriage is for the woman to seek the beloved through the female or seek the beloved through devotion to her husband, both elevate men over women. According to Sufi beliefs, man

[15] Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Arabi al Hatimi at-Tai (or Ibn al-Arabi) was an Arab Andalusian Muslim scholar, mystic, poet, and philosopher.

can either be understood as creator or creature. If one were to understand man as creator, he is elevated to a higher position. This understanding supports masculinity because if man has the power of creation, he has powers similar to those of God. This implies that women are expected to emulate Eve's path, understood as inferior, in Sufi thought. Marriage and procreation then become a means to define and support some Sufis' ideal masculinity (Sondy, 2015, p. 163). This is perhaps why man Sufi poems refer to the master or God as male and the disciple or Sufi as female. This, in turn, loses sight of the act of submission to God, which is genderless, sexless, and beyond procreating.

Shemeem Burney Abbas, in her book, *The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual*, documents the place of women in Sufi practice in Pakistan and India. Despite immense female contributions to and gender components of the Sufi ritual, women's role in this regard has been ignored in scholarly work. In the Islamic world, the mosque is primarily designated for male activity, with significant mosques possessing small spaces for women. The important spheres of religious and spiritual participation for women are the Sufi shrines, where their input is visible as substantial participants in events. The female voice in the Sufi ritual has never been the subject of an investigation by native or Western male scholars. Women are referred to as mothers, sisters, or spouses of the members of a Sufi order. Western male scholars have ignored the field because, as men, they are not permitted to access the female domain of participation and are handicapped by their lack of knowledge of the indigenous languages and its nuances. Moreover, there is a lack of documentation of the subject in the literature and little scholarly evidence available (Abbas, 2002).

As Qureshi's study on shrines in South Asia suggests, female participation is sidelined at best, if permitted. Although it may appear at first glance that women possess much more agency in shrines than they do in their homes or other religious places of worship, that is not the case. Nevertheless, in Sufi shrines, the agency granted to women is merely a façade. Although granted access to the shrine, women are segregated from the men and only observe qawwali. To go even further, there are many shrines – as well as other places of worship – where women are not welcome (Qureshi, 1995).

The mosque has been primarily used as an arena for male activity with little visible participation of women in the rituals. The men dominate the public sphere, and there is barely any space for the women to become active members of religious rituals. In major mosques (singular mosque) in Pakistan, there is a small space where women can pray on Fridays or religious festivals like Eid. However, neighbourhood mosques do not offer any possibility for women to offer their prayers. In Pakistani society, as well as other societies, mosques are recognized as a domain exclusively reserved for male participation as it is in the public eye. Women’s participation spaces are reserved for their homes. In this regard, the Sufi dargah would seem to play the role of an ideal space for religious participation, but space is not afforded to women due to societal norms (Abbas, 2002).

Performance literature of Sufi poetry

The theme of Divine love has been elaborated upon considerably in all the genres of Sufi literature. Sufi poetry is considered the most appropriate vehicle for expressing its transcendent experiences. Divine love's subjective experiences, revealing the higher

existential and metaphysical truths, are described in metaphorical language. Therefore, the functional value of symbols in Sufi poetry cannot be overstated. The symbolic depiction makes the complex Sufi ideas and concepts more readily intelligible.

Moreover, the representation of the intricate truths of Sufism using symbols in Sufi poetry does not make them objectionable in the eyes of the religious establishment and may not mislead the novices or the common folk who do not entirely comprehend them. Symbols help understand the link between outer and inner realities. Symbolism is based on the premise that a symbolic object representing the *zahir* (outer reality) has an underlying meaning that is its *batin* (inner reality or the essence). The symbol conceals the *batin*, making the symbolic less real, while what it symbolizes becomes real. (Anjum, n.d., p. 4-6).

Women in mystical Islamic poetry are given great significance but only as a subject of the poems and not as poets. However, academics such as Qureshi, Abbas, and Schimmel agree that women's role is marginalized in Pakistan’s performance culture. In Sufi poetry, Divine love's symbolic idea is represented by a woman’s love for a man. Schimmel states that in Arabic mystical poetry, the relationship between man and God, from Ibn-Arabi’s tradition, is expressed in metaphors of a man longing for a beautiful woman. In Persian poetry, the same relationship is symbolized between a man and a beautiful martyr. In contrast to Perso-Arabic Sufi traditions, the female plays the protagonist's role in Indo-Muslim Sufi traditions. She is the one who takes the journey to find her Divine Beloved (Schimmel, 2001, 135-170).

The notable absence of the female space within rich Sufi performance traditions, as opposed to the active role in poetry and history, hinders the development of the feminine voice's aesthetics. In South Asian Sufi poetry, the myths of female protagonists such as Heer, Sassi, and Sohni were used as aesthetic devices to speak of broader social, political, caste, and gender issues. Even in male qawwals' performances, the voice speaking to the audience is the female. By playing with the languages' syntactic and semantic structure, they can speak as though they were females. They often sing in the "falsetto" (artificial voice) to impersonate a female voice. Furthermore, these male performers use female pronouns to demonstrate that the lyrics are being sung from a female perspective.

By using such pronouns, a gap is created between the text and performance, making the gender binaries unstable. Considering that South Asian languages do not have gender-neutral terms when the lover and the beloved are characterized, they are ascribed a gender and cannot remain gender-neutral (Abbas, 2002). For example, in *Heer Ranjha*, a tragic romance story of Punjab, Ranjha is shown as an inferior male suitor for Heer. Instead of Ranjha, Heer's mother insists that she marries Khera as he is more masculine than the Ranjha she loves (Sharaf, 2015, 24-25).

A gendered voice in a gendered performance space

In an interview with a prominent female qawwal Naz Warsi, reporter Khadija Araf from BBC Radio asked about the challenges of being a female performer in a sacred space. Warsi told the reporter that although her desire – similar to other female performers – is to perform qawwali, they are not granted permission. Although Warsi has obtained training in Sufi classical singing and has earned her name in the genre, it is twice

the struggle for her to take her place in the world of qawwali. She is not only a woman but a woman who does not possess the "proper" musical lineage (BBC Radio Urdu, n.d.). It said that only men should be permitted to sing qawwali but that men who have inherited the profession should be the only ones to perform. The role of females is actively discouraged within sacred *dargah* culture. Only male heirs are to succeed their fathers, making paternal lineage the trait that allows a singer to become a performer in a Sufi *dargah* (Abbas, 2002).

Abbas centers her entire thesis on the premise that the home and the shrine are the women's space for worshipping, not performance, since it is "traditionally a woman's role to pray for her family." She states that the gendered spaces in Sufi poetry and folk song lyrics are overlooked. According to her, the female possesses more agency than is afforded to her by a patriarchal society (Abbas, 2002). For many traditionalists, the argument for the female voice is irrelevant. For them, androcentric lineage is enough to justify men singing the female protagonist's tale.

Sufi lyrics of qawwali, *kalaam*, and folk songs all centralize the feminine. Considering that the Divine voice can speak to all genders and spiritual love can be attained and expressed by all genders, it is difficult to bind Sufism's philosophy to an androcentric belief that seals women behind a veil. Sufis see the Chishti order's feminine voice as the embodiment of the self's struggle against adversity. When singing the laments of female characters such as Sassi, the male performer attempts to evoke a feeling of loss in the audience. While mimicking the feminine voice, the performer narrates the tale of the protagonist. Furthermore, the feminine voice also symbolizes

resistance not just of the self against the *nafs* but also against psychological and emotional obstructions mystics may face. Identifying with the female as an embodiment of resistance against the restrictive societal norms attempts to gain spiritual freedom and justify ascetic living (Abbas, 2002).

Sufi poets of Punjab mimicked the feelings and emotions as well as the trials and tribulations of women. Young unmarried girls' fantasies were intertwined with their would-be husbands. They were trained by the family's women to become good wives and daughters-in-law in the family of their future in-laws. A wedding was seen as the most critical moment in a woman's life. Women's dreams concentrated on proving herself to be a devoted wife to her husband and pleasing him. Most of her time was passed in longing in separation, waiting for the return of her husband. Her entire life revolved around her husband, and with her husband, she was deemed a custodian of the values of unwavering loyalty, single-minded devotion, and selfless spirit of sacrifice (Anjum, n.d., p. 13-16).

Owing to these and similar characteristics, the premodern Sufis of Punjab employed women as a symbol for the human soul having the qualities as a prerequisite for its arduous journey to God. Male poets do not confront the female but seek to merge themselves with feminine feelings and thoughts. The male-female duality, which violates human nature's wholeness and deprives each person of the other half, is overcome, establishing, in turn, the significance of being human (Anjum, n.d., p. 15-16).

The feminine voice and the subcontinent folk tradition

The female and the feminine have historically been intrinsically embedded into the South Asian folk tradition. The Sanskrit term *virhani* refers to a feminine soul whose embodiment is of a young bride or bride-to-be. The *virhani* sets out for a long odyssey filled with trials and tribulations in an attempt to achieve her ultimate goal – the unification of soul and body. The journey of the *virhani* would end when the soul (the feminine, the bride, the woman) is reunited with her body (a masculine god, husband, male lover). Similarly, the motif of *Radha-Krishna* is used in the Hindu tradition to symbolize the surface dichotomy of soul and body, woman and man. Due to Radha's absolute devotion towards him, the Hindu god, Krishna, views her as a superior being. He is enchanted by Radha, who is known as the supreme *gopi* who has achieved union with her true love after showing complete devotion (Asani, 1988, p. 85-87). This indicates the significance the female had in the Vedic traditions and Hindu devotional poetry and this positionality of the feminine is similar to South Asia's Sufi traditions and its literature.

In the Perso-Arabic folk traditions, it is the male voice that holds power. In the tragic romance of *Laila Majnun*, the protagonist that takes the journey towards the union of the soul and body is male. Majnun dies in the desert while reciting poetry for Laila, who is married to an Arab merchant. He embodies the Sufi motif of *deevangi* (descent into madness), often seen in qawwali, when ecstasy is attained. The descent implies that the quest for the beloved can lead the self into chaos, which is a positive indication of authentic existence. In Perso-Arabic folktale, the male voice dominates the narrative, and the female is seen as a peripheral character with no substantial voice of her own (Sharaf,

2015, p. 33-25). Majnun's poetry resonates within the narrative, uttering his final poem near Laila's grave, addressing his beloved as "the One" and calls out her name:

> "I pass by these walls; the walls of Layla and I kiss this wall and that wall it does not love of the walls that have enraptured my heart but of the One who dwells within them." (p. 34)

In this verse, popularized by the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi, the male voice addresses Laila by her name and then refers to her as 'the One,' which is commonly used to refer to God in Arabic. Therefore, romantic love is equated to Divine love in this case and is known as *tasawwuf*. *Tasawwuf* implies, in the Perso-Arabic tradition, that a male voice is required to deliver the message. The lover is male, and the addressee or beloved is female. In contrast to Persia or Arabia, the Sufi tradition reverses these roles in South Asia, deeming the soul to be feminine to honour the region's existing folk traditions. (Sharaf, 2015, p. 34-25).

Using female protagonists, the Sufis of South Asia were able to help the rural masses understand the philosophy of spiritual transcendence in the Qur'an and the relationship between the human and the Divine through allegories of earthly love. Using love myths of South Asia and elevating the female to a soul searching for the Divine rather than at the lowest socio-cultural rung given to it in the Perso-Arabic tradition. Their choice in the medium of the vernacular language of love was chosen so that every level of society could understand the deep-rooted meaning of Sufi thought. Metaphors and symbols of love served as motifs to describe the emotions of affection and warmth since such emotions are generally referred to as a 'woman's domain.' In the patriarchal tradition of Perso-Arabic poetry, these emotions were portrayed subtly compared to the

philosophical eroticism of the subcontinent's love myths. The blatant use of the feminine voice and soul eventually created a gap between the two traditions (Sharaf, 2015, p. 35).

Nonetheless, this was just one side of the picture. The representation of bold female lovers such as Heer in Punjabi Sufi poetry goes against the traditional, conservative, and subdued image of Punjabi women, who enjoyed a social status in patriarchal Punjabi society. Heroines of romantic folk tales can be seen going against gender norms and societal norms. While analyzing the "Punjabi literary formation," Faria Mir suggests that Punjabi Sufi poetry challenges the dominant narrative of female repression and presents women as active agents, making choices and decisions on their own and acting with determination and resolve. Punjabi Sufi poetry serves as an alternative source of (re)constructing the social and cultural history of premodern Punjab (Sharaf, 2015, p. 26).

Stories such as *Heer Ranjha* serve as a prime example of poetry challenging dominant narratives. These stories are complicated. There are two ways in which this story is interpreted: As a tragic love story or as a story about Divine love. In the first interpretation, Heer's actions do not adhere to normative gender roles. She risks everything to be with her beloved while he merely waits for her arrival, wandering. Heer is not "saved" by Ranjha. Instead, she exercises her agency by eloping with Ranjha and leaving her husband behind. Heer refuses to acknowledge her marriage to Khera as real for her true love is Ranjha. Marriage does not represent a "happily ever after" as many women are taught to believe.

On the other hand, this story was read through a Sufi lens using metaphors, what is and is not normative changes. In Sufi thought, gender roles are assigned to the lover and the beloved; disciple and master, and Sufi and God. Here, Ranjha would represent the beloved, master, or God and Heer the lover, disciple, or Sufi. Heer goes out seeking Ranjha, and he waits for her arrival, not the other way around. Socially speaking, this is odd. However, it adheres to gender norms if the story is viewed from a Sufi perspective. The Sufi seeks God. God never seeks the Sufi. Moreover, Ranjha, superior to Heer as the Sufi, is precisely in line with heteronormative hierarchies. Perhaps Heer's rebel against society is even a metaphor for rebelling against the normative understandings of God and love for God.

Gendered Sufi music

The division of shrine and the qawwali performances concerning gender lines is apparent, according to Regula Qureshi. Live performances belong to the male domain, with women merely participating through listening only. This sidelining of women's participation in qawwali is noted across South Asia (Manea, 2016). The depiction of women as being lesser than men – according to interpretations – has led to their invisibility with regards to qawwali performances. According to interpretations, women are traditionally prohibited from singing in the public eye as it can attract the unwanted attention of men (Barlas, 2002). This also applies to singing in a dargah regarding the concern of a risk of adultery in association with this prohibition (Krishnan, 2006, p. 2969-2971). Parveen has been an exception to the prohibition of female participation in shrines. This may be credited to her androgynous appearance, age, and skills.

The question of women singing is less about the classification of a woman's voice as being forbidden to a man whom she may theoretically marry and more about how her voice may serve as a vehicle for arousing profane lust rather than longing for Allah in the heart of the believer (Pemberton, 2010, p. 121). The arrival of women in a *dargah* is supposedly a cause for men to slip in faith. Yet, the greater concern is that there is inherent guilt attached to male desire and female sexuality. Male desire is frequently attributed to the so-called female titillation and the supposed inability of women to control their sexuality. This need to blame exacerbates women's inherent, internalized guilt (Krishnan, 2006, p. 2969-2971). Additionally, this plays into the exclusion of women's bodies in Islamic rituals.

The objection to female Sufi performances is not only to performances of particular genres such as qawwali – a traditionally "male territory" – but instead to female performances with participation in mixed-gender assemblies of *sama*. In most cases, women's presence at *sama* is opposed. There may appear to be various arguments against the existence of women's performances in mixed-gender assemblies; however, the focus is on the probability that their presence is a distraction from the primary objective of *sama*. The objective here is to focus on creating a love for the Divine. It is often misunderstood that women's presence poses a distraction that draws men closer to worldly attachment rather than Divine love. This is exacerbated by the fact that multiple meanings may be derived from the poetry of *sama*, which often homogenize mundane or worldly love with Divine love or idol worship with *tawhid* (Divine unity) (Pemberton, 20120, p. 123).

The multivalent meanings of Sufi poetry were seen as problematic. A spiritually disciplined person would grasp the mystical truths behind the poetry, but an ordinary person would likely focus on the music's superficial, morally ambiguous content. Moreover, according to some, a woman was more likely to focus on sexual desire than the poetry itself. Those that advocate for women being able to attend *sama* gatherings seeks to distinguish between recitation and singing. The slow, measured recitation of the Qur'an implies an atmosphere of performance that is morally and ethically cautious, whereas singing implies worldliness, frivolity, and self-glorification. With this argument, recitation by women may be justified with theological grounds since recitation of the Qur'an is incumbent on all believers, it may be understood as a religious obligation (Pemberton, 2010, p. 118).

The patriarchal structure of traditional performances is visible at shrines such as Nizam ud-Din Aulia's dargah where there is a sign stating: "No Women Allowed in Shrine." This sign, amongst many others, resonates with Bourdieu (1977) and Foucault's (1978) notion of a body being a practical, direct locus of social control, particularly for women. The female body becomes a medium through which cultural life rules are indoctrinated as a habit (Rajan, 2018). According to Qureshi, women have no part in the qawwali performance at any stage (1995; 1998). Parveen, however, may be the only exception to this restriction.

The participation of women in shrines is disputed by Shemeem Burney Abbas, who argues against the patriarchal study of women's role within Sufi music. She claims that women do play a significant role in the shrine community but that researchers do not

look for their contributions. This oversight is due to the practice of *purdah* by the women, only allowing the entrance of female researchers in their segregated section. Furthermore, there is a shortage of researchers interested in studying women in Sufism and even fewer female researchers available (Abbas, 2002).[16]

In many shrines, such as Nizam ud-Din Aulia's, the tomb's space is only reserved for men, where the laying of embroidered cloths on the tomb and the placing flower garlands is limited to men. The space surrounding the outside of the tomb of Mian Mir – a Sufi saint of Lahore, belonging to the Qadiri order of Sufism – is comprised of a "women's space," though it is not a formal distinction, nor are men completely absent from said space. More significant is that women's presence in the shrine and performing is a strongly demarcated terrain. (Purewal & Kalra, 2010, p. 387).

Female exclusion in qawwali does not apply to rituals such as *dhammal* at some shrines where women also dance to music along with men. The female stays behind her *purdah* (veil) to observe the sanctity of the ritual being performed. In a *dargah* (Sufi shrine) such as Hazrat Laal Shahbaz Qalander and Data Ganj Baksh, the purdah is not strictly observed. Since the difference in gendered performance is subtle, the term qawwali refers to any performance of this kind. Female musicians have fewer direct contacts with male organizers; therefore, their husbands tend to function as negotiators due to cultural norms and earn less than their male counterparts. Male artists such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and the Sabri Brothers have done much better because of their

[16] While this data is from 2002, I can affirm from my own research that, although there are more women writing on Islam and Pakistan, the field is underrepresented.

international networks of male professionals and community contacts (Abbas, 2002). Before her husband's death, Parveen's events were also coordinated by her husband. Now, her daughters manage her career, and her story of resistance and transformation are available everywhere, thanks to Coke Studio.

Male qawwals attempt to incorporate female perspectives in their music by invoking a female psyche yearning for union with the male Divine. This is in an attempt to achieve the state of *fana* (annihilation) through *ishq-e-haqeeqi* (Divine love). The female voice is regarded as the one who yearns and holds some agency that foments crisis regarding male agency. The presumption of knowledge about female desire is predicated on the pre-given myths about what it means to be a woman and possess desire. This not only works to restrict and stereotype the female desire but additionally reinforces male authority. This reinforcement of male authority is an authority that can speak on behalf of and decide on the notion of women's choices (Hinterberger, 2007, p. 74-83). Studies that centre on women's representation does not express enough concern with absent voices. Instead, these studies are focused on attributing agency to women through differentiation of tasks (Rajan, 2018).

Chapter Four: Fizzy Drinks and Sufi Music

According to the Sufi worldview, God is a transcendental reality, closer to a person than their jugular vein (Q 50:16). God is viewed as *Al-Wadud* (The Loving One) with the belief God's that cosmic love embraces the entire universe and all creation. One of the earliest articulations of the concept of selfless and unconditional love for God is attributed to an eighth-century Sufi woman named Rabiah al-Adawiyah of Basrah, preaching that one must love God for God alone. Her advocacy for God's worship out of love, neither out of fear of hell nor in greed for paradise, radically transformed God's image from a Wrathful Master, generally espoused by the conservative sections of the Muslim societies, to an Affectionate Friend. This notion of Divine love later became one of the major themes in Sufi literature and was further developed by the Sufis (Anjum, n.d., p. 25-26).

The basis of the Sufi path is love. Rumi describes it as the "remedy of our pride and self-conceit, the physician of all our infirmities. Only he whose garment is rent by love becomes entirely unselfish" (Nicholson, 1989). Sufi love aims to transgress the boundaries of all things against love and be a constant reflection of God. If Sufi thought is about servitude and submission to God, regardless of gender and sex, then all that seek it – whether male or female – should be submissive without creating a gender hierarchy in the act. Sufism, although visibly appears to mostly male-dominated, has a place for both men and women. However, the belief that men may be more enabled to pursue such a spiritual path persists (Sondy, 2015, p. 154).

Sufis have described spiritual striving as a “masculine” using gendered language. Simultaneously, the receptive state of the soul has been described as “feminine.” “Activity” is defined as “masculine” and “receptivity” as “feminine” – the needs of the situation determine complementary modes of being. Therefore, according to Sufi belief, all human beings, male or female, must assume a state of receptivity to the Divine and actively subdue the commanding self. Only when humans successfully balance these modes of spiritual refinement can they genuinely achieve their inherent capacity as God’s deputy in this world (Sondy, 2015, p. 153-155).

Sunni sect and music

Many conservative Islamic theologians, particularly Sunni sects, believe that music can lead to moral corruption and is therefore forbidden. They believe music is associated with worldly pleasures and could in no way be part of religious ritual. On the other hand, Quranic recitation is often becoming a competition to see whose voice sounds better, thus escaping theological censure. Religious music such as a *nasheed, hamd* or *naat* is encouraged as they refer to Islamic beliefs, history, religion, God, and Muhammad. The only acceptable instrument in such performances tends to be the *daf* because of its use by Muhammad. According to such practices, the distinguishing mark of religious music is the absence of instruments, rendering genres such as qawwali “un-Islamic.”

It is said that Nizam ud-Din Aulia (1238-1325), a Chishti saint, believed that body movement generated by the remembrance of God in ecstasy is *mustahab* (recommended or allowed practice), and if the intention is for *fasad* (carnal pleasure), it is forbidden

(Aquil, 2012, p. 20-23). Gathers organized by Nizam ud-Din Aulia would often include religious scholars opposed to the practice of *sama*, lost in the beauty of the qawwali. In practice, religious music stands out from secular music as it belongs to a relatively private realm. Undoubtedly, secular music's religious sanctioning has resulted in the robust development and spread of religious music in South Asia. Chanting *dhikr* often is the only acceptable outlet for the musically inclined (Aquil, 2012, p. 20-23).

The conceptualization of religious music as chant or recitation rather than song reflects a fundamental belief that the word holds supremacy over music as the basis for all religious communication, including the Qur'an itself (Qureshi, 1972). For Sufis, music is one of the most effective and valid ways to remember God and achieve ecstasy (Aquil, 2012). However, the emphasis is not on instruments but on the emotions that wash over a person during a performance. Overall, the three elements of qawwali performance – song texts, monetary offerings to the singers, and the listener's behaviour – all invite a secular interpretation of qawwali. On the contrary, the very same three elements, as well as the singer's state of mind in the context of a secular performance, are similar to those of the religious ritual of qawwali (Sakata, 1994, p. 91-92). Qawwali holds value in both religious and secular circles due to the choice in language.

History and origin of qawwali

The practice of qawwali began in 8th century Persia and is credited to Amir Khusrau (1244-1325), the "Nightingale of India." Khusrau was a scholar, poet, musician, mystic, and one of the first to bring together Turko-Persian and Indian cultures. Seeing the possibilities of music in the form of a mystical experience, Khusrau invented a form

of music that could be used as a means of achieving spiritual ecstasy (Qureshi, 1972). Today, qawwali is freely performed outside the religious and private realm. It is adapted to include a broader selection of musical instruments, texts with more widespread appeal – i.e. Coke Studio Pakistan.

Initially, the Persian language became rapidly identified with Islam and Sufism in South Asia. However, Khusrau liberally used the Purbi and Braj Bhasha in his compositions. Traditionally, qawwali begins with references in Persian and then shifting to Urdu, Punjabi or Hindi. When language is likely to be a communicating barrier between the audience and the performers, qawwals rely heavily on the musical form and rhythm to convey the song's concepts, achieving a trance. An ideal example would be of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan achieving this with Western audiences, attaining critical acclaim. It is this achievement that has shown the recent popularity of qawwali beyond South Asia. The ability of mature qawwals to alter the audience's consciousness displays skill and unique musical experience that brings about a feeling of ecstasy (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 2015).

Seating, instruments, and apparel for qawwali

Traditionally, qawwali takes place at the dargah of a Sufi *pir,* typically on a Thursday. Major performances occur at the *urs* of a saint, several qawwals performing in honour of the saint being celebrated. A competition commonly takes place in an attempt for all the qawwals to do their best for the saints. Both the qawwals and the audience sit on the ground, cross-legged, in a courtyard and face the shrine. Regardless of audience size, they do not use a microphone as the qawwal’s strong voice can be heard across the

courtyard. The master or lead singer is called the *mohri*, everyone sitting behind him as a sign of respect. There is an unspoken hierarchy on account of skill and seniority. Those lower in the hierarchy would typically sit behind those that ranked higher. However, this is now undergoing some changes with the inclusion of technology (microphones and sound mixers) for stage performances and studio recordings (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 219).

The *mohri* sits in the middle and faces the *dargah* as if directly addressing the saint. The tabla player sits directly behind the *mohri*, while the prompter sits behind him slightly to the left. The prompter is there to aid the *mohri* with the books and manuscripts for the words to the qawwali. Usually, the *mohri* is flanked on both sides by two singers with harmoniums, *daflis* and *manjiras* while the rest of the chorus is aligned on both sides in two rows, better singers in the front row. Often, another singer, almost as skilled as the *mohri*, sits to the left of the *manjiras*. This singer has sufficient knowledge of musical theory and can support the *mohri* as a backup. This concept of a backup singer in qawwali was prompted by the fact that qawwal groups often were a leading pair of brothers or a father and son duo (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 219).

Traditionally, qawwali is performed by a group of about 11 performers. This number was traditionally odd but has changed in the present times. It is evocative of a master-disciple system of imparting knowledge and leading towards enlightenment. The original style of qawwali performance was only voice and handclapping, only performed in shrines and hospices. Over time, folk musical instruments wound their way into the performance, possibly influencing Hindu bhajans and kirtans. The qawwali performance

begins with the *alap,* which invokes God, prophet, and the saint through a mystical couplet by the *mohri* alone. Through this, the other group members and audience remain silent (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 219-220).

This period is used by performers to scan the audience for sensitized individuals or groups that can be addressed with ease throughout the performance. Using the momentum created, the qawwals launch themselves into the qawwali's main body, introducing the rhythm with a moderate tempo. The tempo slowly increases, and any line or musical note that is observed to touch the audience is repeated with renewed passion, inducing a trance (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 220). The interaction between the performer and his audience is an important feature of religious qawwali performance. Therefore, the qawwal relies more on the artistic expression of the text he is singing than the text's mystical meaning to communicate with his audience. When the audience is foreign, the elements of rhythm and pure musical artistry are emphasized far more (Sakata, 1994, p. 96).

The qawwali rhythm is provided by handclapping and percussion instruments such as the *dholak* (two-sided drums) or *tabla* (a pair of drums). During renditions of qawwali, *kanjira* (small hand-held cymbals) and a *dafli* (a drum with cymbals) are often used. Additionally, harmoniums are now a permanent part of the qawwali, usually played by the *mohri* himself. On occasion, the *sarangi* (a bowed, short-necked stringed instrument) is also used (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 219).

During the performances of Sufi music, there is a strict dress code and behavioural code. Traditional performers tend to dress in black or white loose shalwar kameez with

the occasional *kufi* cap. Senior qawwals dress in sober colours such as grey or brown. Qawwals are also permitted to adorn a green scarf as green is believed to be an Islamic symbol. Although less prominent in the public eye, female performers may be allowed to wear a more comprehensive array of colour. However, they are also subject to modest clothing (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 220).

Qawwali in popular culture

Through adaptations, qawwali found its way into Bollywood in 1960 with the song "*Yeh Ishq Ishq Hai*" from the movie *Barsaat ki Raat*. Through this, a subgenre of entertainment music was created called *filmi qawwali*. There has been debate around various songs and their categorization due to this subgenre. Whether or not songs such as "*Kun Faya Kun*" belong in *filmi qawwali* or if they ought to be traditionally performed is a debate that is yet to be settled. With the global popularization of Sufi music following the Sufi Conference conceived by Pakistan in 2001 in New York, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan received international acclaim. He became recognized worldwide as an icon of qawwali and was dubbed *Shahenshah-e-Qawwali* (Emperor of Qawwali) (Sundar, 2007, p. 3-6).

In 2007, the United Nations declared 2007 as the year of Rumi, marking it as the turning point for Sufi music around the world. The Mehrangarh Museum Trust organized the first World Sufi Spirit Festival in which they invited Sufi artists from Egypt, Iran, Zanzibar, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and China to perform in Jodhpur, India, alongside traditional Rajasthani folk musicians. This trend of Sufi music festivals has become popular since then and created a new generation of professional Sufi musical performers (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 221). The genre of Sufi rock was also created by a Pakistani band

called Junoon by combining elements of modern hard rock, traditional folk music, and Sufi poetry to promote peace through Sufi poetry following 9/11 (Mukhtar, 2015, p. 6).

Entertainment platforms and female representation in qawwali

One of the primary instances of female participation in qawwali can be seen in Bollywood films such as *Zeenat*. The qawwali song featured in the film is "*Ahen Na Bharin Shikwe Na Kiye*," featuring the first all-female qawwali. Following *Zeenat*, a qawwali from *Barasat Ki Raat*, a female group sings alongside the voices of Asha Bhosle and Sudha Malhotra. Other examples include *Nikaah*, *The Burning Train*, *Mughal-e-Azam*, *Yeh Jawani Hai Deewani*, and *Bajirao Mastani*. There has been only one prominent exception to the male-dominated traditional qawwali space: Abida Parveen. She is considered to be only second to the great Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and is also known for *sufiana kalam* in which she has incorporated a qawwali style (Abbas, 2002). Reshma is another female singer who sings folk music that has entered the male-dominated qawwali, greatly influencing songs such as "*Dama Dam Mast Qalandar*" and "*Hai O'Rabba Nahion Lagda Dil Mera*." However, neither singers perform qawwali in its most traditional format (Qureshi, 1999).

Qawwali artists such as Naz Warsi, Baby Taj, and Zila Khan are getting their voices heard within traditional performance sites. Naz Warsi and Baby Taj claim that those that have inherited the dargah for hereditary learning do not permit female performers to perform (Holland, 2010). The exclusion of female performers from traditional sites is not an uncommon occurrence. It translates into a code of conduct by the shrine heads, working to enforce female qawwal exclusion in the space. Given the

patriarchal structure, scholars such as Qureshi would presume that women do not possess any form of agency within qawwali. Abbas concludes that there is a sense of female agency in qawwali from a lover's perspective. Abbas quotes Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan on the female voice who states: “In the tradition of Sufi mystical poetry, these poets when they speak, they do it in the female voice, they present themselves as the female, for them their beloved, their mentor, is the male, whereas their own choice is that of the female, their discourse is that of the female” (Abbas, 2002).

Developments within social media platforms that distribute qawwali have aided in bringing the genre of music to the popular global stage. New styles of qawwali are also developed in a secular form that is globally influenced. Artists such as Rekha Bhardwaj claim that Sufi elements can inspire any kind of music. Bhardwaj notes that despite a song considered to be an item-song, its Sufi elements resonate with her to such an extent that she is still able to connect with the Divine through such performances (Sen, 2017). However, the dominant role in the marketing of qawwali today has been YouTube’s. Coke Studio Pakistan, Coke Studio India, Nescafe Basement (Pakistan), and the Dewarists are some of the key players in YouTube channels that present multiple facets of representation of qawwali. These channels all focus on qawwali performances and their live studio-recorded music and are known for bringing the Sufi genre into popular culture.

Platforms such as YouTube have played a significant role in conveying Sufi music by women that would otherwise be guarded and policed to maintain patriarchal hierarchies. Notably, women have contributed to 38% of all Sufi based songs over the

four channels above according to recent data (Rajan, 2018). Singers such as Momina Mustehsan have gained popularity after her rendition of "*Afreen Afreen*" through Coke Studio Pakistan. However, her physical beauty and sense of fashion have become more significant points for discussion than her vocal skills, falling prey to the tendency of female artists being treated primarily as sexual objects that are pressured into complying with specific marketing (Humayune, 2016). Female artists, then, turn increasingly to the limited number of female qawwali artists such as Abida Parveen (Rajan, 2018).

Parveen's Bazm-e-Rang

Bazm-e-Rang is the title of an album produced by Parveen this year. Not only is she the one performing in all the songs – alongside other singers – she is also the one producing the songs through Abida Parveen Productions. Her children manage her, handling the business portion of her career. Although these songs are remarkably similar in layout to Coke Studio Pakistan, the production is unique. While it may not receive the publicity Coke Studio's music does, having the independence to create music the way she wants is significant.

For one, Parveen owns the songs and their compositions. What is most important is the change in her singing style and her physical appearance. Her clothing and makeup are generally consistent. In the first three out of four songs, Parveen is seen wearing the same outfit and only in the latest song – "*Prem Piyala*" – does she change the colour of her outfit. She still keeps the style the same, the same long, loose-fitting dress and *ajrak* shawl she wears in most performances. Furthermore, Parveen appears to be wearing little to no makeup in all four songs, whereas in Coke Studio, she must wear some.

The most beautiful aspect of Bazm-e-Rang is her singing. It does not sound too different from Coke Studio at first. Later, by listening closely, one can tell there is something different about how she is singing. Since Parveen has complete control over the musical aspect of this production, her singing seems fresh in that the requirements of Coke Studio do not restrict her. The freedom to perform as she chooses has had a more substantial impact on the listener and herself. Nonetheless, nothing compares to her live concert performances. Parveen truly achieves feelings of ecstasy.

The spinning wheel spins

Parveen has performed for Coke Studio nine times across multiple seasons. Her most recent performance is "*Ghoom Charakhra*" alongside Ali Azmat in Season 11, Episode 2, which instantly became popular. The original poem is written by Shah Hussain, a 16th century Punjabi Sufi poet. Hussain is regarded as the pioneer of the *Kafi* form of Punjabi poetry, which Parveen herself often sings. Parveen and Azmat both composed the song, performing in Punjabi and Saraiki. The song's title translates as "the spinning wheel spins," where the charkha (spinning wheel) acts as a metaphor.

Many Punjabi Sufis attempted to write poetry that was accessible to the upper class and those in villages, including women. Using female protagonists, Sufis were able to help those in rural areas understand the philosophy of spiritual transcendence and the relationship between the human and Divine. Using feminine language in poetry, the male Sufi takes on the female lover's role, singing to her male beloved – God. Similarly, Hussain takes on the part of a disciple, a lover, and a woman.

The charkha itself is meant to represent the wheel of life, continuously spinning. Hussain searches for his beloved, wanting to be united with the Divine, and it is the Divine beloved who is the one spinning the charkha. Although Hussain is a male, he presents himself as a female to his lord, saying:

Main mandi haan ke changi haan	Whether I am good or bad
Main sahib teri bandi haan	I am your disciple Oh lord
Gehnlen log janan deewani	People think I am crazed
Main rang saiyaan de rangeen haan	But I am painted in your image
Saajan meray akhiyan wich vasda	My beloved lives in my gaze
Main galiyan phiran tashangi haan	While I search the streets yearning to find him
Kahe (Shah) Hussain Faqir nimana	Your disciple (Shah) Hussain says
Main war changi naal mangi haan	I have now been united with the Divine
Ghoom charakhra	The spinning wheel spins

The Punjabi language in this poem uses feminine words, writing Hussain as the female disciple, in search of her male master – the Divine. The goal is for the master and disciple to unite, the Sufi and Divine becoming one. The phenomenon of Divine love – according to the Sufis – can only be expressed in metaphorical language. Therefore, they have employed idioms of temporal human love as symbols of the Divine Love in their writings. They often resort to gendered imagery to articulate subtle notions of this love, such as bridal symbolism. This poem is similar to many Sufi poems filled with bridal symbolism. The male Sufi is the female bride, and the Divine is the male bridegroom.

If the male Sufi presents himself as a bride to God, what does it mean to be God's bride when Parveen – a female – performs the same song? For one, the consequences change. The bride and bridegroom union – a union of the Sufi and God – is the ultimate goal for a Sufi and is referred to as *fana* or, more specifically, *fana fi Allah*. However, the

union of a male Sufi, who takes on a female character while performing, with God – generally regarded as male in such poems – is inconsequential as the Sufi's remains metaphorically unchanged. Perhaps when a female Sufi performs similarly, it may be logical for her to take on a male character's role, whereas God becomes female. This is not the case. Instead, when Parveen performs songs with such lyrics, she does not alter the song's genders. Instead, as a female Sufi, she takes on a female character's role, instantly resulting in consequences.

What is significant about the gendered language Parveen uses, and why is it consequential? First, the modes of receptivity and activity being assigned as "feminine" and "masculine" are important as the ideal human being is one who has successfully balanced both modes of spiritual refinement. If receptivity is regarded as "feminine" and activity as "masculine" and the female bride is feminine, the male bridegroom being masculine, then their union is important. Considering patriarchal definitions of sexual intercourse in Islam, homosexuality has often been looked at with disapproval because the male often "loses" his active status and instead becomes receptive. However, it was acceptable for a man to have intercourse with his male servant because he, the master, was the active member (Kugle, 2010). Therefore, for a male Sufi performing, a receptive female's character is already profound in and of itself and then to have a female singer replace the male singer complicates the narrative further.

Although it is merely a performance of a song, in reality, a union between a female and a male – a bride and bridegroom – serves to be most consequential to the female who possesses the ability to bear children. Nonetheless, there is much to be said

about performances where men write themselves as women. For a man to write himself as a woman in performance is powerful. Some societies prohibited women from performing on stage, so boys and men took female roles. Cross-gender acting is not a foreign concept to the art of performance. However, when a female takes on a female role in a cross-gender acting tradition, it is seen as subversive; what was a novelty suddenly becomes real. Parveen subverts gender norms in society as it is. For her to then subvert a subversion – a man cross-gender performing – is profound.

Maula-e-Kull

Another song performed by Parveen in Coke Studio's Season 9 Episode 3 is "*Maula-e-Kull*." Overall, the poetry does not have any metaphors similar to "*Ghoom Charakhra*." However, poetry does is filled with feminine language, using the same lover-beloved relationship. The idea behind this composition was to have Parveen sing without rhythm or tempo, placing her vocal ability's expressivity. The track builds up to "*Haidari-am*" – the poetry of Shahbaz Qalandar, which is something Parveen suggests and composes herself. The verses are as follows:

Haidari-am qalandar-am mast-am
Banda-i Murtaza ali hastam
Ek hi sooratiya ki do hain mooratiya
Ek Muhammad ek Ali
Bedam yahi toh paanch hain maqsood-i kaainaat
Khair un-nisa Husain o Hasan Mustafa Ali
Ya saiyidah

I am a lover of Haider, I am a wandering mystic, I am lost in ecstasy
I am the devoted servant of Ali Murtaza
One is Muhammad and the other is Ali
Bedam, these very five are the cause for which the world was created
The best of women Fatima, Husain, Hasan, Mustafa, and Ali
O noble daughter of the Prophet!

Here, the lover of Haidar's gender is not specified, but "*banda-i-Murtaza*" is a male servant, both of which Parveen takes the role of in her performance. These verses, as well as the last two about Fatima, were suggested by Parveen. Moreover, "*ya saiyidah*" is something she adds on her own, replacing the original, masculine phrase of "*ya Ali*."

Chaap Tilak

Written by the subcontinent's foremost musical genius Hazrat Amir Khusrau, "*Chaap Tilak*" is an instantly recognizable qawwali that has been performed by every legendary voice of South Asia. Written in Braj Bhasha, the popular country dialect, a predecessor of Urdu, its beauty lies in its simplicity. Sung from a young girl's perspective, the song is full of modest yet enchanting symbols, celebrating the magnificence of losing oneself in love. Both the use of themes as well as the language itself were deliberate creative choices by Khusrau, as they communicated to the common people using their ideas and aesthetics.

"*Chaap Tilak*" is performed for Coke Studio's Season 7 Episode 6 by Abida Parveen and Rahat Fateh Ali Khan. The lyrics are as follows:

Tan man dhan baaji laagi re
Dhan dhan moray bhaag baaji laagi re
Laagi laagi sab kahen
Laagi lagi nah ang
Laagi to jab jaaniye
Jab rahe guru ke sang
O ji maula
Khusro baaji prem ki
Ko main kheli pi ke sang
Jeet gayi to piya more
jo main haari pi ke sang

I've stalked all I have – my wealth, my body, my very soul
And good fortune has showered its blessing on me
Everyone makes a play of devotion
But true devotion is not achieved
You will know the true meaning of devotion
When you devote yourself to your spiritual master
O my master
Khusrau, the game of love
If I play with my dear one
If I win, my sweetheart is mine
If I lose, I'm still with my dear one

What is impressive about this particular performance is that the gender of the character is relatively forced. However, it is essential to remember that many qawwals tend to fuse multiple poetry pieces, as is the case with this song. Therefore, the song cannot be looked at as a whole. In one instance, the perspective is of a young girl's, and in another, it is Khusrau himself. Initially, Khusrau uses the young girl's voice, showing her devotion, saying that true devotion is to one's spiritual master. These lines are sung by Parveen, the camera then shifting to Khan, who begins with "*Khusro baaji prem ki*." He too sings of a relationship, that of the beloved. Here, it is Khusrau himself who speaks and yet, he uses female pronouns to refer to himself. When Parveen sings again, that is when the gender of the speaker is genuinely blurred with the lines:

"You have snatched away all trace of me with one glance of your enchanting eyes. Whether or not you agree to speak to me I will not leave your side, my swarthy beloved. Come and let his slave dye you in his hue. Whoever is veil he chose to colour, blessed became his fortune."

Khan then goes on to sing: "Khusrau forfeits his life in Nizamuddin Auliya's love. You've made me a radiant bride with just one glance of your enchanting eyes." It is apparent that the gendered voice changes were deliberate, yet again displaying bridal metaphor. Rather than God, it is Nizam ud-Din Aulia, whom Khusrau presents himself as a lover and bride.

The bridal symbolism in the lines mentioned above is most significant when Parveen sings the words "Come and let his slave dye you in his hue." It is from there that one can begin unpacking the meaning of the lines above. In Season 9's finale, Rahat

Fateh Ali Khan and Amjad Sabri perform a song called "*Rang*" in which the same lines are sung. The translation provided by Zahra Sabri in "*Chaap Tilak*" is a bit vague but she comes through when she translates the same lines later on in "*Rang*" as:

> "The glorious colour of the Prophet is the blessed dye, and Maula Ali's auspicious hand does the dying."

Although this line is about Muhammad as the dye, this is derived from the concept of God's color in South Asian religions. In Hinduism and other folk beliefs in India, colours and dyes play a vital role in popular rituals, iconography, and clothing for religious occasions. Dyes have also been used to identify specific communities and movements within a religion through dresses and headgear. In Islam, it is popularly assumed that green is the colour of Islam and many Muslims in South Asia and across the world – prefer the colour even when buying goods. In the subcontinent, green garments are often laid on saints' graves when paying respect, and many countries with Muslim majorities often have green in their flags (Saeed, 2012, p. 80).

Green may be soothing to many Muslims around the world. In South Asia and elsewhere, Sufis have also used other colours such as saffron, yellow, red, and white. Sufi orders wear headgear or turbans of a specific colour to differentiate themselves from other orders.[17] Chishti Sufis are often seen wearing saffron or elongated orange caps. For Chishtis, saffron symbolizes sacrifice, renunciation, and salvation, similar to many Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs (Saeed, 2012, p. 81).

[17] For example, Parveen often dons an ajrak shawl from Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's shrine. Ajrak has a deep-rooted connection to the Sufi culture of Sindh

Various colour schemes are also used for spiritual means, such as colouration, that is equated with a spiritual transformation that is attained by consummation with a Sufi master or God. It is here that the bridal metaphors are most apparent. Words such as *rang* (colour), *rang-dena* (to dye), and *rang-rez* (textile dyer) are often used in Sufi poetry, especially in poetry by Amir Khusrau and Kabir, signifying the impression of the master on the disciple. Such concepts of *rang* have been derived from the playful and romantic lore of the Hindu god and goddess Krishna and Radha. Moreover, Chishtis continue to celebrate spring festivals such as Basant and Holi, filled with colour, as symbols of spiritual union and transformation (Saeed, 2012, p. 81-83).

Parveen appears to be the mellow one in this collaboration between her and Khan. In most of her performances, she tends to be more energized, in a trance-like state. Instead, when she begins singing "*Chaap Tilak*," the background easing the audience into the song with just a piano and acoustic guitar in a very gentle and romantic manner. Throughout the performance, Khan is the more energized singer, displaying more of a qawwali style. His voice takes over the studio, clearly the more masculine of the two, although Parveen's voice is deeper.

Nigah-e-Darwaishaan

Parveen's Coke Studio Season 3 song, "*Nigah-e-Darwaishaan*," goes as follows:

Maula... maula... maula... ho maula
Na khuda maseehtay labda
Na khuda vich kaabay
Na khuda quraan kittabaan
Na khuda namazay
Sanu ishq laga hai pyaar da

Master, Oh Master
Neither can God be found in the mosque
Nor is God in the Ka'ba
Neither is God in the Quran or other books
Nor is God in the prayer ritual
We are besotted with (our) Love
We are besotted with (our) Love!
With the beloved!

This poetry focuses on the concept of love for a *maula* (master), also referred to as the beloved (*dildar*, *yaar*) and teacher. Ultimately, the master is God or can be the fourth Muslim caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661 CE), and he plays a significant role in Sufism. The emphasis on love is conveyed in the chorus, "we are besotted with (our) Love." It is part of the song that carries the greatest musical and emotional intensity. Moreover, the first four verses emphasize the irrelevance of physical markers and acts of religion compared to the strength of the love felt towards God. The poet describes himself as religiously undefined and carrying the physical symbols of different faiths. Hence, the poetry suggests variability between other denominations, orientations, and faiths to pursue nearness with God. The point is emphasized again, with the poet insisting that a Muslim may demolish a place of worship – not that they should – but should never break a heart because that is where God truly resides (Mukhtar, 2015, p. 34-35).

The poet's argument is not a secular one in that one's love for God is for the private sphere. Instead, they are besotted by God, yearning to be united with God, often to the brink of their worldly sanity and self-control. The trajectory of such extreme yearning has had fateful consequences in the history of Sufism, particularly in the figure of Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922 CE). Hallaj, who earned the disapproval of many leading Sufis of his time and was executed for his blasphemous declaration of "*ana al-Haqq*" (I am Truth), which was derived out of his ecstatic experiences (Massignon, 1982).

In the behind-the-scenes clip for the song, Parveen relates the meaning of the poetry by saying:

"A heart in which God dwells is better than many thousands of Ka'ba…that one heart is unique in the force of its purity… There is a powerful colour; in reality, the artist possesses this colour, this fire that makes [the listener] yearn [for love]. If only one person in this whole universe was to attain the wisdom of the Sufis, it is enough because one person constitutes all of the universes." (Coke Studio, 2010).

Nooran Sisters

The Nooran Sisters are a Sufi duo comprised of Jyoti Nooran and Sultana Nooran, belonging to Jalandhar, India. The pair follows the Sham Chaurasi Gharana classical music in which their father, Ustad Gulshan Meet, has trained them. Remarkably, they are not the only female in the family to perform Sufi music as their grandmother – Bibi Nooran – was a well-known singer of her time. The Nooran Sisters have sung classics such as "*Mast Qalandar*" and "*Allah Hoo*," the former of which has been sung by Parveen and Khan both and the latter by Khan only (Ghosh, 2014).

By comparing Parveen and the Nooran Sisters' overall performance, the sisters reflect more of a normative appearance of femaleness than Parveen. They are both adorned with jewelry, fancy clothes, and heavy makeup, contrary to Parveen's appearance. However, unlike Parveen, the sisters use a more resonant voice when singing and are quicker. Moreover, they are physically more aggressive in their performance in an attempt to achieve ecstasy. When attaining a state of ecstasy in their performances, many male qawwals move with such vigour that it leaves their hair and clothes wild. The Nooran Sisters also perform with such energy, although it is rare for female Sufi performers, including Parveen.

Copy-cat or the real deal? Sanam Marvi

Sanam Marvi is a Sindhi Sufi singer from Hyderabad, raised in a Sufi musical family. Her initial training was in the Gwalior Gharana singing style, starting at age 7. Marvi was trained by her step-father – Faqeer Ghulam Rasool – and continued her classical, *ghazal*, and thumri training under singers such as Ustad Fateh Ali Khan of Gwalior and Ustad Majeed Khan. What is most significant about Marvi here is her connection to Parveen. Often, people claim that she attempts to copy Parveen's singing style and is unoriginal, but it is untrue. Marvi's father and Parveen were trained in classical Sufi singing by Parveen's father, Ghulam Haider. From an early age, Marvi has strived to sing like Parveen and idolizes her. Ever since she saw Parveen perform for the first time on television, and then at a live concert, Marvi has practiced the same singing style. Although they have different family singing styles, her father's training by Ghulam Haider has helped in creating a singing style similar to Parveen's (Entertainment Daily, 2019).

Marvi has performed many songs composed and performed by Parveen, such as "*Chaap Tilak*," "*Ghoom Charakhra*," "*Tera Ishq Nachaya*," and "*Mahi Yaar Di Gharoli*." One of Parveen's songs' latest performance is "*Hairan Hua*" for Coke Studio Pakistan Season 12 Episode 4. Marvi's singing style is similar to Parveen's; however, her voice is much softer than Parveen's powerful vocal range. Interestingly, they have this difference since both have the same training lineage. Parveen's male singing style training taught her how to sing genres, such as qawwali, that require more "masculine" vocals, whereas Marvi did not learn qawwali.

An exception to the rule – Tahseen Sakina

Tahseen Sakina is a Sufi singer who has just begun her career in qawwali. Her recent claim to fame is her performance in Nescafé Basement's Season 5 finale, where she sang "*Gharoli-Ghoom Charakhra*". Both songs – "*Mahi Yaar Di Gharoli*" and "*Ghoom Charakhra*" – are ones that have been performed by Parveen and have gained fame due to her. Sakina attempts to imitate Parveen in her performances and her appearance. Although she is younger than Parveen, however, she has attempted to dress exactly like her. Like Parveen, Sakina also wears an *ajrak* shawl, loose-fitting dresses, and lets her hair loose.

Nonetheless, Sakina falls short in her imitation in that she still displays some aspects of femininity occasionally, such as makeup, decorative clothing, and styling her hair (Nescafe Basement, 2019). Additionally, Sakina does not possess the strong vocals that Parveen does, resulting in a softer, more feminine performance. Nonetheless, Sakina's existence in itself is important as she is the only singer who has attempted to sing like Parveen and dress like Parveen. As mentioned earlier, due to Parveen's subversive appearance, most only desire to sing like her and not to be her.

"Sultan-e-Qawwali"

Born in Faisalabad, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (1948-1997) was a Pakistani vocalist and musician, primarily a qawwali singer. To date, he is considered one of the greatest voices ever recorded, possessing an extraordinary range of vocal abilities with an ability to perform at an elevated level of intensity for hours. He belonged to the Patiala Gharana, extending a 600-year-old qawwali tradition of his family. Khan is credited with

introducing qawwali music to international audiences and is popularly known as "*sultan-e-qawwali*." It is important to note that Khan was not the only qawwal to gain success internationally. Nonetheless, he was one of the most prominent actors in the transformation of qawwali in Pakistan and key in diffusing qawwali abroad (Jacoviello, 2011, p. 325).

Following his father's death, Khan became the *mohri* of the qawwali group as musical knowledge is handed down from father to son. With the spread of recording technologies, Khan's success supported his role as the 'true' representative of the qawwali tradition; his recordings became documents that began to reconstruct the Pakistani cultural identity. Simultaneously, alongside other types of traditional religious music of the world, qawwali became universal access to the sacred. Soon after his death, devotional tales around his grave came into existence, his tomb receiving almost the same treatment as those of Sufi saints (Jacoviello, 2011, p. 324.

As Khan became more famous, making him the most famous South Asian contemporary musician, modern qawwali crossed Pakistan's borders and reached the globalized world. Once recorded, ritual music took the form of a discographic product for the international market. It is important to specify that Nusrat was not the only qawwal to gain success before the Western audience. He was nonetheless one of the most prominent actors in the transformation of qawwali in his homeland and the key to spreading qawwali abroad. He went as far as appearing without his party as a soloist in several fusion projects. Furthermore, the Western audiences invested upon him and his work the role of

representative of a “different” Islam — certainly not normative, but inaccurately defined “weak” (Jacoviello, 2011, p. 320).

The only female Sufi singer who has received significant – if not equal – public attention is Abida Parveen; she comes only second to Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (Rajan, 2018). Therefore, it is only logical to compare the two singers. Many other female Sufi singers are well-known in South Asia, such as the Nooran Sisters, and Reshma but Parveen might be the only globally recognized female in the genre (Abbas, 2002). Moreover, Parveen is perhaps the only Sufi singer known across the globe along with Khan, although she is not ranked at the same level as him. Not only has she performed for Khan, but Parveen has also shared the same stage as him. One of the reasons she is not considered to be as popular as Khan is perhaps because he sang qawwali more than any other genre, whereas she sings other forms of Sufi music with hints of qawwali for the most part. However, Parveen has been unable to achieve the same level of recognition in Sufi music as Khan because of the restrictions placed on female Sufis in the past.

Like Parveen, Khan was also dressed in simple traditional attire, and his hair was usually dishevelled due to his performances. Compared to other traditional Sufi musicians such as Saieen Zahoor Ahmed, Khan presents a relatively simple appearance just as Parveen does. That is not to say that her simplistic style is not deliberate. Both Parveen and Khan possess a male singing style and have been trained through a male family singing style. For Khan, it was the Patiala Gharana, and for Parveen, is it the Sham Chaurasia Gharana. Having been trained with a male singing style, her style is closer to Khan’s than any other female. However, Parveen’s singing style is unique on its own in

that she brings her training in *Kafi* and *ghazal* performances into her qawwali performances. Moreover, her qawwali performances do not come with a group of singers. Instead, she is often the only singer on stage with two to three musicians.

Another difference between Khan and Parveen's singing on stage is their interaction with the other musicians or singers on stage that are part of their group. Khan would perform along with multiple musicians and a few singers. One individual would sit to his right, preparing him for the next few lines that he needed to sing. Overall, Khan interacted significantly more with his group members than Parveen. On the other hand, Parveen only needs a few musicians to play their instruments as she sings on her own. Khan's singing style is similar to many other male qawwals. On the contrary, even when Parveen performs qawwali, she uses female and male singing styles together.

Branding Pakistan

Although Pakistan is an ethnically diverse country, it is still regarded as a nation-state due to the various ethnic groups being strongly bonded by a – generally – common ideology of Islam, Muslim heritage, cultural values, and social norms. Sufism is immensely popular in Pakistan, with the country home to countless monuments and shrines dedicated to saints. Most Pakistanis embrace Sufis' authenticity at least as sources of wisdom and hold them in high esteem. Others also believe them to be Divine intervention and a counterbalance to "illness" caused by supernatural forces and maintain a spirituals relationship with God (Yousaf & Huaibin, 2014, p. 91).

Promoting Sufi values and adopting Sufism as an official stance by the Pakistani

government deters from extremist elements in the country, allowing for Pakistan's branding to be based on a “Sufi theme.” The fundamental problem with Pakistan’s image being portrayed negatively is that a small segment of the society gets most of the coverage in the media avenues, forming a perception of the rest of the nation. Most countries worldwide already have some sort of identity associated with them, which is mostly negative in the case of Pakistan (Yousaf & Huaibin, 2014, p. 97).

This perception though mainly based on stereotypes, not reality, has been acknowledged by the international public. The more significant the difference between the prevailing stereotypes about a nation around the world and its reality, the greater is the scope of the nation’s branding (Gilmore, 2002, p. 4-5). However, the country’s brand must be based on their reality, and they cannot expect to create a new image if it is not synonymous with its identity. For this reason, country branding is a long-term process that can take decades. Promoting Pakistan’s image as a “Sufi country” is consistent with Pakistani society's prevailing disposition in comparison to the current image of Pakistan. It is also offering more coherence with Pakistani cultural and societal values than the concepts of Zia’s Islamization and Musharraf’s enlightened moderation (Yousaf & Huaibin, 2014, p. 97).

In his essay, “The Nation Longing to Form,” Timothy Brennan explains Pakistan’s issue always being in flux, stating that its dependency on multifarious narratives is why the country will remain highly volatile (Brennan, 1991). He states that Pakistan’s existence is contingent on the thriving of cultural fictions, and that is where not only Sufism but Coke Studio Pakistan’s Sufism’s unique position becomes clear. Music and the discourse surrounding music offers an alternative idea of what nationhood means

for Pakistan, confirming and contradicting the country's foundations simultaneously (Gupta, 2016, p. 2).

When stereotypes are attached to a nation, a continuous, coordinated branding campaign is needed to reinvent its brand and what it represents. How then does a nation imagine itself? According to Benedict Anderson (1990), imagined communities – or nations – are formed through a national identity shared among the nation and its people. The people perceive themselves as a homogenous body, despite having never met other individuals. Moreover, Anderson theorized the underlying concept of a nation, stating that it emerges with a common language and discourse generated from the printing press, escalating by a capitalist marketplace. Books and media were written in the vernacular rather than exclusive script languages resulting in a common discourse. If print and media have such a significant role in imagining the nation, they can be easily used to reimagine the nation. This is where Coke Studio platforms come into the picture, exporting a certain image of Pakistan.

Pakistan, much like any nation, is not monolithic in nature. In the Pakistani diaspora, there is a romanticization of the homeland, traditions, people, and way of life. For the most part, our experiences are mediated by our elders, and imagination is all the diaspora has when it comes to truly understanding Pakistan. This mediation drives a wedge between Pakistanis and their diaspora, raising questions of authenticity and an identity crisis.

Nations are socially constructed; its citizens do not know most of their fellow members, share their experiences, or hear of them and yet, the image of their communion lives in all their minds. The diaspora and Pakistan do not share most of their experiences

with each other. However, shared experiences are transcended by a platform such as Coke Studio, flattening the geographical boundary by creating accessible art. If nations are formed through a national identity, shared among the nation and its people, then the ability to share such experiences surely bridges some of the gap between the diaspora and Pakistan itself.

This chapter will discuss the new kind of Islam and new Pakistani identity that is being promoted in Pakistan and is also being exported to diasporic communities through platforms such as Coke Studio. It will also examine the role of Abida Parveen in this reimagined Pakistan. The reimaging of Pakistan through music and its discourse offers an alternative understanding of Pakistani nationhood for those living in the diaspora. For those in the diaspora, being connected to Pakistani identity is important, especially when isolated from other Pakistanis. Music programs such as Coke Studio build a sense of belonging to Pakistan that people may not have had access to had it not been available on the internet. People such as myself may not experience Pakistani culture first-hand as often as we would like. Coke Studio changes this by combining traditional and contemporary musical formats. However, Coke Studio serves as a portal to Pakistani culture for those in the diaspora. Along with a specific representation of Islam and Pakistan, Coke Studio has – perhaps unintentionally – exported a different kind of femininity and gender through Sufi singers such as Abida Parveen.

Sufism or Sufism Inc.? Questions of authenticity

When listening to singers such as Parveen or Khan, there is a significant difference between their performances at a live concert and a recording studio. In live

performances, Parveen's singing is often raw and unregulated. She has the freedom to perform how and what she wants because she is the one in control. However, in a space such as Coke Studio, the producer has a say in how the song will be performed. This, in turn, impacts the freedom that the singer has, restricting their performance. Additionally, Coke Studio appears to rely on instruments and background singers more than Parveen herself does. When performing at a concert, she tends to be surrounded by a few musicians and no other singers.

Coke Studio's producers need access to platforms to disseminate their ideas, given the identity crisis that motivates them to engage in the struggle for discursive power over Islam. Securing such platforms is difficult because Pakistan's music industry remains underdeveloped and suffers from threats of violence from those that consider music to be contrary to Islam. Generally, Pakistani musicians lack sources of funding outside of corporate sponsorship (Tanweer, 2012).

The emergence and continuity of Coke Studio are possible by the sponsorship of Coca-Cola Company Pakistan. Coca-Cola owns the Coke Studio brand, financing its production activities, organizing the airtime that Coke Studio receives on television, and supporting Coke Studio's website. In return, product placement is abundant in Coke Studio's public output, such as the Coca-Cola bottle featuring in the backdrop of music videos. The show is a significant component of Coca-Cola's marketing campaign in Pakistan, with its artists featured on Coca-Cola bottles, cans and billboards (Mukhtar, 2015, p. 31-32).

Moreover, Coke Studio's utility for Coca-Cola must also be considered in light of PepsiCo's interaction with a rival company. Since the start of Coke Studio in 2008, Coca-Cola has recaptured some of the markets that it had lost out in the 1980s and 1990s to Pepsi, partly because of Pepsi's predominant sponsorship of Pakistani cricket team and local music. Pepsi even sponsored Hyatt's first music band, Vital Signs. Moreover, Hyatt has also previously produced a cricket show for the company, called Pepsi Inside Edge, as well as the music programme Battle of the Bands. The marketing contest between the two cola companies has resulted in tussles over sponsorship of Pakistan's leading cricketers and music; for instance, Pepsi is currently sponsoring a music programme, Pepsi Smash, to challenge the success of Coke Studio (Akbar, 2001).

After entering the global stage in the late 80s, qawwali began to be played at Sufi music festivals worldwide, creating new genres and groups of professional Sufi musicians. It has taken hold in Pakistan, present everywhere from corporate-sponsored music shows like Coke Studio to wedding celebrations and university "culture nights." Through this process, qawwali was detached from its more profound spiritual significance and was repackaged as a cultural item, all so that it could be more easily commodified for a global and younger audience. The distinction of Sufism versus "normative" Islam played a significant role in this transformation. The Musharraf regime's solution to promoting a moderate image of the nation while staying true to its Islamic heritage was Sufism, an "Islam of peace." Projecting a peaceful Pakistan had to be done visibly, and so Sufi practices were turned into forms of cultural tourism, commodifying it (Gupta, 2016, p. 4).

By becoming Pakistan's version of global youth culture, popular music sharpened the generation gap and bridged class and cultural divides. It originated in defiance of the official and religious establishments, meaning that it did not intend to evolve per state-sponsored dogma. Therefore, popular music in Pakistan became a reaction against Pakistan's inceptive idea, striving to imagine a new Pakistani identity perhaps. Coke Studio has played a vital role in this. The show's format is a celebration of diversity that challenges the state's projection of homogeneity, thus questioning the notion of uniformity in nationhood. This diversity is not a fusion, according to the producer, and is instead a merger between the two. The idea is not to present a synthesis of the old and the modern but to create a new musicality realm, allowing the old and modern to co-exist and be equally articulated (Gupta, 2016, p. 4).

Coke Studio, among other platforms. has given Pakistan international recognition in the world of music. A primary reason for the popularity of Coke Studio is its availability at the intercontinental level, via YouTube. After the invention of television, video culture has become popular simply because of its almost viral availability across all socio-political barriers. Coke Studio viably uses this platform to reach out to millions of international viewers with a new image of Pakistan. Its aim is commendable; however, there are a few issues that arise. The first is that Hyatt's project is directed towards Pakistan and the youth at the global level. Coke Studio takes up a few cultural causes by focusing on a narrative for the youth, ignoring the rest. This dismissal of what could potentially have given a fuller figure to the Pakistani character is problematic. Secondly,

Coke Studio's support of a stylized, secular, popular culture may not represent a Pakistani identity (Gupta, 2016, p. 3-4).

In pioneering a particular aesthetic ethos, the project runs the risk of perpetrating what it was conceived against – homogenization. By providing an alternative to Pakistan's international religio-political image, it dangerously balances itself on the border of new cultural institutionalization. The other argument is the corporate interference in the realm of music. Sponsored by Coca Cola, this project has been, for the most part, designed according to the wishes of the company who want their business venture to return maximum yield and, at the same time, not get involved in direct political statements. A Western multinational company's participation in Pakistani nation formation is deeply paradoxical. This perpetuates cultural imperialism because the management selects the musical tradition. Furthermore, Coca Cola's marketing strategies, intended to create a more robust consumer connection with Pakistan's youth, using the soft drink as a vehicle for branded entertainment, is problematic. There is an unmistakable seepage of brand politics and economic imperialism into indigenous experiences and identity formation, thus contaminating the cultural output (Gupta, 2016, p. 8-9).

The efforts to "culturalize" Sufism in a capitalist society was part of the strategy to transform Sufism into a product. During Musharraf's regime, Sufi music and poetry have spread the works of Sufi poets and renowned qawwals into music CDs, TV shows, radio programs, and Sufi music festivals. Corporate-sponsored shows such as Coke Studio turned the Sufi music into a commodity and began hosting well-known Sufi

singers. With Musharraf's help, a National Sufi Council was founded in 2006 that was responsible for promoting Sufi philosophy, poetry, and music on behalf of Pakistan. Much of Sufi poetry being circulated by both corporations – and the Pakistani government – comes from a history of political resistance. The poetry is written by poets who were against material consumption, selfishness, and vanity, as is the Sufi belief. The Pakistani government's reduction of centuries-old Sufi poetry and music into a commodity goes against the art's initially defiant spirit. By becoming commodified and "culturalized," qawwali is separated from its spiritual beginnings (Amin, 2019).

There is also the issue of authenticity. Is it permissible to listen to qawwali outside of its spiritual contexts? Do we dishonour its origins by listening to establishment-sponsored qawwali? The erasure of qawwali's history in resistance to politics and Islam, qawwali's market value shoots up. Sufism is therefore used for profit where people outside of the Sufi tradition can also play, including people who enjoy more "secular" music. The transformation of qawwali into a commodity may be unavoidable in current day neoliberalism, where everything has been commodified. Until this changes, we have no choice but to watch Sufi poetry be sung against the Coca-Cola logo (Amin, 2019).

Coke Studio music videos start with the bright red logo flashing on the screen with the phrase "Sound of the Nation" in bold letters written underneath. As the camera pans out, the complete set becomes visible, from the overhead lights to the neon outline of a life-sized Coke bottle displayed on the wall, glowing red and orange. The frames change frequently, the tempo switches from slow to fast, and the qawwali singers' volume shifts from low to high. However, the logo remains fixed in the upper right corner

of the screen from the song's beginning to the end. Sufi practices like qawwali are widely performed and venerated in Pakistan, making them an ideal avenue for Coca-Cola to promote itself. Ironically, self-interest and profit-maximizing principles lie at the center of capitalist companies like Coca-Cola, contradicting the values of humility and asceticism that Sufism and qawwali seek to promote (Amin, 2019).

According to Robert Rozehnal, in his book *Cyber Sufis: Virtual Expressions of the American Muslim Experience,* he states that semantic spaces in Sufi practice exist where the virtual is real – i.e. dreams, visionary experiences – and central to Sufi tradition. This is where the boundaries between living and dead; God and humanity; prophet and saints; and angel and terrestrial human beings fall away. This veil separating the two falls away in the virtual and tangible things can come from these spaces. There is reason to believe that Sufis may be inclined to participate in or adopt virtual spaces increasingly as technology advances along with a generational shift (Rozehnal, 2019).

Rozehnal also argues that digital space is just as real as dreams or visionary experiences (Rozehnal, 2019). Through this argument, the question of the authenticity of some current day Sufi practices is answered. This also provides one way of looking at Coke Studio's existence. It can be argued that Coke Studio is inauthentic because it progresses beyond Sufi beliefs and practices, such as associating with Coca-Cola, digital media, or Western music. However, if the virtual or the digital are real experiences, and the objective is to spread the message, Coke Studio's platform is as good as any. It cannot be denied that associating with Coca-Cola goes against Sufi beliefs, nor can it be denied that Coke Studio is an adaptation of Sufi music. Nonetheless, Coke Studio has ignited a

new, albeit different, interest in Sufi poetry across the globe and stands as its genre. Although some traditional Sufi practitioners may disagree, Coke Studio is host to many well-known Sufi singers such as Parveen and is still a genuine experience.

What, then, happens when a Sufi musician such as Parveen performs for a studio sponsored by such a company? To unpack this, it is crucial first to discuss Sufi traditions relating to money. A form of appreciation of performance in Pakistan is called *nazrana*, where members of the audience throw money at the musicians during their concerts. For many Sufis, this is a source of earning. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, for instance, would receive a vast amount of money as gifts throughout his performances, and a helper would collect the bills. However, both Khan and Parveen do not concern themselves with such matters for the most part. At a concert in Bahrain where the audience showered her with jewelry, Parveen left the jewelry on stage, commenting that she will not be remembered for her wealth after her death (Los Angeles Times," n.d.).

For Parveen to perform for Coke Studio, where Coca-Cola is overly concerned with product placement and promoting the brand, it is uncommon. Although there are a few other Sufis that perform for Coke Studio, such as Saieen Zahoor Ahmed and Abu Muhammad Qawwal and Brothers, it is unheard of for the most part. Traditionally, Sufis perform at a dargah, or, if they gain enough popularity, at a concert. Coke Studio is an extremely public television programme which not a common platform for Sufis. Coke Studio was created by Rohail Hyatt to promote Sufi music, making it an exception to Sufis when it comes to such public performances. Khan was one of the pioneers in taking qawwali outside Pakistan and into Bollywood and Western audiences. Parveen has not

gone as far as him yet in Westernizing Sufi music and chooses to remain closer to her spiritual roots.

Although Parveen does perform for Coke Studio, it does not imply that her spiritual beliefs have changed. For her, performing is a form of worship, and if someone can benefit from her words, then there is no better accomplishment. Just as it is not about the terms but about the feelings the performance gives, it is not about the platform where she performs but about delivering the performance's message. Coke Studio has been most popular with Pakistan's youth and its diaspora; however, this has not deterred Parveen from performing. Instead, she believes that age is irrelevant to Sufi music and spirituality.

Parveen's desire to deliver her music's message may be her only concern and not financial gain. That does not mean that she – and other Sufis – disagree entirely with earning any income. In fact, in recent news, Parveen filed a copyright claim against Coke Studio's Season 12 Episode 4 song "*Hairan Hua*." The song, performed by Sanam Marvi for Coke Studio, was composed by Parveen, and she holds the rights to the song. The song was immediately removed from Coke Studio's YouTube channel and its website. Parveen's son, Sarang Latif, handled the matter, saying that Coke Studio must have thought the song was a traditional or folk composition but that his mother composes 99% of her songs herself. It now seems that Parveen and her team – her children – have agreed to grant them the rights to use the song by purchasing it. In Season 11, Coke Studio also had to ask permission to use Parveen's composition for "*Ghoom Charakhra*" and purchased it even though Parveen herself performed it (Images, n.d.).

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Growing up, my version of Pakistan was filled with trips to the local markets, small snack shops on the sides of motorways, the sight of the Himalayan foothills from my grandmother's rooftop, Wall's ice cream trucks, and the constant worry of food poisoning. It was not until I was 13 years old that I began experiencing and exploring more of what the nation had to offer. What became very apparent to me was that Pakistan's romanticized branding – including Sufism – was aimed towards the diaspora. The deeper I looked, the more I realized the political, cultural, religious, and gender-related complexities that Pakistan was composed of. My journey through graduate studies and this thesis have enabled me to wrestle with questions about my religion, gender, culture and its popular representations and identity.

This thesis explores Abida Parveen's career, and recent performances for Coke Studio observed through gender theory lenses. I focused specifically on Parveen's career in Coke Studio because the content was not only readily available but also because Coke Studio itself brought on its complexities – i.e., sponsorship by Coca-Cola. I argued that to understand Parveen's gender blurring, both Butler and Mahmood's theories on gender and agency were needed. By analyzing Parveen's gender blurring, this thesis has shown it is possible to engage in subversive and non-subversive behaviour while possessing agency, be it in spaces such as traditional qawwali performances in Pakistan.

I presented gender as socially constructed characteristics, norms, and roles attributed to women and men. Since gender is a construct, concepts such as feminine and masculine are not exclusive to any gender. Instead, there is no pre-existing being or norm for gender, but it is created as it is performed through a relationship with and a

dependence on other individuals. When Butler defines gender, she specifies that it is not a noun but a doing which produces an endlessly gendered subject (Lloyd, 2007, 31-42).

According to Butler, undoing gender norms must be a subversive act if one possesses any sense of agency. While Butler is interested in the subversive potential of gender performativity that creates agency, Mahmood is concerned with the non-subversive potential. When it comes to Parveen, because she conforms to traditional practices while also disrupting societal and gender norms, both Butler and Mahmood's theories on gender were necessary for a comprehensive analysis.

Parveen challenges Pakistani and Islamic gender norms on countless levels. To better understand what she does, I used Butler's theory of gender performativity and Mahmood's theory on female agency. Although Butler's theory on gender performativity holds across the world, both theories were necessary as Butler's theory only takes Western liberal views on agency into account. Butler argues that gender identity is a performance, sex a socially constructed category, and concepts of masculinity and femininity are established through predominant cultural agents operating on the body. She argues that to achieve a sense of agency, one must undo, or subvert, cultural norms surrounding gender. On the other hand, Mahmood suggests that a claim to agency can be non-subversive and can be done without the use of resistance.

It is possible to engage in subversive and non-subversive behaviour and still have agency over one's self. While Butler's theory argues that gaining agency and undoing societal gender norms is only possible through subversive behaviour, the other scholar argues that resistance is not always necessary. Although qawwali, Sufism, and Pakistan all possess rigid definitions of gender in one way or another, it is possible to disrupt said

norms and become successful as Parveen has. Parveen may be an anomaly in her field, but she proves that one can push back against their traditions and adhere to them without feeling as though they have no agency over themselves.

Despite female contributions to and feminine components of Sufi ritual, women's role in the Sufi space has often been overlooked in scholarly work. The existence of women in Sufi spaces is not only restricted, but it is also glossed over when Sufi practices are examined, particularly by Western male scholars. Although women appear to have more agency in Sufi shrines than mosques in South Asia, their existence in the space is still quite restricted. The presence of Abida Parveen in such spaces, dominated by men, then warrants a closer look. Due to a lack of previous research on the subject matter and restrictions on women in shrines, accessing relevant information for this thesis proved to be a challenge.

In Sufism, the notion of equality and common submission appears to be the same for females and males but only at the surface level. However, women rarely have the opportunity, let alone access, to dedicate themselves to devotional exercises in the manner that men do. The Sufi doctrine of mysticism intends to be ungendered with notions such as love, submission, and subservience but begin to appear gendered when looked at closely. Despite ample female contributions, women’s existence in Sufism has often been ignored, and women have been pushed to the sidelines. There have been Sufi women in the past, such as Rabia Basri, who participated in devotional practices and celibacy equally and yet, they are thought to be men in disguise.

Parveen not only differs from women in Sufi spaces who perform *sufiana kalam*, but she also differs from men who perform qawwali. She holds a unique position in

qawwali because of how she disrupts the genre's male-dominated demographics and Pakistani gender norms. By negating her gender and deeming herself to be merely a vehicle for God's words, Parveen simultaneously claims and surrenders her agency. She blurs her gender through her androgynous appearance and the role she takes on in her performances. By refusing to conform to all gender norms, she deconstructs the notion of her identity being an extension of her body. Over time, Parveen changes how she performs her gender by displaying more subversive behaviour. Although she chooses to abandon countless gender norms and undo normative conceptions of gendered life, she does not entirely remove herself from social and cultural structures of femininity. While she cannot completely remove herself from such ideologies, she still works within them to challenge and disrupt them.

Coke Studio Pakistan has played a significant role in what Islam in Pakistan looks like to the world. Using contemporary Western music and traditional music, Coke Studio has grabbed listeners' attention from around the world. Before YouTube, traditional Pakistani music was difficult to access outside Pakistan or cities such as Toronto with large diasporic communities. Coke Studio helped bridge a connection between the diaspora and Pakistan, drawing attention from the previously disconnected youth from folk traditions and poetry.

On a personal level, as a member of the Pakistani diaspora, Coke Studio Pakistan has given me access to music and traditions I may never have been exposed to otherwise. Often, in the diaspora, our perceptions of Pakistan are shaped by what our elders, who have lived there, tell us. Listening to traditional music may never have crossed my mind had I not listened to Coke Studio renditions of songs such as "*Chaap Tilak*" or "*Afreen*

Afreen." Although I had begun listening to traditional qawwali a few years ago, my research enabled me to look further into what was being said in those performances.

I was under the assumption that Parveen's analysis would simply find that she engages in subversive behaviour. However, due to the space that she occupies and her Sufi beliefs, my analysis was not as straightforward as anticipated. Between Butler's theory on gender performativity, Mahmood's theory on female agency in Muslim spaces, and Sufi "disruptions" of gender norms, understanding Parveen's unique position was not easy. What I found was most important to my analysis was to remember the context in which Parveen exists.

When I initially began researching for this thesis, I was looking forward to learning more about the qawwali's beautiful tradition and the use of feminine language in Sufi poetry. I wanted to know the implication of a woman performing poetry riddled metaphors about the female, written for men and men. What I ended up learning gave me a newfound appreciation for gender norms, Islam, and qawwali in Pakistan.

Through this research, I explored the complexities that make Pakistan and its diaspora what it is. Although I spent a large portion of this thesis exploring Parveen's disruption of gender, the aim was to determine whether she, the performer, was an authentic representation of Sufism, Islam, and women in Pakistan. By exploring her career, I concluded that Parveen, although different from mainstream Pakistanis, provides just an authentic experience of what Pakistan is to its people and the diaspora. She may not be an as traditional representation of qawwali or Pakistani Muslim women such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan or Farhat Hashmi, but she is just as authentic.

The emergence and existence of Coke Studio are only possible due to Coca-Cola's sponsorship. Whether or not the platform is "authentically" Sufi then becomes an important question because of Coca-Cola's interest in profit-maximizing as it conflicts with Sufi beliefs. Moreover, Coke Studio is a virtual experience, deterring from the traditional Sufi practices of South Asia and incorporating Western music. Many traditional qawwals argue that Coke Studio is inauthentic. However, the nature of the Sufi practice itself is disruptive, often going against norms.

Furthermore, the semantic spaces in Sufi practice exist where the virtual, such as dreams or visionary experiences, is real. Therefore, there is reason to believe that Sufis may be inclined to participate in virtual or digital spaces. For someone like Parveen to perform for Coke Studio may be unheard of, but it is not disingenuous. When asked about this matter, she says that her focus is on delivering the message, and if such a platform can reach younger generations, then that is what is essential.

Fundamentally, what is so intriguing about Parveen is that if she is constantly interested in defeating her ego and effacing herself, it makes sense that she is on Coke Studio. She does not care about our critique as her primary interest is being a "vehicle for passion". She is neither a man or a woman on stage. She is merely in the state of performing. Whether that be at a *dargah*, a concert, Coke Studio, or even in her own home, when she begins to sing, all eyes shift to her. Abida Parveen has an arresting presence that pulls her audience in and in that moment, all that matters is her magnificent voice, not her gender. The experience is not just musical but also spiritual, transcending all language.

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