

# Understanding the Role of Hindi Cinema in Popularizing Sufi Music and Its Rising Appeal among Youth in West Bengal

Shubhangi Chowdhury<sup>1</sup>  
Student, Women's College Calcutta  
Calcutta University

**Abstract:-** Sufi music is a devotional music genre that originates from the mystical tradition of Sufism. It plays a significant role in expressing the profound emotions and spiritual experiences of Sufi practitioners, and listeners. Also, it aims to transport listeners into a state of heightened spiritual awareness. Sufi music in India is in high demand; people have incorporated this genre into the Indian sub-continental culture. This led to a rise in the number of Sufi songs as well as Sufi artists in India. Independent music artists have released their songs on popular platforms like YouTube and other digital music sites. Besides, the incorporation of Sufi Music heavily in the last 20 years of Hindi cinema has made it a popular culture in society. Indian city Kolkata is known for its affection towards musical culture. Recently, there has been a rising appeal among the youth for Sufi Music. Young people are frequently seen singing at Sufi music performances and mentioning how the music has affected them. Even due to the flexibility of this genre, there has been a creation of Sufi music over the past few years by audiences' needs and preferences. Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine how Hindi film contributes to the development of a Sufi music culture among young people and the factors that contribute to the growing popularity of Sufi music among them, with an emphasis on the Indian state of West Bengal. To do this, a survey of 100 young people living in different districts of West Bengal and a content study of Hindi movie songs released in the past few years have been carried out in the study.

**Keywords:-** Popular Culture, Sufi Music, Hindi Films, Youth, West Bengal.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sufism is derived from the Arabic term “Suf,” which translates to “wool,” and pertains to the garments donned by the early practitioners of Sufism (Schimmel, 2024). According to Safi Ali Shah, a prominent Sufi figure of the previous century, “Sufism is the journey through the stations of the soul” (Boroujerdi, 1993). Within the context of Sufism, musical sound is extensively embraced in both theoretical frameworks and practical applications. “Sufi music is the music of the rooh (soul).” Music of the insides. Sufi means absolutely pure, said Mame Khan, a Rajasthani folksinger (Khan, 2020). Self-connection is considered the most significant goal in Sufi music. And so, often said, it is mind-

based or heart-based, which refers to the seat of thought and emotion.

Simultaneously, Sufi music is evolving with the local cultural heritage and is part of life in communities everywhere (Kataria & Sharma, 2018). In every community, Sufi music brings together the local and universal forms of spirituality into creative expression. The meditative percussive rhythms produced by the goblet-shaped drum called *darbuka* are complemented by a harmonic fusion of the pear-shaped lute called *oud*, which together contribute to the distinct instrumentation of Sufi music (Wolf, 2006). Similarly, the Sufi genre of music plays a strong role in all Indians' lives, even for non-practicing or non-observant people of Sufism, for the fact is that hundreds and thousands of Sufi songs have been produced and disseminated amongst the people by Hindi cinema, especially over the past ten years.

The relationship of Sufi music with Hindi cinema has very rich historical roots. Sufi music first appeared on Indian television in 1994 during the opening titles of Shekhar Kapur's *Bandit Queen*. “Choti Si Umar,” a poignant song by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, perfectly encapsulated the suffering of a little girl who was made to leave her home and get married at a young age. The song created the atmosphere for the on-screen terrible life tale of *Phoolan Devi*.

Incidentally, that became the initiating point of Sufi music in the country through the Hindi cinema. Films had introduced *qawwali* to the current India. The first *Qawwali* was performed in the Hindi movie *Mughl-e-Azam*, *Teri Mehfil Mein Kismat* (Murarka, 2021). Ever since many songs and performances have been produced and keeping that in consideration, *Qawwali* is a type of Sufi devotional music which gained much popularity over the Indian subcontinent (Qureshi, 1990). Shankar-Shambhu, alongside the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, who is recognized as the most prominent Sufi vocalist in the region, played a significant role in introducing contemporary Sufi music to Hindi cinema and modern India (Sen, 2023). Indian Sufi fusion elevated the audience to a heightened spiritual and emotional experience. The modernized interpretation or contemporary adaptation of Sufi music was exemplified in Hindi cinema songs such as “Chaiya Chaiya” and “Dil Se Re” (Jaiswal, 2021).

In due course of time, as Sufi music evolved as a distinguished musical genre, it also gave birth to a completely new cult of music in India. This growth was heralded by the A R Rahman, Wadali brothers, Nizami brothers, Warsi brothers, and Madan Gopal Singh. As these singers gained in popularity, so did the genre itself.. Slowly Sufi music began creeping into many cultures. They have experimented with their music by drawing inspiration from and attempting to incorporate their interpretations of Sufi music for cinematic purposes.

“Piya Haji Ali” from Fiza (2000), Allah Ke Bande” from Waisa Bhi Hota Hai II (2003), “Zikr” from Bose, The Forgotten Hero (2004), “Khwaja Mere Khwaja” from Jodhaa Akbar (2008), “Arziyan” in Delhi-6 (2009), ‘Kun Faya Kun from Rockstar (2011), ‘Piya Milenge” from Raanjhanaa (2016) are some of the Sufi songs that helped in creating the Sufi playlist a household one in our country, rather naming it as Indian Sufi music.

In modern society, Sufi music is integrated with other kinds of music to create new genres, like Sufi jazz, Sufi pop, and Sufi rock, among others. With the introduction of varied technologies and high-tech musical instruments, the modernization of this particular genre has made it more beautiful, and the influence of Sufi music on people has grown with time (Rajan, 2014).

At the same time, these songs did carve out niches within playlists for the Indian youth, for their popularity increased significantly in West Bengal as well. Therefore it is crucial to study the resonance of Sufism within this demographic, offering interesting insights into changing musical tastes and spiritual orientations. At the same time, it underscores the way Hindi cinema has played a crucial role in spreading this genre of music. A dialogue between young people and the genres of music often offers a great perspective in studying the movement and the drivers behind the same.

#### ➤ *Aims and Objectives*

- To understand Sufism and its Musical Expression through lyrical analysis of the Hindi Sufi songs.
- To investigate the role of Hindi cinema in promoting and popularising Sufi music among the youth.
- To map youth’s perception towards Sufi Music of Hindi cinema.

#### ➤ *Hypothesis*

The hypothesis proposed that youth are more inclined towards connecting with Sufi music through Hindi cinema songs for its unique expression and the ability to ease mental health issues.

## II. METHODOLOGY

- Research Approach: Mixed Method(Qualitative-Quantitative).
- Research Design: Descriptive Research Design

- ✓ Survey
- ✓ Content Analysis

- Population: Youth of West Bengal
- Sample:

- ✓ For Survey: All university students in West Bengal aged 18–24.
- ✓ For Content Analysis: Sufi Songs in Hindi Cinema:

- 2003- Allah Ke Bande, Movie – Waisa Bhi Hota Hai- Part II
- 2007- Maula mere Maula, Movie- Anwar
- 2008- Khwaja Mere Khwaja, Movie- Jodhaa Akbar
- 2009- Arziyan, Movie- Delhi 6
- 2011- Kun Faya Kun, Movie- Rockstar
- 2014- Patakhya Guddi, Movie-Highway
- 2015- Bhar Do Jholi Meri, Bajrangi Bhaijaan
- 2016- Bulleya, Movie-Sultan
- 2018- Nit Khair Manga, Movie- Raid
- 2021- Akhiyan Udeek Diyan, Movie- Shiddat
- Sample Size:

- ✓ Survey: 100
- ✓ Content Analysis: 10 Hindi Cinema Sufi songs released between 2000-2022.

- Sampling Technique: Convenience Sampling
- Tools and Techniques: A survey was conducted where a structured questionnaire sheet of 20 questions (17 close-ended and 3 open-ended) was handed over to 100 people to obtain the data required for this study.

The obtained data was then analyzed through graphical representations.

The content analysis was conducted using certain variables to describe the entire content in great detail. The information obtained from the content analysis is what the song is, what its appeal is, in what context it was set, and how its appealing nature is achieved through the visuals and the melody to reach out to the audience.

## III. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

#### ➤ *Survey Findings:*

- Demographics: Out of the 100 respondents, 52% were female and 48% were male.
- Familiarity with Sufi Music: The obtained data revealed that a significant majority (85%) of respondents were familiar with Sufi music, primarily through Hindi cinema.
- Frequency of Listening: Around 67% of respondents reported listening to Sufi songs at least once a week, with 22% listening once or twice a month.
- Hindi Cinema’s role in making Sufi music accessible: An overwhelming 91% of respondents identified Hindi cinema songs as their primary source of exposure to Sufi music.

- **Emotional Connection:** When asked about their emotional connection to Sufi music, 76% of respondents stated that Sufi songs evoke strong emotions in them. The lyrics and melodies resonated deeply, providing an outlet for personal feelings.
- **Sense of Peace:** 85% of the respondents felt that these Sufi songs provide a sense of peace, and the music helps them.
- **Preference for Fusion:** When asked about their preference for traditional Sufi songs versus modern fusion adaptations, 42% favoured the fusion style,
- **Socio-Political Reflection:** Approximately 68% of respondents agreed that Sufi songs, with their spiritual depth and underlying messages, have encouraged them to reflect on socio-political issues and themes of unity and tolerance.
- **Creative Expression:** Regarding creative expression, 37% of respondents indicated that Sufi music had
- inspired them to explore their artistic talents, such as singing, dancing, or creating cover versions of Sufi songs.
- **Cross-Generational Bonding:** Around 81% of respondents felt that Sufi music provided a means of bonding across generations, as older family members also enjoyed these songs. This highlights the bridging role Sufi music plays in connecting youth with elders.
- The perceptions, opinions and received in the survey further emphasize the fact that youth have been able to relate to this genre and express themselves and it connects to their soul. The youth (90 percentage) in West Bengal want Sufi music to continue in the future.

#### ➤ Content Analysis Findings:

- Hindi cinema sufi songs often explore concepts of love, devotion, and the quest for the divine, resonating with the deep introspection and philosophical questioning that are common among young individuals. The spiritual depth of Sufi lyrics provided a departure from the more commercialized themes, allowing Gen Z to engage with music on a more profound level.
- These songs are known for their emotive lyrics and soul-stirring melodies. For Gen Z, these songs provided a platform for emotional expression and connection. The intricate lyrics and poignant musical arrangements allowed them to navigate complex emotions, from love and heartbreak to existential contemplation, thus serving as an emotional outlet.
- Sufi songs and their fusion of traditional and contemporary musical elements exposed youth to diverse musical styles. This exposure helped broaden their musical tastes beyond conventional pop and Western genres. The fusion of traditional instruments with modern production techniques offered a unique auditory experience that resonated with their preference for eclectic music.
- Sufi songs provided youth with inspiration for their creative expressions. Whether through dance, cover versions, or reinterpretations, young artists found a rich source of material to channel their artistic energy and reinterpret Sufi melodies for contemporary audiences.

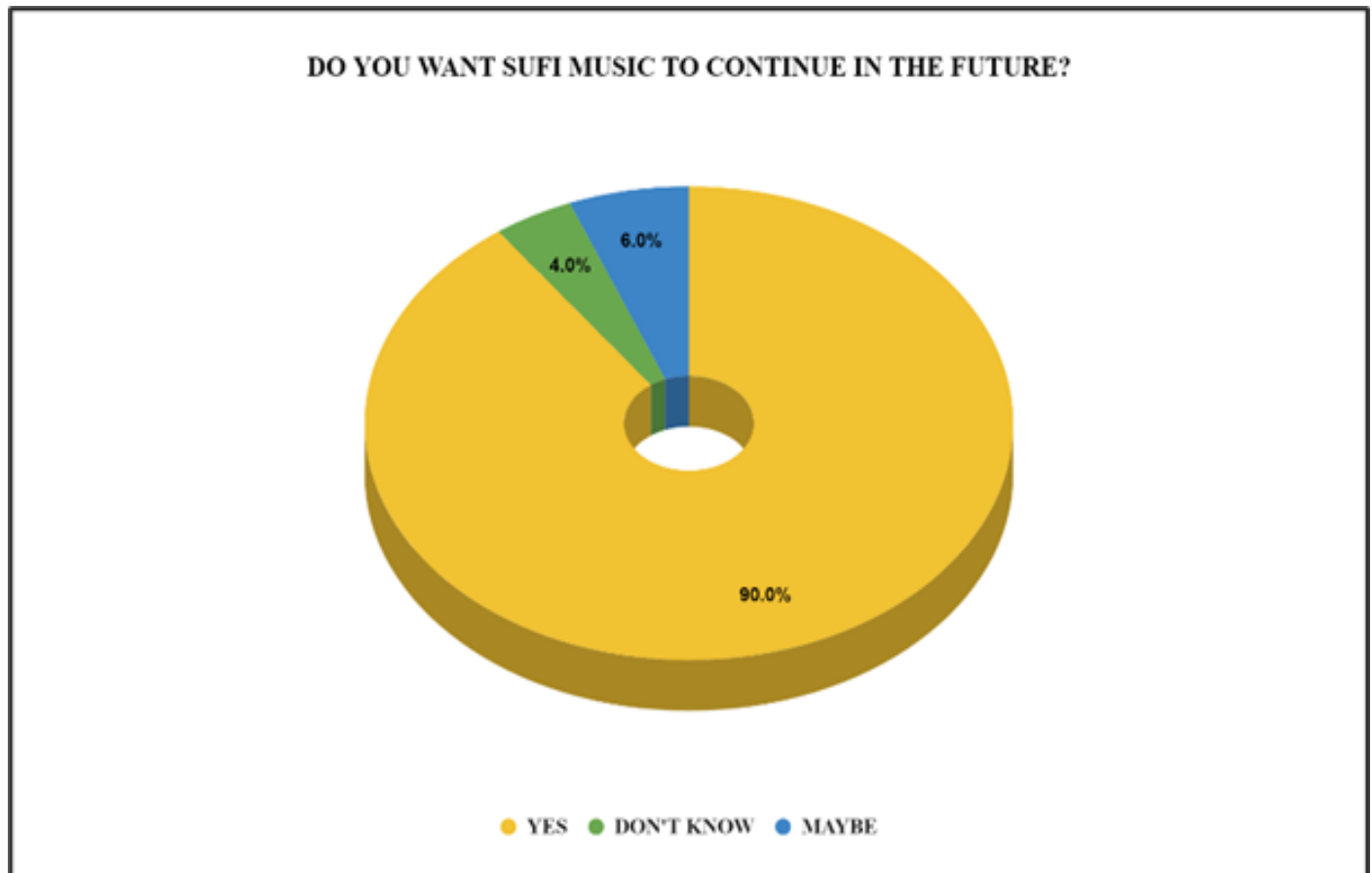


Chart 1: Graphical Representation of the Respondents who wants Sufi Music to Continue in the Future.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the findings that largely the lyrics, the depth, the unique expression, the Sufi poetry, technology, and the ability to provide a sense of peace and hope have raised the appeal of Sufi music among the youth. Also, the constant production of such songs in Hindi cinema has helped in the popularity of Sufi music over time.

Moreover, the emotional resonance of Sufi music became a vital outlet for complex emotions. The melodies and lyrics allowed them to navigate the intricate landscape of their feelings, whether it was expressing love, longing, or existential contemplation. This emotional connection transcended generational gaps, fostering unity within families and communities as older generations shared their appreciation for Sufi melodies.

Furthermore, Sufi music's potential as a vehicle for socio-political reflection and inspiration for creative expression emerged as significant findings.

#### FUTURE PROSPECTS

- Broader understanding of music has no barriers.
- Commercialization of Sufi music.
- Fusion of authentic music with rock melody.
- Medium of expression for Gen Z.

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