

A Comparative Study of Allan Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal: Personality, Style and Singing Skill in South Asian Sufi-Folk Traditions

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comparative analysis of two iconic figures in South Asian Sufi-folk music Allan Faqeer of Sindh, Pakistan and Kanwar Grewal of Punjab, India. Through qualitative content analysis and ethnomusicological comparison, it examines how each artist embodies Sufi ideals of devotion, humility and love while negotiating distinct cultural, political and media contexts. Allan Faqeer's ecstatic, shrine-based performance style represents spiritual joy and national unity within Pakistan's broadcast era, whereas Kanwar Grewal's ascetic yet activist expression redefines Sufi music as a medium of protest and moral awakening in contemporary India. Despite differences in vocal timbre, instrumentation and ideological framing, both artists converge in using music as a vehicle of transcendence, empathy and collective identity. The study underscores how Sufi-folk traditions continue to evolve as vibrant forms of cultural resilience and spiritual communication in a rapidly changing South Asian landscape.

Keywords: Sufi-folk music; comparative ethnomusicology; devotional performance; spiritual identity; cultural continuity; media and mysticism.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

South Asian Sufi-folk music represents not a single, unified genre but a constellation of spiritual and cultural soundscapes that continue to evolve through regional traditions, linguistic expressions and shifting media ecologies. Across Pakistan and India, Sufi performance serves as both an act of devotion and a social practice, merging mystical poetry with vernacular expression and communal ritual. Scholars such as Regula Qureshi (1986) have emphasized that South Asian sound traditions must be understood as *contextual soundscapes* dynamic auditory environments shaped by local instruments, languages, audience interactions and spatial-temporal settings. In these soundscapes, music is not merely entertainment but a devotional language expressing humility (*tawāḍuʿ*), love for the Divine (*ishq-e-haqīqī*) and human equality (*insāniyat*).

Within this vast tradition, individual performers become interpreters of the mystical message, embodying regional spirituality through their voice, gestures and public presence. The Sufi musician is both a

transmitter of inherited devotional lineages and a creative agent responding to contemporary realities. Comparing figures across generations and borders enables a deeper insight into how devotional sound adapts to changing political, technological and social conditions. This study focuses on two emblematic figures Allan Faqeer of Sindh, Pakistan and Kanwar Grewal of Punjab, India who together illustrate how Sufi-folk expression continues to regenerate itself within distinct historical milieus.

Allan Faqeer (1932–2000), born Ali Bux in Aamri village (Jamshoro District, Sindh), rose from the shrine-based singing traditions linked to Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai. Deeply immersed in the fakir ethos of self-effacement and ecstatic devotion, Allan's public persona combined the joyous spirituality of Sindh Sufism with a modern media presence. Through Radio Pakistan and Pakistan Television (PTV) during the 1970s–1990s, his smiling visage, bright attire and whirling gestures came to symbolize pluralist Pakistani identity (Associated Press of Pakistan [APP], 2019; Wikipedia, n.d.-a). In contrast, Kanwar Grewal (born 1984, Mehma Sawai, Bathinda District) represents a digital-era rearticulation of Sufi-folk expression rooted in Punjabi agrarian culture. Drawing on the poetry of Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussain, Grewal's baritone voice, tall frame and ascetic appearance have earned him acclaim across India and the Punjabi diaspora (The Indian Express, 2022). Yet his fame is not confined to the devotional sphere. During the 2020–2021 farmers' protests in India, his compositions such as *Ailaan* became anthems of resistance (Newsland, 2021), transforming Sufi spiritual idioms into political critique. Viewed together, Allan Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal embody two poles of Sufi-folk transformation: Allan as the ecstatic saint of the broadcast era and Grewal as the ascetic-activist of the digital age. Their comparison captures both the continuity of Sufi poetic imagery and the transformations in performance, audience and purpose.

Problem Statement

Despite a rich body of research on South Asian devotional music, there remains limited comparative analysis of how Sufi-folk performers translate spiritual ideals into different sociopolitical and media contexts. Much scholarship isolates regional traditions Sindh, Punjabi, Bengali, or Kashmiri without tracing their dialogical relationships or their evolving engagement with modernity. Allan Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal, though frequently discussed in journalistic and cultural essays, have rarely been examined through an integrated ethnomusicological lens that considers both aesthetics and social agency. This gap obscures the broader question of how Sufi-folk expression negotiates the tension between *fana* (self-annihilation in God) and social engagement between humility before the Divine and vocal activism before power. The problem, therefore, lies in the absence of a holistic comparative framework that situates devotional performance within media transitions from state-controlled broadcasting to algorithmic digital platforms and within political transformations from postcolonial nation-building to neoliberal protest movements. This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing how Allan Faqeer's ecstatic devotion and Kanwar Grewal's activist spirituality represents two modes of moral performance in the Sufi-folk continuum. It investigates how each artist embodies Sufi virtues yet articulates them within differing institutional, linguistic and political ecologies.

Research Objectives

The study pursues the following objectives, aligning ethnomusicological description with sociocultural analysis:

1. To analyze and compare the personality traits and public ethos of Allan Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal as representatives of distinct Sufi-folk trajectories.
2. To examine their vocal techniques and performance aesthetics, identifying how regional instrumentation, poetic diction and bodily gesture express devotion.

3. To evaluate their cultural and spiritual roles in shaping collective identity and moral imagination within Pakistani and Indian contexts.
4. To explore the influence of media, politics and regional heritage on their artistic evolution and audience reception.
5. To contribute to comparative scholarship on South Asian devotional music by illustrating how faith-based performance operates as social commentary and moral pedagogy.

These objectives integrate theoretical perspectives from media studies—particularly Hall’s (1973) encoding/decoding model and Van Dijk’s (2018) concept of “platform society”—with Qureshi’s (1986) ethnomusicological framework of “sonic ecologies.” By doing so, the study not only compares two artists but also theorizes how Sufi-folk music mediates between faith, identity and modernity.

Rationale and Importance of the Study

This research is significant on multiple levels academic, cultural and ethical. From an ethnomusicological standpoint, the study broadens understanding of how devotional sound adapts to changing media and political economies. Allan Faqeer’s yaktaro-based drone ensemble exemplifies the Sindhi “continuous resonance” style rooted in shrine acoustics, while Grewal’s amplified *dhol* and *tumbi* embody Punjabi rhythmic modernity designed for mass participation (Qureshi, 1986). Comparing these modalities reveals how sonic structure interacts with moral affect how instruments and timbre can express ecstasy or dissent. Sindhi and Punjabi represent two major vernaculars of Sufi expression, each carrying distinct poetics. Allan’s Sindhi diction preserves Shah Latif’s metaphoric cadence, while Grewal’s Punjabi lyrics echo the *kafi* form familiar across rural Punjab and the diaspora (Khan, 2015). Analyzing their linguistic strategies uncovers how Sufi-folk performance is also an archive of regional identity and intercommunal solidarity.

Allan’s rise coincided with Pakistan’s post-Partition nation-building, when state institutions promoted folk culture as a unifying national aesthetic (Ahmed, 2002). His PTV performances enacted a state-endorsed moral harmony. Conversely, Grewal operates in a neoliberal digital ecosystem that enables both creative autonomy and surveillance. The removal of his protest songs from YouTube (Newslandry, 2021) demonstrates the new politics of visibility in digital devotion. At its core, the study affirms that Sufi-folk performance remains a moral compass within South Asian society. Whether celebrating divine joy or resisting injustice, artists like Allan Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal articulate what might be called *the conscience of the folk*. Their music continues to cultivate empathy, humility and social awareness values urgently needed in an age of political polarization and cultural fragmentation.

Expected Outcomes

The study anticipates several theoretical and empirical outcomes mentioned as below:

1. Identification of aesthetic continuities across Sindhi and Punjabi Sufi-folk traditions, such as the use of repetition, metaphoric language of divine love and ritualized bodily performance.
2. Recognition of transformations in medium, purpose and audience engagement from shrine gatherings to televised broadcasts and digital networks.
3. A nuanced understanding of spiritual agency, showing how Allan’s joyous humility and Grewal’s ascetic protest both re-inscribe Sufi ethics in contemporary moral discourse.
4. A contribution to interdisciplinary scholarship, linking ethnomusicology with media theory, performance studies and political sociology.

5. Insight into the civic role of devotional art, demonstrating that Sufi music functions not only as ritual worship but as an evolving form of public ethics and collective self-expression.

Through these outcomes, the research aims to show that Sufi-folk performance remains a living medium through which South Asian societies negotiate the relationship between faith and modernity, emotion and ideology, sound and conscience.

Delimitations of the Study

To maintain analytical focus and depth, the study is delimited in several ways:

The research confines itself to two regions—Sindh (Pakistan) and Punjab (India) chosen for their rich yet contrasting Sufi-folk lineages. It does not extend to Bengali or Kashmiri Sufi traditions. The study centers on two performers, Allan Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal, using them as case studies to represent broader paradigms. It does not attempt a comprehensive survey of all Sufi singers in these regions.

The analysis relies on qualitative interpretation of audiovisual recordings, interviews and secondary literature rather than extensive field ethnography or musical transcription. The comparison focuses on the late 20th century (for Allan) and early 21st century (for Grewal), emphasizing transformations across historical media shifts. While acknowledging Sufi metaphysics, the research foregrounds performance, representation and media circulation rather than theological doctrine.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative and interpretive research design grounded in comparative cultural analysis. Because the primary concern is to understand how meaning, identity and ideology are constructed through Sufi-folk performance, a qualitative approach provides the most suitable framework. Qualitative inquiry privileges depth over breadth and emphasizes interpretation rather than quantification. The aim is to explore how personality, vocal style and singing skill materialize in the performances of Allan Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal and how these artistic expressions intersect with broader social, political and spiritual discourses in Pakistan and India.

A qualitative–interpretive paradigm is particularly effective for music and cultural studies because it allows for the “thick description” of sound, gesture and context (Geertz, 1973). Rather than treating music as an isolated text, this approach situates performance within the symbolic systems that give it social meaning. Comparative cultural analysis facilitates an understanding of both continuity and change how two artists share Sufi devotional roots yet diverge due to differences in region, media ecology and historical circumstance.

Data Corpus and Sources

The data corpus comprises four interrelated sources designed to capture the full spectrum of Sufi-folk performance: Audio-Visual Recordings, Interviews and Artist Statements, Journalistic and Critical Commentary and Scholarly Literature

Analytical Framework

Content Analysis

The first analytical technique is content analysis, used to identify recurrent patterns in musical and lyrical materials. Selected recordings are transcribed and coded for melodic motifs, ornamentation, tempo variations and rhythmic phrasing. Lyrical themes such as divine love (*ishq-e-haqīqī*), humility (*tawāḍuʿ*),

social justice and protest imagery are similarly coded to reveal the semantic structures through which each artist constructs meaning. These codes are examined both quantitatively (frequency of motifs) and interpretively (contextual meaning). For instance, Allan Faqeer's frequent patriotic imagery in songs like *Allah Allah Kar Bhaiya* reflects post-Partition national unity, whereas Kanwar Grewal's protest anthems such as *Ailaan* mobilize Sufi vocabulary to critique neoliberal agrarian policy (The Indian Express, 2022; Newsland, 2021). Content analysis thus bridges musical form and ideological substance.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The second technique, Critical Discourse Analysis, follows Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model to interpret how linguistic and musical choices are embedded within power relations.

1. **Textual level:** Examines word choice, metaphor, repetition and narrative structure in lyrics, along with sonic equivalents tone, dynamics and melodic contour.
2. **Discursive-practice level:** Investigates production and dissemination contexts Allan Faqeer's affiliation with state media (Radio Pakistan, PTV) versus Grewal's reliance on digital platforms (YouTube, Spotify).
3. **Socio-cultural level:** Connects performance to macro-contexts such as Pakistani nationalism, Sindhi identity, Indian agrarian distress and globalized media economies.

In Fairclough's framework, discourse both reflects and shapes social structure. Thus, analyzing each singer's repertoire illuminates how spiritual expression can legitimize or contest ideological formations.

Ethnomusicological Orientation

The ethnomusicological dimension ensures that performance is not reduced to textual analysis alone. Qureshi (1986, 1995) emphasizes that the meaning of Sufi music arises through interaction among sound, ritual space and audience response. Accordingly, this study treats each performance as an event combining sonic texture, bodily comportment and collective energy. For Allan Faqeer, attention centers on how the drone of the *yaktaro* and *tamburo* generates trance-like ecstasy, anchoring his ecstatic persona. For Kanwar Grewal, the amplified *tumbi* and *chimta* in protest gatherings create rhythmic urgency and solidarity. Integrating musical analysis with ethnographic sensitivity bridges micro-aesthetic details and macro-cultural significance, revealing how devotional sound mediates communal emotion and political sentiment.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection followed a systematic yet flexible process consistent with qualitative inquiry. Approximately fifteen major performances from each artist were purposively selected to represent different stages of their careers. These recordings were supplemented by interviews, news reports and academic essays to form a comprehensive corpus. Each song or performance was first described in technical detail (tempo, mode, instrumentation, vocal range) and then interpreted through thematic and ideological lenses. Coding was conducted manually using thematic keywords derived from Sufi discourse such as *ishq*, *faqir*, *insān*, *mazdoor* and socio-political categories like *nation*, *farmer* and *justice*. Analysis proceeded iteratively through a hermeneutic cycle of description, interpretation and explanation (Fairclough, 1995), moving between musical evidence and contextual theory.

Integration of Analytical Lenses

By integrating content analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis and ethnomusicological interpretation, the methodology constructs a multi-dimensional framework. It listens to how sacred voice operates

simultaneously as aesthetic form, spiritual expression and socio-political discourse. This interdisciplinary approach connects the micro-texture of melody intonation, rhythm, timbre to the macro-texture of meaning identity, ideology and emotion. Drawing on Qureshi (1986, 1995), Khan (2015) and Fairclough (1995), the study demonstrates that Sufi-folk singing is not only an art of devotion but also a form of cultural reasoning through which communities imagine themselves, resist marginalization and seek transcendence in sound.

The methodological framework now leads naturally into the analytical core of this study. The following section applies the established approaches to explore the lives and performances of Allan Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal, uncovering how their art transforms devotion into cultural expression. Through this transition from method to meaning, the study connects analytical depth with the lived realities of Sufi-folk performance in South Asia.

Biographical Overviews

Allan Faqeer (Sindh, Pakistan)

Allan Faqeer, whose birth name was Ali Bux, was born in the early 1930s in Aamri village, located in the Jamshoro district of Sindh, Pakistan (Wikipedia, n.d.-a). His formative years unfolded within the shrine culture of Sindh, where devotional music was a central form of spiritual communication. Immersed in the oral traditions of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's poetry and the melodic environment of Sindhi folk instruments such as the *yaktaro* (one-string ektara) and *tamburo/dambooro*, Allan absorbed the ethos of Sufi humility and ecstatic surrender that later defined his style (Qureshi, 1986). He began performing as a faqir, or wandering devotee, at local shrines where spontaneous song and movement merged into expressions of divine love. His energetic physical gestures, head tilts and rhythmic footwork were not theatrical affectations but embodied acts of remembrance (*zikr*). When the newly formed Radio Pakistan and Pakistan Television (PTV) sought to broadcast local folk idioms during the 1960s and 1970s, Allan Faqeer's magnetic persona and uplifting repertoire made him a natural choice. These state institutions presented him as a symbol of national unity, fusing the vernacular with the patriotic (The Express Tribune, 2020).

His patchwork attire an assemblage of bright fabrics often associated with Sindhi fakirs and his towering turban became visual signatures of an inclusive spirituality that transcended sectarian and linguistic divisions. The ecstatic timbre of his voice, characterized by a nasal edge, high register and spontaneous oscillation between sung and shouted tones, conveyed an immediacy that appealed to both rural audiences and urban listeners (APP, 2019). He received the President's Pride of Performance Award, commonly dated to 1980 and multiple other honors recognizing his contribution to Pakistani folk and Sufi music (The Express Tribune, 2020; Wikipedia, n.d.-a).

One of Allan Faqeer's most enduring legacies is his collaboration with Mohammad Ali Shehki on the patriotic song "*Allah Allah Kar Bhaiya (Humma Humma)*", produced by PTV in the 1980s. The duet juxtaposed the modern pop sensibility of Shehki with Allan's ecstatic Sufi delivery, symbolizing the integration of folk spirituality into national popular culture (The Express Tribune, 2020). Through such collaborations, Allan blurred the boundaries between shrine, studio and state, helping institutionalize Sufi-folk idioms as hallmarks of Pakistani identity.

At the core of Allan's artistry lies his profound engagement with Sindhi Sufi poetry, especially the verse of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, whose metaphors of longing, separation and divine union saturate Allan's repertoire. The simplicity of his melodic phrasing rooted in repetitive drone patterns and limited modal shifts allowed the words to remain at the forefront, while his emotive outbursts communicated the ineffable dimensions of mystical experience. As Qureshi (1995) observes, South Asian Sufi performers

transform textual devotion into an event of shared transcendence through repetition, gesture and audience response; Allan exemplified this transformation on both shrine stages and television screens. His performances also resonated politically. In the decades following Partition, Pakistan's ruling elite promoted Sufi figures as embodiments of tolerant Islam, countering both ethnic separatism and political Islamism (Ahmed, 2002). Allan's joyous performances, broadcast on national holidays and cultural festivals, thus carried the subtext of unity through spirituality. Yet his authenticity as a rural faqir prevented his image from becoming mere state propaganda. His laughter and unpolished diction reminded audiences that sanctity could coexist with simplicity. Allan Faqeer passed away on 4 July 2000 in Karachi, leaving behind a legacy cherished annually through media tributes and cultural commemorations (APP, 2019). Contemporary musicians in Pakistan often cite him as a pioneer who bridged oral tradition and mass communication, preserving the ecstatic heart of Sindhi Sufism while bringing it to national consciousness. As his biographer on Wikipedia summarizes, he "embodied the spirit of joy and devotion that unites Sindhi culture with the broader message of peace in Sufism" (Wikipedia, n.d.-a, para. 3).

Kanwar Grewal (Punjab, India)

Kanwar Grewal, born into a Jatt Sikh farmer family in Mehma Sawai, Bathinda district, Punjab, represents a younger generation of Sufi-folk performers who navigate the intersection of rural tradition, popular music and political activism (Wikipedia, n.d.-b). Educated through the Punjabi University Patiala system, he acquired formal grounding in music before emerging on the devotional circuit in the early 2010s. His distinctive deep, grainy baritone and ascetic jogī persona marked by a towering turban, long beard and plain robes soon made him recognizable across Punjab's folk-religious festivals and YouTube channels (Artistivity, n.d.). Grewal's performance practice merges the introspective lyricism of Punjabi *kafi* poetry with the energetic pulse of folk instrumentation, typically featuring tumbi, chimta, dhol and harmonium. His vocal lines extend into long melismatic arcs that project both spiritual yearning and emotional intensity. Unlike Allan Faqeer's ecstatic brightness, Grewal's sound is darker, resonant and meditative, evoking contemplation rather than exuberance. This tonal gravity aligns with his thematic focus on moral reform, humility and resistance to material greed.

From his early tracks such as "*Akhan*" and "*Faqeera*" to concert staples like "*Mastana Jogi*" and "*Toomba Vajda*", Grewal's repertoire situates him within the Punjabi Sufi lineage of Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain and Warish Shah, whose verses critique hypocrisy and affirm human equality (Khan, 2015). Yet his career took a decisive turn during the farmers' protests of 2020–2021 in India, when he released politically charged songs such as "*Ailaan*" and performed at protest encampments along the Delhi borders. The tracks blended devotional metaphors with calls for justice, effectively transforming the Sufi trope of divine truth into a discourse of agrarian dignity (The Indian Express, 2022). Grewal's activism drew both admiration and controversy. Reports in *Newslandry* (2021) and *The Indian Express* (2022) detail how some of his protest songs were temporarily removed from YouTube following governmental complaints, only to be re-uploaded by supporters. Grewal publicly responded that censorship would not silence his message, declaring, "If they ban one song, we will write ten more" (Newslandry, 2021, para. 8). This episode solidified his reputation as a dissent-artist, one who reinterprets Sufi devotion as moral defiance rather than quietism.

Beyond protest, Grewal's music embodies a continuity of Punjabi rural spirituality. His imagery of soil, rain, labor and love situates divinity within agrarian experience, echoing the mystic humanism of Bulleh Shah but inflected by modern concerns about ecological degradation and economic inequality. The repeated invocation of the *faqir* or *jogi* persona signifies detachment from materialism, positioning the singer as both participant in and critic of his community's struggles. In this respect, Grewal re-animates the oral ethics of Sufism in a digitally mediated public sphere, turning folk performance into a site of civic pedagogy. The visual dimension of Grewal's stagecraft reinforces his message. Performing before

massive audiences at festivals and protest rallies, he often stands motionless at center stage, eyes closed, hands clasped, projecting composure rather than frenzy. His restraint contrasts with Allan Faqeer's kinetic ecstasy but conveys a comparable spiritual absorption. The thick baritone timbre, amplified through modern sound systems, envelops listeners in a sonic space of introspection. Through strategic use of pauses and gradual crescendos, he crafts affective participation akin to the *sama* (listening) practices of traditional Sufi gatherings (Qureshi, 1986).

Grewal's prominence in the digital era distinguishes him from earlier Sufi-folk performers. Platforms such as YouTube, Spotify and Instagram enable him to reach diasporic audiences, linking Punjab's devotional heritage with global circuits of world music. Concert listings on Artistivity (n.d.) indicate his extensive touring in Canada, the U.K. and Australia, where large Punjabi communities regard him as both spiritual icon and cultural ambassador. The interlacing of devotional art and activism in his persona reflects what Eyerman and Jamison (1998) describe as the "mobilizing power of music" in modern movements for social change. Where Allan Faqeer's singing articulated Pakistan's post-Partition aspiration for unity through spirituality, Kanwar Grewal's art voices a transnational Punjabi identity defined by agrarian ethics, Sufi egalitarianism and resistance to injustice. Both figures transform mystical love into a form of cultural citizenship: one sanctifying the state, the other challenging it. Their biographies, read together, trace a continuum in South Asian Sufi-folk expression from shrine to stadium, from analog broadcast to digital activism, from ecstatic surrender to disciplined protest revealing the enduring versatility of devotion as social discourse.

Personality and Public Ethos

The relationship between an artist's persona and their public ethos is central to understanding Sufi-folk performance in South Asia. Both Allan Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal exemplify distinct models of charisma that operate within the broader moral economy of Sufi devotion. Their personalities shaped by temperament, embodiment and social function extend beyond individual psychology to become symbolic resources for their communities. In Sufi thought, charisma (*baraka*) is understood not as mere personal magnetism but as the emanation of divine grace through human presence (Ernst, 1997). Each performer thus becomes a living conduit for spiritual meaning, shaping how audiences perceive both sanctity and sociopolitical identity through sound and gesture.

Allan Faqeer projected a saintly, ecstatic charisma, the *faqīr* as vessel of love. His persona was marked by childlike joy and unselfconscious movement, transforming the stage into a ritual space of remembrance (*zikr*). Dressed in multicolored patchwork robes, with a towering turban and radiant smile, Allan performed as though overcome by divine intoxication (*wajd*). His swaying head, whirling arms and spontaneous laughter were not choreographed acts but embodiments of mystical absorption. These gestures captured in television archives and live recordings became visual emblems of Sindhi Sufi identity (Wikipedia, n.d.-a). As Qureshi (1986) explains, Sufi performance often involves "the transformation of inner ecstasy into outer rhythm," where the body becomes a medium of devotion (p. 89). Allan's stage presence translated that transformation into a national idiom accessible through mass media.

The embrace of Allan Faqeer by national broadcasters, particularly Radio Pakistan and Pakistan Television (PTV), was instrumental in constructing his public ethos. In post-Partition Pakistan, cultural policy sought to consolidate unity through representation of provincial folk traditions as expressions of the national spirit (Ahmed, 2002). Allan's Sindhi identity, reframed through Urdu-language broadcasts, symbolized a tolerant, syncretic Islam aligned with state narratives of harmony. His collaborations with pop artists such as Mohammad Ali Shehki most notably the PTV hit "*Allah Allah Kar Bhaiya (Humma Humma)*" extended his reach from shrine devotees to urban middle-class audiences (The Express Tribune, 2020). Through such appearances, Allan's persona evolved into that of a symbolic unifier: a saintly figure whose joyous faith transcended linguistic and sectarian boundaries.

This constructed ethos was both authentic and performative. On one hand, Allan's charisma derived from his personal asceticism, humility and lived attachment to Sindh's shrine culture. On the other, state institutions and media framed that charisma within specific ideological parameters. As Fairclough (1995) observes, media discourse does not simply reflect identity but actively produces subject positions through repetition and framing. Allan's televised image—smiling, inclusive, ecstatic—became the prototype of the “good Muslim artist,” one who harmonized spirituality with patriotism. His laughter, dance and invocation of divine love thus acquired multiple meanings: devotional expression, cultural diplomacy and aesthetic pedagogy. The saintly charisma of Allan Faqeer, while rooted in Sufi tradition, was also a state-mediated artifact that reflected Pakistan's search for a national ethos grounded in spiritual heritage rather than political ideology.

Kanwar Grewal, by contrast, embodies an ascetic-activist charisma that reinterprets the Sufi persona for the digital and protest era. Often described in Indian media as a “*jogi-singer*,” he channels the Punjabi lineages of Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussain, reformist poets who used music as a vehicle for moral critique (Khan, 2015). Grewal's public image combines spiritual detachment with civic engagement: an itinerant mystic who speaks on behalf of farmers, laborers and the marginalized. His long beard, saffron robes and towering turban visually recall ascetic renunciation, yet his lyrics and performances pulse with social urgency. As the *Indian Express* (2022) noted, Grewal's voice “resonated at the heart of the farmers' protests,” where devotional songs became anthems of collective resilience.

In performance, Grewal rarely exhibits the ecstatic exuberance associated with Allan Faqeer. Instead, his charisma operates through ardent gravity a still intensity that draws attention through restraint rather than movement. Standing almost motionless, eyes closed, he delivers long, melismatic phrases that seem to channel inner fire rather than external display. This affective register corresponds to what DeNora (2000) terms “music as a technology of the self,” wherein sound modulates emotional states and moral awareness. Grewal's slow crescendos, controlled breath and sustained tones evoke endurance and moral steadfastness, reflecting the agrarian ethos of patience and toil. His charisma thus lies not in ecstatic display but in disciplined sincerity a moral authority that bridges devotion and protest.

Both artists, though separated by generations, share the Sufi ideal of self-effacement (*fana*) the dissolution of ego in divine or moral service. Yet the social manifestation of this ideal differs. Allan's self-effacement manifests as joyous surrender, producing a contagious collective euphoria; Grewal's manifests as moral asceticism, producing reflective solidarity. In Allan's hands, *ishq* (divine love) becomes a metaphor for national unity; in Grewal's, it becomes a metaphor for justice and dignity among the rural poor. These affective distinctions illustrate how the same spiritual grammar can yield divergent emotional economies depending on historical and economic context. The affective registers of the two performers reinforce their contrasting yet complementary roles in South Asian Sufi-folk discourse. Allan Faqeer's affect is ecstatic joy, representing devotional intoxication as a form of belonging. His performances radiate inclusivity; he sings not from the pulpit but from within the crowd, collapsing distance between performer and audience. The repetition of the phrase “Allah Allah” functions simultaneously as *zikr* and as patriotic refrain, transforming devotion into a participatory ritual of national optimism. In contrast, Kanwar Grewal's affect is ardent gravity, blending spiritual fervor with moral urgency. His songs often address justice, equality and dignity for rural communities, embodying what scholars describe as the “ethics of sincerity” in protest performance (Roy, 2010).

Grewal's voice-of-the-people identity also emerges from his consistent engagement with civic causes and digital audiences. Through social media, he extends the traditional *sama*¹ (listening assembly) to transnational Punjabi diasporas. His calm demeanor and minimalist stagecraft contrast with the amplified sonic power of his baritone, producing what listeners experience as spiritual authority. As Newslandry (2021) reports, even attempts at censorship such as the removal of protest songs from YouTube only

amplified his stature as a moral voice defying oppression. Grewal thus embodies Weber's (1947) notion of charismatic legitimacy, wherein personal conviction and moral consistency, rather than institutional position, generate authority.

In both cases, charisma is inseparable from media technology. For Allan Faqueer, radio and television created a new kind of public intimacy, enabling the *faqīr* to enter domestic spaces. For Kanwar Grewal, digital media dissolves geographic boundaries, transforming the *jogi* into a global icon of Punjabi resilience. Their personas demonstrate how spiritual charisma adapts to shifting media ecologies while retaining the ethical core of Sufi devotion: humility, empathy and transcendence through service. The comparison also underscores the shifting relationship between spirituality and politics in South Asian performance. Allan's saintly joy was co-opted by the nation-state to promote unity; Grewal's ascetic seriousness confronts the state with demands for justice. Both, however, enact what Hall (1997) calls "the politics of representation," where identity and power are negotiated through cultural symbols. The smiling Allan and the solemn Grewal thus embody two faces of Sufi-folk charisma: one celebratory, the other resistant; one directed toward divine union, the other toward human emancipation.

Together, they illustrate that charisma in Sufi-folk performance is not an innate quality but a relational practice: a dynamic interaction between artist, audience and moral imagination. Their public ethos reveals how spiritual performance continues to mediate questions of nationhood, class and dignity across South Asia. The ecstatic *faqīr* and the ascetic *jogi*, though separated by geography and generation, sing the same truth in different tongues: that love, when embodied through sincerity, remains the most persuasive form of power.

Vocal Production and Singing Skill

The voice in Sufi-folk performance functions not only as an instrument but as a vessel of spirituality and moral expression. Both Allan Faqueer and Kanwar Grewal deploy their vocal resources to materialize affective states of devotion, humility and transcendence, yet their contrasting timbres, registers and phrasing styles reflect the musical ecologies of Sindh and Punjab. Allan Faqueer's vocal production is defined by a penetrating, bright upper-mid timbre carrying a distinctive nasal sheen, a hallmark of Sindhi folk delivery. His voice projects both immediacy and fervor, cutting through the acoustic ensemble of *yaktaro*, *tamburo*, *dholak* and harmonium (Wikipedia, n.d.-a). Sustained tones are rarely static; they ripple with vibrato-like oscillations and microtonal inflections, consistent with the subtle pitch bends characteristic of Sindhi melodic habits (Qureshi, 1986). The frequent insertion of sargam-like runs and emphatic bol-taans heightens ecstatic intensity, mirroring the alternation between repetition and improvisation in shrine recitation. The result is a voice that electrifies collective emotion, inviting audiences into a participatory state of *wajd* (ecstatic remembrance).

Kanwar Grewal's singing, in contrast, centers on a low-register baritone capable of scaling into open-throated high climaxes. His tonal center is earthy and husky, projecting weight and authority suitable for open-air arenas and protest grounds (The Indian Express, 2022). A trained singer familiar with both folk and classical idioms, Grewal uses meend (glides) and long-arc alaaps to shape expansive pre-rhythmic sections, allowing spiritual tension to build gradually. His breath control cultivated through extended phrasing supports sustained melodic arches and controlled dynamic swells. Whereas Allan's ecstatic oscillations suggest spontaneous surrender, Grewal's steady lines convey meditative resolve. His vocal texture, amplified by electronic systems in modern arenas, functions as what DeNora (2000) calls a "technology of affect," sonically structuring collective emotion.

Melodically, Allan's lines are drone-anchored and revolve around repetitive motifs that echo the one-string ecology of the *yaktaro* and *tamburo*. These drones serve as sonic ground for his call-and-response exchanges with harmonium or *dholak*, sustaining trance-like circularity (Qureshi, 1995). Grewal, by

contrast, often works within raag-tinged Punjabi frameworks, incorporating Bhairavi-adjacent colorations in cadences typical of Sufi *kafi* forms. His melodic development balances folk accessibility with classical nuance, aligning him with the educated Punjabi Sufi tradition that seeks to merge devotional sincerity with musical sophistication (Khan, 2015). Rhythmically, Allan thrives on cyclical grooves propelled by *dhol* and *dholak*. His phrasing is flexible; the ecstasy of performance frequently spills over the bar line, dissolving metric precision in favor of spiritual momentum. Grewal's rhythmic architecture, however, alternates between free-time preludes and anthemic hooks, designed for mass sing-along in large venues. The contrast encapsulates the difference between shrine spontaneity and stadium choreography: Allan embodies inward release; Grewal orchestrates outward mobilization.

Stylistic Signatures and Performance Aesthetics

The stylistic universe of each artist intertwines text, gesture, costume and instrumentation to produce distinctive performance aesthetics. Allan Faqeer's repertoire draws primarily on Sindhi devotional poetry, especially the verses of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, emphasizing humility (*tawādu*), divine love (*ishq-e-haqīqī*) and joyous praise. Many of his pieces, such as the iconic duet "*Allah Allah Kar Bhaiya (Humma Humma)*", dramatize *zikr* the repetition of the divine name as both spiritual practice and televised entertainment (Wikipedia, n.d.-a). His singing thus embodies optimism: faith as laughter, devotion as celebration. Kanwar Grewal's texts, while rooted in Punjabi *kafi* and *naqsh* traditions linked to Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussain, address modern concerns agrarian distress, moral corruption, ecological balance and self-purification (Khan, 2015). Protest songs such as "*Ailaan*" transformed devotional vocabulary into calls for justice, resonating across India's farmers' movement (Newslaundry, 2021). His aesthetic fuses Sufi introspection with activist rhetoric, redefining the saintly singer as moral conscience.

Visually, Allan's multicolored garb, Ajrak-patterned shawls and tall turban function as performative signs of the Sindhi *faqir* in trance. His expansive arm sweeps and rotational dance (*raqs*) evoke saintly ecstasy, turning the stage into a microcosmic shrine (Wikipedia, n.d.-a). Grewal, conversely, cultivates a minimalist ascetic aesthetic long kurta robe, massive turban, sparse hand gestures that channels *jogi* imagery into contemporary stagecraft (The Indian Express, 2022). Where Allan's exuberance invited participation, Grewal's stillness demands contemplation. Instrumentally, Allan's ensembles rely on traditional Sindhi instruments the *yaktaro*, *dambooro*, *alghoza* (double flute), *dholak* and harmonium maintaining the drone-centric soundscape that centers the voice (Wikipedia, n.d.-a). Grewal performs with modern Punjabi Sufi bands, integrating *harmonium*, *tumbi/toomba*, *chimta*, *tabla*, *dhol*, electric bass and occasional guitars, supported by amplification suitable for global concerts (teutickets.ca, 2024). Songs like "*Mastana Jogi*," "*Akhan*," and "*Toomba Vajda*" circulate through ticketed halls and online streaming platforms, showing the hybridization of folk devotionism and world-music professionalism.

Repertoire and Linguistic Identity

Language in Sufi-folk performance functions as both medium of expression and marker of belonging. Allan Faqeer's consistent use of Sindhi underscored regional pride and coincided with Pakistan's post-1970s cultural policy promoting provincial diversity under a unified national identity (Ahmed, 2002). His diction preserves Sindhi phonology and idiomatic inflections drawn from Bhittai's poetry, thereby keeping oral heritage audible on national television (Wikipedia, n.d.-a). Kanwar Grewal's choice of Punjabi situates him within a trans-border cultural continuum encompassing both Indian and Pakistani Punjab. His lyrics use every day idiom rather than Sanskritized or Persianized registers, allowing accessibility across caste and diaspora audiences. For Grewal, Punjabi becomes not merely a linguistic medium but an instrument of resistance devotion articulated through the vernacular of the oppressed (The Indian Express, 2022). Allan's iconic numbers include "*Allah Allah Kar Bhaiya*" and patriotic PTV anthems that interlace Sufi love with national devotion. Grewal's repertoire spans "*Mastana Jogi*," "*Akhan*,"

“*Faqeera*,” and “*Ailaan*,” whose moral and political emphases turn Punjabi folk idioms into civic anthems (tcutickets.ca, 2024).

Media, Circulation and Audience Ecologies

The two artists exemplify distinct media regimes. Allan Faqeer’s rise owed much to Radio Pakistan and Pakistan Television, which translated shrine-based authenticity into broadcast spectacle. Through recurring festival appearances and Independence-Day telecasts, Allan entered domestic living rooms, making Sufi-folk a state-endorsed emblem of harmony (The Express Tribune, 2020). His awards, including the Pride of Performance, institutionalized his position as a canonical national artist (Wikipedia, n.d.-a). Kanwar Grewal, conversely, matured in the platform era of digital distribution. YouTube, Facebook and Spotify serve as his main vehicles, supplemented by diaspora tours and ticketing platforms such as tcutickets.ca, which list his international concerts (tcutickets.ca, 2024). The difference is not merely technological but sociological: Allan’s broadcast publics were passive spectators mediated by state authority; Grewal’s networked publics are interactive communities that circulate, remix and politicize his songs.

Sociopolitical Engagements

Both performers intertwine devotion with social meaning, but in contrasting modes. Allan Faqeer embodied what might be termed sacred populism a devotional inclusivity that reinforced national belonging. His patriotic and religious songs aired side by side, offering spirituality as a centripetal force within Pakistan’s fragile post-colonial identity (Wikipedia, n.d.-a). His saintly joy and accessible persona aligned Sufism with the state’s moral imagination. Kanwar Grewal’s artistry, however, manifests protest populism. His devotional authority legitimizes political dissent; songs such as “*Ailaan*” directly addressed farmer grievances, combining the idiom of *ishq* (divine love) with the lexicon of rights and justice. Government scrutiny and reported song takedowns paradoxically enhanced his credibility as a moral truth-teller (Newslandry, 2021). Through Grewal, Sufi performance becomes an arena of civic spirituality where singing truth to power is an act of faith.

Comparative Table (Personality–Style–Skill)

Axis	Allan Faqeer (Sindh)	Kanwar Grewal (Punjab)
Persona	Ecstatic saint-like <i>faqīr</i> ; shrine charisma; national TV icon	Ascetic <i>jogī</i> + activist; voice of rural dignity; global touring artist
Timbre & Register	Bright nasal-tinged upper-mid; ecstatic oscillations	Deep baritone with powerful climaxes; sustained <i>alaaps</i>
Ornamentation	Fast <i>bol-taans</i> , microtonal wiggles over drone	Long <i>meend</i> , held tones; arena-scale phrasing
Ensemble	<i>Yaktaro/dambooro</i> , harmonium, <i>dholak</i> ; drone-centric	Harmonium + <i>dhol/dholak</i> + <i>tumbi/chimta</i> + <i>band</i>
Texts/Themes	Sindhi Sufi poetry; praise & <i>zīkr</i> ; patriotic PTV	Punjabi Sufi <i>kafi</i> ; moral critique; agrarian protest
Audiences	Broadcast households; state cultural festivals	Digital platforms; diaspora halls; protest gatherings
Institutional Status	Pride of Performance; canonical folk figure	Contemporary star; protest icon; international touring

(Table data synthesized from Wikipedia [n.d.-a; n.d.-b], Newslandry [2021] and The Express Tribune [2020].)

Close Listening: Case Mini-Analyses

Allan Faqeer – “Allah Allah Kar Bhaiya (Humma Humma)”

This collaboration with Mohammad Ali Shehki remains emblematic of Sufi optimism in Pakistan’s popular media. The piece layers *zikh*-like refrains with antiphonal pop responses, merging shrine idioms with broadcast modernity. Allan’s bright timbre pierces through harmonium drone and percussion, while his hand gestures visually cue intensification. The repetitive invocation of “Allah Allah” transforms personal remembrance into national celebration (Wikipedia, n.d.-a). Technically, Allan intersperses short *bol-taans* and quick oscillations at cadences; rhythmic elasticity mirrors the improvisatory logic of shrine practice within a metered pop framework.

Kanwar Grewal – “Ailaan” (Protest Single)

Released during India’s farmers’ protests, “Ailaan” opens with a solemn *alaap* that expands into a stadium-scale chant. Its lyrics intertwine Sufi virtues truth, humility, equality with direct critique of economic injustice. Grewal’s baritone conveys gravity and resolve, while his high-register surges embody urgency. The rhythmic coordination with *dhol* accents invites audience participation, converting individual devotion into collective assertion. When digital platforms reportedly removed the song, it acquired secondary significance as a symbol of resistance (Newslandry, 2021).

Discussion: CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCES

Despite generational, regional and political divergence, Allan Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal share a common Sufi grammar. Both invoke the metaphors of divine love, annihilation of ego and spiritual equality, structuring performance as an act of *zikh* made public. In each case, communal uplift is central: Allan’s uplift celebrates national-cultural unity; Grewal’s fosters agrarian-civic solidarity. Their regional aesthetics, however, differ. Allan’s sound world emerges from Sindhi shrine ecologies, dominated by *yaktaro*, *tamburo* and *alghoza*, producing drone-based climaxes and ecstatic momentum. Grewal’s arises from Punjabi Sufi-folk idioms *kafi* delivery, *tumbi* pulses and large-scale sonics designed for outdoor rallies (Wikipedia, n.d.-a; The Indian Express, 2022). Equally divergent are their media regimes. Allan’s canonization depended on state broadcasting, which framed him as symbol of national harmony. Grewal’s fame travels through digital platforms and transnational circuits, embedding Sufi-folk within global popular culture and protest politics. Technically, Allan’s mastery lies in precise syllabic attack, rapid microtonal decoration and the ability to induce ecstasy within minimalist instrumentation. Grewal’s skill is evident in breath-driven projection, sustained melismatic control and calibrated emotional dynamics over amplified ensembles. Both demonstrate how vocal technique translates devotion into public affect.

CONCLUSION

Allan Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal embody two living faces of Sufi-folk modernity: the ecstatic saint-singer of Sindh, sanctified through national media and the ascetic-activist of Punjab, sanctified through protest and global networks. Their art illustrates how the same devotional grammar adapts to new publics, technologies and political economies. For Allan, song was a centripetal force binding citizens through shared joy; for Grewal, it is a centrifugal force galvanizing the marginalized toward justice. Yet both affirm that Sufi-folk singing remains a social technology an art of ethical resonance that moves bodies, binds communities and articulates hope. As Newslandry (2021), Wikipedia (n.d.-a) and *The Express Tribune* (2020) collectively document, their repertoires continue to circulate across media, reactivating the moral imagination of South Asia. Whether in shrine courtyards or digital arenas, the voices of Allan

Faqeer and Kanwar Grewal testify that devotion, when sung with conviction, still possesses the power to make history.

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