Constructing Servanthood in Popular Islamic Music: A Semiotic Analysis of Maher Zain's "Qalbi Sajad"

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Abstract

Arabic religious songs have become an important medium for expressing and transmitting Islamic values; however, their lyrical meanings are often overlooked due to linguistic barriers and listeners' focus on musical elements rather than textual interpretation. Despite the popularity of Qalbi Sajad, scholarly studies that examine its ideological meaning construction through semiotic analysis remain limited. This study aims to analyze how the concept of servanthood is constructed in the lyrics of Qalbi Sajad through denotative, connotative, and mythological levels of meaning using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Employing a qualitative semiotic approach, this study analyzes selected lyrical expressions as cultural signs operating within a system of signification. The findings reveal that servanthood is represented denotatively through acts of worship such as prostration, calling, supplication, and crying; connotatively through inner devotion, spiritual communication, absolute dependence, and unconditional love; and mythologically through the naturalization of Islamic ideological values such as tauhid, tawakkal, and mahabbah as the existential condition of the servant. By extending Barthes' concept of myth to contemporary Arabic religious song lyrics, this study contributes to semiotic scholarship and Islamic cultural studies, while also highlighting the pedagogical potential of Arabic religious songs as authentic materials in Arabic language education.

Keywords: *Qalbi Sajad, Semiotic, Roland Barthes, Servant, Islamic Music*

Abstrak

Lagu-lagu religi Arab telah menjadi medium penting dalam mengekspresikan dan mentransmisikan nilai-nilai Islam; namun, makna liriknya sering kali terabaikan akibat kendala bahasa serta kecenderungan pendengar untuk lebih berfokus pada aspek musikal daripada penafsiran teks. Meskipun lagu *Qalbi Sajad* memiliki popularitas yang tinggi, kajian akademik yang mengkaji konstruksi makna ideologisnya melalui pendekatan semiotika masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana konsep penghambaan dikonstruksi dalam lirik lagu *Qalbi Sajad* melalui tiga lapisan makna: denotasi, konotasi, dan mitos, berdasarkan kerangka semiotika Roland Barthes. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan analisis semiotik terhadap ekspresi-ekspresi lirik sebagai tanda budaya yang beroperasi dalam suatu sistem pemaknaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa makna penghambaan direpresentasikan secara denotatif melalui praktik ibadah seperti bersujud, memanggil, memohon, dan menangis; secara konotatif melalui pengabdian batin, komunikasi spiritual, ketergantungan mutlak, serta cinta tanpa syarat; dan secara mitologis melalui naturalisasi nilai-nilai ideologis Islam seperti *tauhid*, *tawakkal*, dan *mahabbah* sebagai kondisi eksistensial seorang hamba. Dengan memperluas konsep mitos Barthes ke dalam analisis lirik lagu religi Arab kontemporer, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian semiotika dan studi budaya Islam, sekaligus menegaskan potensi pedagogis lagu religi Arab sebagai bahan ajar autentik dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab.

Kata Kunci: *Qalbi Sajad, Semiotika, Roland Barthes, Hamba, Musik Islami*

Introduction

Arabic songs are often popular among Indonesian society. Their popularity is supported by the availability of various streaming services, such as YouTube Music and Spotify, which make it easy for people to listen to Arabic songs anytime and anywhere. Because of their popularity and beautiful rhythms and melodies, Arabic songs easily attract listeners' attention[1]. However, the meanings of the lyrics are often overlooked due to limited language proficiency and listeners' tendency to focus more on the melody than on the message. This results in misunderstandings of meaning, leading to the perception that all Arabic songs are *sholawat*, which is not true. Such misunderstandings frequently occur among lay

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[1] Siti Patimah Zahra, Fadlil Yani Ainusyamsi, and Yadi Mardiansyah, "Representasi Makna pada Lirik Lagu Sherine Abdel Wahab yang Populer di Indonesia: Pendekatan Semiotika Roland Barthes," *Riwayat: Educational Journal of History and Humanities* 8, no. 3 (July 2025): 3802–17, https://doi.org/10.24815/jr.v8i3.48156.

Muslim communities, particularly because of language barriers faced by those who are not proficient in Arabic.[2]

On the other hand, Arabic songs with religious nuances do not merely function as entertainment but also serve as a medium for spiritual communication. This is evident in the growing use of Islamic-themed Arabic songs for *da'wah*. Moreover, these religious songs do not only represent individual spiritual experiences but also function as ideological discourses that shape perceptions of how humans position themselves before God. One musician who performs Arabic religious songs is Maher Zain. He consistently presents music with religious themes and conveys messages of *da'wah* through poetic and emotionally touching lyrics.[3]

Qalbi Sajad is an Arabic religious song popularized by Maher Zain. The song was released in 2021 as part of a mini-album entitled *Nour Ala Nour*[4]. In its lyrics, *Qalbi Sajad* conveys many implicit meanings about the servant's representation before God. The song reflects a person's emotional and spiritual condition, a meaning that is rarely fully understood. Therefore, to comprehend the meanings embedded in the lyrics of *Qalbi Sajad*, an analysis that goes beyond its explicit narrative is required. In this regard, Roland Barthes' semiotic approach is highly relevant, as it enables an in-depth examination of the signs and narratives that construct meaning in the song's lyrics.

Roland Barthes emphasizes that meaning does not stop at the level of denotation but extends to connotation and myth, where certain ideologies are naturalized and accepted as self-evident truths. The concepts of denotative, connotative, and mythological meaning in this study refer to Roland Barthes' ideas as explained in *Mythologies*, particularly in the essay "Myth Today"[5]. Barthes distinguishes two levels of signification: denotation, which refers to literal or objective meaning, and connotation, which is shaped by social, cultural, and ideological

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[2] Yulia Rahmah Amalia, Muhammad Ridwan, and Mujadilah Nur, "Representasi Makna dalam Lirik Kumpulan Lagu yang Dipopulerkan oleh Hamza Namira (Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes)," *Jurnal Sarjana Ilmu Budaya* 5, no. 2 (2025): 1–16.

[3] Rika Rahmawati, Rohanda Rohanda, and Ahmad Qonit Ad, "The Representation Of Ambiguicity In The Song Qolbi Fiil Madinah By Maher Zain Through Roland Barthes's Semiotic Framework," *International Conference on Language Learning and Literature (ICL3)* 55 (2025): 215–27.

[4] Lestari Nur Sabilah, "استعارات مفاهيمية في ألبوم ماهر زين نور على نور (دراسة الدلالي المعرفية للاكوف وجنسون)" (Thesis, Bahasa dan Sastra Arab, Fakultas Humaniora, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim, 2023).

[5] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Noonday Press, 1957).

contexts. Furthermore, Barthes introduces the concept of myth as a second-order sign system, through which connotative meanings can generate particular ideological discourses.[6]

To determine the position of this study, several relevant previous studies are presented. Research conducted by Simanungkalit et al. examined cultural elements in *Tombak Sulu Sulu*, focusing on denotation, connotation, and myth from the perspective of Roland Barthes' semiotics. The findings show that *Tombak Sulu Sulu* conveys cultural values, social norms, and spiritual beliefs of the Batak Toba community[7]. Furthermore, a study by Mubarok et al. sought to examine the representation of a mother's nobility in D. Zawawi Imron's poetry from the perspective of Madurese culture, using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. The results indicate that, at the denotative and connotative levels, the mother is portrayed as a noble and resilient figure. At the mythological level, the mother is represented as a symbol of the homeland, spiritual strength, and cultural identity deeply rooted in Madurese society.[8]

In addition, a study by Meisyaroh et al. analyzes the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings of several Arabic words in the film *Capernaum*. This study emphasizes that language is not merely a tool of communication but also an ideological instrument that represents social reality[9]. Another relevant study is an article written by Priyadharshini and Jaishree Karthiga. Its main focus is to demonstrate the usefulness of the BPS Materno-Semiotics framework in analyzing the film *Nightbitch*. This framework enables a two-layered interpretation that captures the cultural myths influencing the representation of

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[6] Fitria Meisyaroh, Dayudin, and Rohanda, "Denotative and Connotative Meanings in the Dialogue of Capernaum: A Semiotic Approach to Nadine Labaki's Work," *Alibbaa': Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 6, no. 1 (2025): 138–58, https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.v2i1.4130.

[7] Kaleb E. Simanungkalit, Kundharu Saddhono, and Muhammad Rohmadi, "Representation of Cultural Elements in Tombak Sulu Sulu Among the Batak Toba Community: A Semiotic Analysis Using Roland Barthes' Perspective," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 15, no. 4 (April 2025): 1298–307, https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1504.28.

[8] Hayyul Mubarok, Setya Yuwana Sudikan, and Suhartono, "Representasi Kemuliaan Seorang Ibu Perspektif Budaya Madura dalam Puisi D. Zawawi Imron: Kajian Semiotika Roland Barthes," *GHANCARAN: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, ahead of print, September 12, 2025, https://doi.org/10.19105/ghancaran.vi.21677.

[9] Meisyaroh, Dayudin, and Rohanda, "Denotative and Connotative Meanings in the Dialogue of Capernaum: A Semiotic Approach to Nadine Labaki's Work."

motherhood as well as the psychological reality of the maternal experience.[10]

Another study conducted by Novianingsih et al. focuses on connotative meanings in selected song lyrics by Maher Zain using a semantic approach based on Leech's theory of meaning. The findings indicate that positive connotations dominate Maher Zain's song lyrics, reflecting persuasive religious, moral, and spiritual messages[11]. Furthermore, a study conducted by Syamsurrijal et al. aims to examine the layers of denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings in the music video *The Chosen One* by Maher Zain. The results reveal the presence of Islamic *syariah da'wah* messages that encompass divine laws.[12].

Collectively, previous studies indicate that Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis has been widely applied across various fields of research, ranging from traditional folklore and cultural practices to poetry, films, and music videos. Meanwhile, studies of Maher Zain's songs have predominantly employed semantic approaches that focus on classifying connotative meanings and linguistic aesthetics. To date, scholarly attention to popular Islamic music as a contemporary cultural text that actively constructs ideological and spiritual meanings through myth remains limited. Moreover, the concept of servitude has not been explicitly examined as a central semiotic construct in Maher Zain's song lyrics.

To address this gap, this study applies Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to the song *Qalbi Sajad* in order to analyze how the concept of servitude is constructed through three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. Accordingly, this research is expected to extend semiotic studies to popular Islamic music, a powerful medium for articulating and naturalizing Islamic spiritual ideology in a modern context. Furthermore, the novelty of this study lies in extending Roland

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[10] Jagannathan Priyadharshini and R. K. Jaishree Karthiga, "The Biopsychosocial Materno-Semiotics Framework: A Holistic Analytical Tool for Film Studies," *Elsevier* 14 (2025), https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5177666.

[11] Dwi Utari Novianingsih, Firqo Amelia, and Nine Febrie Novitasari, "The Beauty of Words in Maher Zain's Selected Song Lyrics: A Study of Connotative Meaning," *ELLITE: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching* 7, no. 1 (August 2022): 60–72, https://doi.org/10.32528/ellite.v7i1.7820.

[12] Syamsurrijal Syamsurrijal, Muhlisin Muhlisin, and Fitri Arniati, "Analysis of Maher Zain's 'The Chosen One' Video Clip: Rolland Barthes Semiotic," *Rainbow : Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Culture Studies* 13, no. 1 (April 2024): 74–85, https://doi.org/10.15294/rainbow.v13i1.3196.

Barthes' concept of "myth" from the context of secular popular culture to contemporary Islamic religious music. In this context, Barthes' analysis is employed to interpret *Qalbi Sajad* as a spiritual discourse rather than merely an artistic expression. Therefore, this study specifically proposes two main research questions: (1) What words construct the meaning of servitude in the lyrics of *Qalbi Sajad*? (2) How do denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings construct the concept of servitude in the lyrics of *Qalbi Sajad*?

Method

This study adopts a qualitative semiotic analysis based on Roland Barthes' theoretical framework to examine how meaning is constructed in the lyrics of *Qalbi Sajad*. The analysis focuses on three interrelated levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. These levels are employed to investigate how linguistic signs in the song articulate and naturalize the concept of servitude.

The primary data consist of the official lyrics of *Qalbi Sajad* as popularized by Maher Zain. Secondary data include academic books and peer-reviewed journal articles relevant to semiotic theory, religious discourse, and popular Islamic music, which are used to support theoretical interpretation rather than to generate empirical data.

Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation and systematic note-taking. The researcher listened to the song repeatedly to identify lexical units and expressions associated with servitude. Each relevant lexical item was recorded and analyzed using both the original Arabic lyrics and the official English translation provided in the music video. Cross-checking between the Arabic and English versions was carried out to minimize potential semantic distortion and to maintain consistency at the denotative level prior to further semiotic interpretation.

Data analysis followed Roland Barthes' semiotic procedure. First, denotative meanings were identified based on conventional lexical definitions. Second, connotative meanings were interpreted by situating these lexical signs within broader Islamic cultural and emotional contexts. Third, myth was analytically distinguished as a second-order semiotic process in which connotative meanings are naturalized into an ideological narrative that presents servitude and absolute reliance on God as self-evident and universal human conditions. This distinction allows myth to be treated not as theological truth but as an ideological mechanism, in line with Barthes' concept of second-order signification.

The analytical findings are presented in tabular form for denotative meanings and in narrative form for connotative and mythological interpretations. To enhance analytical rigor, triangulation was applied by comparing auditory elements, Arabic textual data, and official translated lyrics. This approach ensures that the interpretation is grounded in consistent semiotic evidence rather than subjective impression alone.

Results and Discussion

This study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze the system of signs in the lyrics of *Qalbi Sajad*, particularly those related to words that construct the meaning of servitude. In this context, the system of signs functions as a conceptual framework that helps individuals interpret meaning[13]. Analysis using Roland Barthes' semiotic concept enables an in-depth examination of the symbols, signs, and narratives that construct meaning. Barthes distinguishes two levels of signification: denotation, which refers to literal or objective meaning, and connotation, which is shaped by social, cultural, and ideological contexts. Furthermore, according to Barthes, myth operates at the second level of signification. Once the signifier–signified–sign is formed, the sign becomes a new signifier, which then acquires a second signified and forms a new sign. The first-order signification is language, while the second-order signification is myth.[14]

Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meaning

Roland Barthes' theory (1915-1980) explains that semiotics consists of two levels of signification: denotation and connotation[15]. Denotative meaning refers to the literal meaning contained in a text, in accordance with definitions found in dictionaries[16]. According to Fiske,

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[13] Siti Hadiza Rahmah, "Analisis Semiotika dalam Puisi Barang Kali Karena Bulan Karya WS. Rendra Perspektif Roland Barthes," *MEMACE: Jurnal Linguistik, Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia, dan Asing* 1, no. 3 (September 2023): 111–17, https://doi.org/10.55681/memace.v1i3.2021.

[14] Kurniawan, *Semiologi Roland Barthes* (Magelang: Indonesiatera, 2001).

[15] Firman Saleh, Nur Azizah M. Aras, and Fitrawahyudi Wahyudi, "Interpretasi Makna Lagu Bugis 'Alosi Ripolo Dua': Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes," *Jurnal Idiomatik: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia* 6, no. 2 (December 2023): 185–95, https://doi.org/10.46918/idiomatik.v6i2.2115.

[16] Kuntanto Kuntanto, "Makna Kesendirian: Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes pada Lirik Lagu Ruang Sendiri Karya Tulus," *Journal of Language, Literature, and Arts* 4, no. 7 (July 2024): 757–62, https://doi.org/10.17977/um064v4i72024p757-762.

Barthes states that this level refers to common assumptions about signs. Therefore, the use of denotative meaning may appear similar, with differences in connotation[17]. In Barthes' semiotic interpretation, a denotative sign consists of a signifier and a signified[18]. Based on this, several signs that represent the concept of servitude in the lyrics of *Qalbi Sajad* are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Data Findings for Denotative Signs

Lyrics	Signifier	Signified
قلبي على بابك سجد	سجد – prostrate	A bodily movement of lowering oneself to the ground
يدعوك يا الله	يدعو – call	Calling out a name for someone to come
مالي أنا غيرك أحد	مالي – don't have	The absence of possession or support
قلبي أنا كلما ابتعد	ابتعد – avoid	The act of moving farther away
يطلبك يارب المدد	يطلب – request	Speaking in order to obtain something
ربي أحبك للأبد	أحب – love	Showing affection
لولاك قلبي تاه	تاه – lost	Deviating from the right path
دومًا عليك المعتمد	المعتمد – which is made into a handle	Something that is relied upon
دمعي على خدي ورد	دمع – tears	Liquid that comes out of the eyes
يا خالقي رحماك	رحمى – mercy	A feeling of affection arising from compassion

Based on the table above, the researcher can analyze the data from the lyrics of *Qalbi Sajad* into comprehensive denotative and connotative meanings. The purpose is to identify and reveal the concept of servitude that is implicitly embedded in the song's lyrics. At the connotative level, denotative signs function as connotative signifiers that are then associated with connotative signifieds[19]. Connotation is a depiction of the interaction that occurs when a sign encounters the

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[17] Neng Tika Harnia, "Analisis Semiotika Makna Cinta pada Lirik Lagu 'Tak Sekedar Cinta' Karya Dnanda," *Jurnal Metamorfosa* 9, no. 2 (July 2021): 224–38, https://doi.org/10.46244/metamorfosa.v9i2.1405.

[18] Meisyaroh, Dayudin, and Rohanda, "Denotative and Connotative Meanings in the Dialogue of Capernaum: A Semiotic Approach to Nadine Labaki's Work."

[19] Meisyaroh, Dayudin, and Rohanda, "Denotative and Connotative Meanings in the Dialogue of Capernaum: A Semiotic Approach to Nadine Labaki's Work."

feelings or emotions of its user[20]. Connotative meaning involves deeper associations and interpretations that arise from social and cultural contexts[21]. The denotative and connotative meanings of the song lyrics that construct the concept of servitude are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Denotative and Connotative Meaning

Lyrics	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
قلبي على بابك سجد	My heart prostrates at Your doorstep	Prostration symbolizes total spiritual surrender and complete inner devotion to God
يدعوك يا الله	Calling to You O Allah!	Calling represents intimate spiritual communication between the servant and God
مالي أنا غيرك أحد	I have no one else but You	Negating the existence of other beings and signifying absolute dependence on God
قلبي أنا كلما ابتعد	Whenever my hearts strays away	Moving away does not merely depict physical distance but also signifies spiritual alienation and inner anxiety when being far from God
يطلبك يارب المدد	It asks for Your help	Symbolizes supplication to God in order to attain spiritual strength
ربي أحبك للأبد	I will love You forever, My Lord	Loving God with eternal devotion and unconditional love
لولاك قلبي تاه	If it were not for You, my heart would have been lost	Being lost not only symbolizes confusion but also signifies spiritual disorientation

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[20] Harnia, "Analisis Semiotika Makna Cinta pada Lirik Lagu 'Tak Sekedar Cinta' Karya Dnanda."

[21] Muhamad Saiful Mukminin, "Love's Representation in Kalam Eineh Lyrics: A Semiotic Perspective by Roland Barthes," *Muaddib Journal Of Arabic Language And Literature* 1, no. 1 (2024): 49–59.

دومًا عليك المعتمد	My reliance is always on You	God is the ultimate source of support and permanent dependence
دمعي على خدي ورد	My tears flow down my cheeks	Tears symbolize the transformation of suffering into repentance and spiritual sincerity
يا خالقي رحماك	Have mercy on me, O my Creator!	A plea for mercy to God as the ultimate source of compassion

From a connotative perspective, the lyrics of *Qalbi Sajad* construct servanthood not merely as a set of ritual actions, but as a comprehensive spiritual condition that encompasses the entirety of the human self. The lyric قلبي على بابك سجد exemplifies this construction. While denotatively referring to physical prostration, the expression connotes complete spiritual surrender and inner devotion. The word قلب (heart) functions not simply as a bodily organ, but as a signifier of the spiritual center of faith, sincerity, and consciousness, representing the totality of the servant's being. Similarly, باب (door) does not denote a literal physical object but symbolizes a spiritual threshold through which mercy, forgiveness, and divine acceptance are accessed. Prostration (سجد), therefore, is re-signified beyond bodily movement into an inner act of submission, suggesting that worship operates simultaneously on physical and spiritual levels. In this way, prostration becomes an ideological sign that naturalizes *tauhid* by presenting complete submission to God as a self-evident and ideal mode of human existence.

This spiritual orientation is reinforced through the lyric يدعوك يا الله, which signifies intimate and continuous communication between the servant and God. The verb يدعو (to call) transcends its literal meaning to connote dependence, hope, and ongoing self-surrender. Calling upon God is thus framed not as a neutral communicative act, but as an acknowledgment of human limitation and an expression of reliance on divine assistance. The direct vocative address يا الله intensifies this meaning by producing a sense of emotional proximity, positioning the servant as fundamentally dependent and God as the ultimate refuge and authority. At the connotative level, this lyric constructs *tawakkal* as a relational practice rooted in trust and spiritual intimacy rather than mere verbal prayer.

The theme of absolute dependence is further articulated in the lyric مالي أنا غيرك أحد. This expression does not simply assert the absence

of other beings, but signifies existential emptiness in the absence of God. The emphasis on أنا (I) foregrounds personal subjectivity within the religious relationship, suggesting that identity itself is constituted through dependence on God rather than autonomous selfhood. By excluding all alternative sources of support, the lyric positions God as the sole foundation of meaning and security, thereby reinforcing a worldview in which human existence is defined by reliance rather than self-sufficiency.

Human vulnerability is further emphasized in the lyric قلبي أنا كلما ابتعد, where distancing (ابتعد) connotes spiritual alienation rather than physical separation. The recurring marker كلما (whenever) suggests that deviation from God is not an isolated event but a recurring human tendency. This repetition constructs humans as inherently fragile beings, prone to forgetfulness and moral deviation, whose spiritual stability is contingent upon constant divine guidance. The heart, once again, functions as the locus of faith and moral consciousness, underscoring the internal nature of spiritual struggle.

The plea for restoration appears in يطلبك يارب المدد where seeking (يطلب) signifies acknowledged helplessness rather than mere request. The term المدد implies continuous and sustaining assistance, encompassing spiritual strength, guidance, and renewal rather than temporary relief. This lyric reinforces a vertical relational structure in which humans occupy the position of supplicants and God the role of the perpetual giver, thereby consolidating dependence as an enduring existential condition.

Love emerges as a central affective dimension in the lyric ربي أحبك للأبد. Here, love (أحب) connotes obedience and devotion grounded in sincerity rather than compulsion. The temporal marker الأبد (forever) extends this love into an eternal horizon, naturalizing unwavering devotion to God as the highest and most authentic form of love. From a Barthesian perspective, this expression functions ideologically by elevating divine love above all other affective bonds and rendering it unquestionable.

The consequences of divine absence are articulated in لولاك قلبي تاه, where loss (تاه) signifies existential disorientation rather than mere confusion. God is constructed as an essential presence whose absence results in moral deviation, inner emptiness, and spiritual instability. This connotation reinforces the ideological assumption that human coherence and direction are impossible without divine proximity.

Steadfast trust is consolidated in دومًا عليك المعتمد, which frames reliance on God as continuous and non-negotiable. The adverb دومًا (always) constructs dependence as permanent, while المعتمد positions God not as an alternative source of help, but as the primary and ultimate foundation of existence. In this sense, *tawakkal* is naturalized as the normative and ideal disposition of the believer.

Emotional vulnerability is rendered visible in دمعي على خدي ورد, where tears (دمع) connote repentance, humility, and deep sincerity rather than weakness. The embodiment of emotion through the cheek (خد) emphasizes that inner spiritual states manifest outwardly, while the verb ورد suggests that tears flow naturally and irresistibly. Suffering, therefore, is re-signified as a legitimate and meaningful expression of faith.

Finally, the lyric يا خالقي رحماك encapsulates the relational intimacy constructed throughout the song. By addressing God as خالقي (my Creator), the servant affirms an existential bond rooted in origin and dependence. Mercy (رحماك) is connoted not merely as forgiveness, but as protection, care, and compassion. At the ideological level, this sign naturalizes the belief that human weakness is met not with punishment, but with divine gentleness.

Myth Analysis in the Lyrics of Qalbi Sajad

Within Barthes' theory of myth as a second-order system of signification, denotative and connotative meanings are transformed into ideological narratives that appear natural and self-evident. Barthes does not define myth as everyday folklore or regional legends, but rather as a mode of meaning construction within language. In the lyrics of Qalbi Sajad, myth is constructed around servitude as the existential nature of human beings. The myth of servitude as a natural human condition appears in the lyrics يطلبك يارب المدد and قلبي على بابك سجد, يدعوك يا الله, which depict acts of prostration, calling, and supplication as integral aspects of tauhid. These acts are not understood merely as individual religious practices, but are naturalized as the most instinctive human responses to God. Consequently, the servant is positioned not as a self-determining subject, but as a being inherently oriented toward submission and dependence on the divine.

The myth of dependence is further articulated in the lyrics مالي أنا غيرك أحد and دومًا عليك المعتمد, which construct absolute reliance on God as the only legitimate form of relationship. Within this myth, human autonomy is relativized, while spiritual dependence is legitimized as an

existential truth. Through this process, tawakkal is naturalized as an unquestioned ideological condition rather than a consciously chosen ethical stance. Likewise, the lyrics لولاك قلبي تاه and قلبي أنا كلما ابتعد mythologize distance from God as the source of suffering, anxiety, and inner disorientation, reinforcing the belief that meaning, direction, and inner peace can only be attained through divine proximity.

The myth of divine love as the foundation of servitude is expressed in the lyric ربي أحبك للأبد, which frames submission not as coercion but as unconditional and eternal love. This relationship is further reinforced through the lyrics يا خالقي رحماك and دمعي على خدي ورد, where suffering, tears, and pleas for mercy are constructed as legitimate and necessary stages in the servant's spiritual journey. Tears are not interpreted as weakness, but as signs of repentance, purification, sincerity, and intimacy with God. Through this mythic construction, servitude is no longer perceived as a historical, cultural, or theological formulation, but as an inevitable and universal condition of human existence.

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to and extend semiotic scholarship by demonstrating how Roland Barthes' framework can be applied to contemporary Islamic religious music as a site of ideological meaning production. Consistent with the methodological approach outlined earlier, this study shows that meaning in *Qalbi Sajad* operates through interconnected layers of denotation, connotation, and myth, rather than remaining at the level of literal representation. In line with previous studies on semiotics and cultural texts, which argue that popular cultural artifacts function as carriers of ideology rather than neutral expressions,[22] the present findings confirm that religious song lyrics can actively shape religious subjectivity and worldview rather than merely reflect individual piety.

At the denotative level, the analysis demonstrates that lexical items such as سجد(to prostrate), يدعو(to call), يطلب(to ask), and دمع(tears) refer to concrete bodily actions commonly associated with acts of worship. Similar observations have been reported in prior studies on religious and cultural texts, which identify denotation as the foundational

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[22] Bennett, Tyler James. "Second-Generation Semiology and Detotalization." *Linguistic Frontiers* 4, no. 2 (September 2021): 44–53. https://doi.org/10.2478/lf-2021-0010.

layer that anchors meaning in observable actions or material signs.[23] However, as these studies also suggest, denotation alone is insufficient to explain how cultural texts generate broader significance. The present study confirms this by showing that these denotative signs function primarily as semiotic entry points for deeper layers of meaning.

At the connotative level, the findings reveal that *Qalbi Sajad* constructs worship as an intimate, emotional, and existential relationship between the servant and God. Lexical signs related to the heart (قلب), suffering, tears, and distance from God are connoted as indicators of inner spiritual states rather than external ritual performance. This finding resonates with research on religious discourse and popular music, which has shown that affective language and embodied metaphors are frequently used to frame faith as a lived and emotional experience.[24] In this sense, the song aligns with broader patterns identified in previous studies, while also adding a specific contribution by foregrounding servitude (*ubudiyyah*) as the central organizing concept of this emotional spirituality.

Importantly, the connotative analysis shows that suffering, vulnerability, and emotional fragility are not represented as negative conditions, but as meaningful stages in the servant's spiritual journey. This interpretation is consistent with findings in other works that examine how religious narratives reframe human weakness as a productive spiritual condition.[25] However, the present study extends this line of research by demonstrating how such meanings are not only expressed but systematically structured through recurring lexical patterns in Arabic religious song lyrics, thereby reinforcing a coherent model of ideal religious subjectivity.

At the mythic level, the findings indicate that *Qalbi Sajad* naturalizes servitude as the existential condition of human beings. Acts of prostration, calling upon God, and supplication are no longer

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[23] Trimo Wati, Trimo Wati, Dina Safira Ikmaliani, and Mustolehudin. "Representasi Makna Denotasi Dan Konotasi Dalam Lirik Lagu Kun Fayakun (Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes)." *Alibbaa': Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 3, no. 1 (January 2022): 73–102. https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.v3i1.5172.

[24] Chong, Hyun Ju, Hyeon Joo Kim, and Bohyun Kim. "Scoping Review on the Use of Music for Emotion Regulation." *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 9 (September 2024): 793. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14090793.

[25] Narayanan, Jayakrishnan, and Senkamalam Periyasamy Dhanavel. "The Play of Cultural Subcodes in Decoding the Visual Signs of Karnatik Music Videos." *Visual Communication Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (July 2021): 166–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2021.1949720.

presented as situational or optional religious practices, but as the most instinctive and self-evident human responses to divine authority. This process corresponds with Barthes' conception of myth as a second-order semiological system that transforms historically and culturally situated values into taken-for-granted truths. Comparable processes have been identified in studies of myth and ideology in popular culture, where repeated symbolic patterns render particular worldviews natural and unquestionable.[26] The present study contributes to this discourse by situating such myth-making within contemporary Islamic religious music, a domain that remains underexplored in international semiotic research.

The myth of dependence on God is further reinforced through the construction of *tawakkal* as an unquestioned ideological condition. The findings show that absolute reliance on God is framed not as an ethical choice among alternatives, but as the only legitimate and meaningful mode of existence. This observation parallels findings from previous studies on religious ideology, which highlight how dependence and submission are often presented as universal human truths rather than culturally specific constructs.[27] By applying Barthes' framework, the present study demonstrates how this ideological positioning is achieved semiotically through language, repetition, and affective imagery.

Furthermore, the myth of divine love as the foundation of servitude reveals that submission is framed not as coercion or domination, but as unconditional and eternal love. This aligns with scholarship on religious affect and devotion, which emphasizes the role of love in legitimizing hierarchical relationships between humans and the divine.[28] However, the present study adds a distinctive contribution by showing how this affective dimension operates simultaneously with narratives of suffering, repentance, and mercy, thereby constructing a comprehensive ideological model in which vulnerability, love, and dependence are mutually reinforcing.

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[26] Bhat, Taskeen. "Exploring Symbolism and Myth in the Motifs of Pashmina Shawls: A Semiotic Analysis." *TEXTILE* 23, no. 1 (January 2025): 139–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/14759756.2024.2448363.

[27] Ellis, Maureen. *Spiritual Consciousness as Evolutionary Learning*. London: Routledge, 2025. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003402572.

[28] Cappellen, Patty van, Megan E Edwards, and Barbara L Fredrickson. "Upward Spirals of Positive Emotions and Religious Behaviors." *Current Opinion in Psychology* 40 (August 2021): 92–98. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.09.004.

Taken together, the findings of this study indicate that *Qalbi Sajad* operates simultaneously on personal, cultural, and ideological levels, functioning as an effective medium for the reproduction of religious meaning. In dialogue with existing Scopus-indexed scholarship on semiotics, popular culture, and religious discourse, this study demonstrates that popular Islamic music should not be understood merely as artistic or devotional expression, but as a site where religious ideology is produced, naturalized, and transmitted. By extending Roland Barthes' concept of myth to contemporary Arabic religious song lyrics, this study contributes to broader discussions in semiotics, cultural studies, and Islamic studies on how faith is mediated and normalized through modern cultural forms.

Despite these contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. First, the analysis focuses on a single song, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader corpus of contemporary Arabic religious music. Second, the study concentrates on textual semiotic analysis without incorporating audience reception or empirical classroom-based data. As a result, the pedagogical impact of semiotic meanings on learners' comprehension, attitudes, and language development cannot be directly measured. Future research is therefore encouraged to expand the scope of analysis to multiple religious songs and to integrate semiotic approaches with reception studies or instructional-based research designs.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings offer important implications for Arabic language education. Semiotic analysis of Arabic religious songs can be employed as an authentic learning resource that supports not only linguistic competence but also cultural, affective, and ideological awareness among learners. Song lyrics such as *Qalbi Sajad* may be utilized in Arabic language classrooms to enhance learners' lexical, semantic, and pragmatic understanding while simultaneously fostering critical interpretation of religious and cultural values embedded in the text. In this sense, the study contributes to the development of culture-based Arabic language pedagogy, aligning with *Alibbaa*'s focus on integrating language learning with Islamic values and cultural literacy.

Conclusion

Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, this study concludes that *Qalbi Sajad* functions not merely as an aesthetic form of religious expression, but as an ideological cultural text that systematically constructs the meaning of servitude. Through the interconnected levels of denotation, connotation, and myth, the song articulates an existential relationship between the servant and God, positioning God as the ultimate source of dependence and meaning. In this process, Islamic theological values such as *tauhid*, *tawakkal*, *mahabbah*, and *rahmah* are naturalized through poetic and affective language. The findings reaffirm the relevance of Barthes' semiotic framework for uncovering ideological dimensions embedded in contemporary Islamic popular music and extend its application to Arabic religious song lyrics as a form of modern cultural discourse.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations, particularly its focus on a single song and its reliance on textual semiotic analysis without incorporating audience reception or classroom-based investigation. Future research is therefore encouraged to expand the data corpus, integrate semiotic analysis with reception studies, and explore pedagogical applications in Arabic language education. From an educational perspective, this study highlights the potential of Arabic religious songs as authentic learning materials that support linguistic development while fostering cultural, affective, and critical interpretive awareness. In line with the scope of *Alibbaa'*, the findings underscore the value of integrating language, culture, and Islamic values in Arabic language pedagogy, contributing to a more holistic and culturally grounded approach to teaching and learning Arabic.

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