

Decoding Sufism and Symbolic Hermeneutics in Dewa 19's Album *Laskar Cinta: A Paul Ricoeur Perspective*

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Abstract

Song lyrics in contemporary popular music frequently serve as complex symbolic systems capable of communicating deep theological and philosophical ideologies, yet prior research has mostly categorized religious themes under broad moral headings without dissecting specific ontological constructs. This study aims to systematically analyze the symbolic representation of Sufi ideology and the multi-layered mechanisms of spiritual meaning transformation in Dewa 19's album *Laskar Cinta* (2004) through Paul Ricoeur's symbolic hermeneutics. Employing a qualitative descriptive-analytic design with purposive sampling, seven selected tracks ("Satu", "Pangeran Cinta", "Nonsense", "Hadapi dengan Senyuman", "Hidup Ini Indah", "Atas Nama Cinta", and "Sweetest Place") were examined using Ricoeur's three-tiered interpretive framework: semantic analysis, reflective interpretation (the world of the text), and existential appropriation. The findings demonstrate that the album articulates four core Sufi doctrines: Wahdat al-Wujud (unity of existence), Tadzakkur al-Maut (remembrance of death), Mahabbah (unative divine love), and Ithmi'n'an al-Qalb (tranquillity of the heart). The structural transformation moves from surface poetic metaphors to reflective theological horizons that re-frame physical mortality into divine encounter (liqa' Allah) and external conflict into inner purification (tazkiyatun nafs), ultimately guiding listeners toward ego dissolution (fana') and serene spiritual contentment (nafs al-mutmainnah). This study concludes that popular rock music functions as an inclusive, humanistic, and transformative medium capable of bridging classical esoteric Sufi philosophies with the spiritual needs of modern society.

Keywords: Dewa 19; Laskar cinta; Sufism ideology; Paul ricoeur; Symbolic hermeneutics; Popular music

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INTRODUCTION

In modern linguistic, literary, and cultural discourse, song lyrics are no longer viewed merely as passive aesthetic complements to musical compositions, but as dynamic symbolic systems capable of transmitting complex theological and philosophical ideologies. As expressed by Indah et al. (2025), music serves as a profound symbolic medium for conveying multi-layered emotional and spiritual realities that reflect human existence across diverse socio-cultural contexts. In line with this perspective, songs operate as artistic expressions blending linguistic creativity with musical structures to establish intimate spaces for listener engagement (Pristianingrum & Damayanti, 2022). Within contemporary popular culture, musical works frequently function as a vital communicative channel that bridges traditional religious philosophies with the intellectual needs of modern listeners (Fatiya et al., 2024; Storey, 2018). Furthermore, the presence of metaphors, allegories, and poetic expressions in song lyrics

allows language to convey both denotative and connotative meanings that extend far beyond literal surface interpretations (Erlangga et al., 2024; Siregar, 2024).

In the context of Islamic spiritual traditions, Sufism utilizes allegorical language, esoteric metaphors, and linguistic symbols to articulate transcendental experiences, divine love, and interior transformations (Bani Sudardi, 2003; Schimmel, 2011). According to Ricoeur (1976), symbolic language and poetic texts possess an inherent “surplus of meaning” (*surplus de sens*) that demands rigorous hermeneutic interpretation to uncover the world projected by the text beyond its grammatical boundaries. Consequently, popular music becomes a fertile arena for hermeneutic inquiry, wherein linguistic symbols mediate the transition from external religious dogma to internal spiritual awareness (Hadi, 2004; Rahardjo, 2007). A prominent cultural phenomenon illustrating this integration in Indonesia is the album *Laskar Cinta* (2004) by the renowned rock group Dewa 19, which explicitly embeds Sufi ideology as a constructive response to socio-religious tensions and dynamic ideological shifts in contemporary Indonesian society.

Existing scholarly literature has extensively investigated the representation of religious, moral, and pragmatic dimensions in literature and popular media. In literary and theological studies, Nur Kholis (2021) demonstrated how Sufi literature employs deep transcendental metaphors to articulate the intimate relationship between humanity and the Divine. Furthermore, Barokati and Ihsan (2025) categorized Sufi spiritual development through the classic fourfold path (*sharia, tariqah, haqiqah, and marifah*), illustrating how textual narratives facilitate critical self-reflection and spiritual purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*). In the domain of popular culture, Salimullah et al. (2023) highlighted that moral and religious values embedded in popular media function effectively as instruments for internalizing ethical principles among youth. Concurrently, recent pragmatics, semiotics, and textual studies published in *JOLLS*—such as those conducted by Safrina and Siregar (2025) on deictic emotional expressions, Putri et al. (2026) on pragmatic contextual meanings in popular albums, and Nurdin et al. (2026) on Saussurean romanticism in Arabic pop lyrics—affirm that lyrical structures operate as contextual texts conveying deep psychological, relational, and emotional meanings. Similar semiotic and textual investigations on song lyrics have also emphasized how structural linguistic signs construct multi-dimensional spiritual and emotional realities (Ariyanto et al., 2025; Barus et al., 2025; Pranata & Deni, 2024; Ulfah & Dewi, 2025).

However, despite these valuable contributions, a critical research gap remains in current scholarship. Most prior studies on religious themes in popular music tend to restrict their focus either to broad moral categorizations or to descriptive semiotic and pragmatic mappings, without systematically explaining how specific ontological concepts of Sufism operate within popular song structures. Specifically, there is a noticeable lack of research examining how core Sufi doctrines, namely *Wahdat al-Wujud* (unity of existence), *Mahabbah* (divine love), *Tadzakkur al-Maut* (remembrance of death), and *Ithmi'nan al-Qalb* (tranquillity of the heart), are symbolically constructed and mediated through multi-level hermeneutic interpretation to transform listener consciousness (Al-Ghazali, 1994; Ibn 'Arabi, 1980; Mustamain, 2021).

To address this empirical and theoretical gap, this study offers scientific novelty by integrating Paul Ricoeur's symbolic hermeneutics with Sufi ontological frameworks to analyze Dewa 19's album *Laskar Cinta*. By applying Ricoeur's three-tiered interpretative framework, encompassing the semantic level, literal and metaphorical meanings, the reflective level or the world of the text, and existential appropriation, this article demonstrates how popular music transforms classical esoteric Sufi philosophies into accessible, inclusive, and humanistic spiritual discourses for modern society.

Based on the state of the art and the identified scientific novelty, the research problems addressed in this study are formulated through two primary questions: How are the core ideologies of Sufism (*Wahdat al-Wujud*, *Tadzakkur al-Maut*, *Mahabbah*, and *Ithmi'nan al-Qalb*) symbolically represented in the lyrics of Dewa 19's album *Laskar Cinta*? And How does Paul Ricoeur's symbolic hermeneutics elucidate the structural transformation of meaning across the semantic, reflective, and existential levels within these lyrical texts? Concurrently, the primary objective of this article review and textual investigation is to systematically analyze and explain the symbolic representation of Sufi ideology and the multi-layered mechanisms of spiritual meaning transformation in the album *Laskar Cinta* through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic lens.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytic design integrated with Paul Ricoeur's symbolic hermeneutics to investigate the representation of Sufi ideology in popular music. As defined by Furidha (2023), qualitative descriptive research systematically and concrete-historically captures complex cultural and textual phenomena without converting qualitative nuances into statistical figures. In linguistic and literary inquiries, this approach provides the necessary methodological flexibility to examine textual signs and underlying philosophical meanings within their natural contexts (Maslia & Patriansah, 2024; Pranata & Deni, 2024). In line with recent methodology published in *JOLLS*, qualitative frameworks are particularly effective for analyzing song lyrics, as they treat verbal structures not merely as grammatical arrangements, but as pragmatic and symbolic instruments embedded within socio-religious discourses (Nurdin et al., 2026; Putri et al., 2026; Safrina & Siregar, 2025). Furthermore, according to Ricoeur (1976), symbolic texts possess a unique surplus of meaning (*surplus de sens*) that requires an interpretive bridge moving from surface textual semantics to deep existential appropriation. Consequently, this study adopts a hermeneutic-textual design to unravel the multi-tiered spiritual meanings encoded in Dewa 19's album *Laskar Cinta*.

Data Source and Data Corpus

The primary data source for this study consists of selected lyrical texts from the album *Laskar Cinta* (2004) by the Indonesian rock band Dewa 19. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select specific tracks that explicitly embody core Sufi doctrines. As highlighted by Ahmad and Wilkins (2025), purposive sampling allows qualitative researchers to strategically select data units that offer the richest theoretical insight regarding the central research problem. Out of the eleven tracks on the album, seven songs were identified as containing profound Sufistic symbolism: “*Satu*”, “*Pangeran Cinta*”, “*Nonsense*”, “*Hadapi dengan Senyuman*”, “*Hidup Ini Indah*”, “*Atas Nama Cinta*”, and “*Sweetest Place*”. The official song lyrics were retrieved from authoritative album releases and verified documentation platforms, then transcribed into a written textual corpus (Endraswara, 2011; Teeuw, 2003). To provide a clear overview of the data corpus selection and its theoretical alignment, Table 1 outlines the selected tracks along with their corresponding Sufi ideological categories.

Table 1. Selected Songs from the Album *Laskar Cinta* as Data Corpus

No	Song Title	Primary Sufi Ideology	Textual & Philosophical Focus
1	<i>Satu</i>	<i>Wahdat al-Wujud</i> & <i>Mahabbah</i>	Dissolution of ego (<i>fana'</i>), divine unity, and unative love.
2	<i>Pangeran Cinta</i>	<i>Wahdat al-Wujud</i> & <i>Tadzakkur al-Maut</i>	Transience of physical existence versus eternal divine love (<i>baqa'</i>).
3	<i>Nonsense</i>	<i>Wahdat al-Wujud</i>	Critique of rational pride and deconstruction

No	Song Title	Primary Sufi Ideology	Textual & Philosophical Focus
4	<i>Hadapi dengan Senyuman</i>	<i>Tadzakkur al-Maut & Ithmi'nan al-Qalb</i>	of material reality. Spiritual tranquility, submission (<i>taslim</i>), and acceptance of destiny (<i>ridha</i>).
5	<i>Hidup Ini Indah</i>	<i>Tadzakkur al-Maut & Ithmi'nan al-Qalb</i>	Death as a transition to <i>liqa' Allah</i> and existential gratitude (<i>syukr</i>).
6	<i>Atas Nama Cinta</i>	<i>Mahabbah</i>	Critique of spiritual hypocrisy and purification of intention (<i>ikhlas</i>).
7	<i>Sweetest Place</i>	<i>Ithmi'nan al-Qalb</i>	Ultimate inner peace (<i>nafs al-mutmainnah</i>) and spiritual intimacy (<i>uns</i>).

Research Instruments

In qualitative textual research, the human researcher serves as the primary instrument for data gathering, pattern recognition, and interpretive analysis (Dayu & Syadli, 2023; Pandey, 2019). According to Suratullah et al. (2023), positioning the researcher as the primary instrument enables an in-depth contextual interpretation of human experiences, beliefs, and values embedded in language. To maintain analytical objectivity and consistency, the researcher was supported by a structured theoretical grid as a secondary instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin, 1989). This auxiliary instrument comprised a data coding matrix containing six analytical categories: (1) song lyric excerpts, (2) literal-semantic meaning, (3) symbolic-reflective meaning, (4) existential appropriation level, (5) Sufi ontological category, and (6) hermeneutic commentary.

Data Collection and Verification

Data collection was carried out through systematic document analysis and textual close-reading procedures (Nurdin et al., 2026; Teguh et al., 2025). The data gathering process proceeded through four distinct phases: (1) Compilation to collecting complete audio recordings and official written transcripts of the album *Laskar Cinta*. (2) Verification for cross-checking written lyrics against original album sleeve notes and official digital releases to ensure textual authenticity. (3) Identification & unitization for executing repeated close readings to locate specific stanzas, metaphors, and allegories reflecting Sufi concepts (Safrina & Siregar, 2025). (4) Categorization for Sorting the selected lyrical excerpts into four Sufi ideological matrices (*Wahdat al-Wujud*, *Tadzakkur al-Maut*, *Mahabbah*, and *Ithmi'nan al-Qalb*).

Data Analysis and Hermeneutic Flow

Data analysis was executed using Paul Ricoeur's three-tiered symbolic hermeneutics, which bridges structural textual analysis with existential interpretation (Adams, 2016; Ricoeur, 1976, 1984). In accordance with Ricoeurian methodology, the interpretive process progressed sequentially across three analytical levels: (1) First tier, semantic level for analyzing the objective, grammatical, and descriptive layers of the lyrics, including explicit vocabulary, direct statements, and surface poetic metaphors (Al-Ghazali, 1994; Ricoeur, 1976). (2) Second tier, reflective level to uncovering the symbolic and allegorical dimensions by projecting "the world of the text" (*le monde du texte*). At this stage, lyrical expressions (such as "*Laskar Cinta*" or "*Satu*") were interpreted beyond literal boundaries to reveal hidden theological narratives regarding spiritual struggle, *fana'*, and divine love (Ibn 'Arabi, 1980; Mustamain, 2021). (3) Third tier, existential appropriation to internalizing the text's projected world into contemporary existential realities. Here, the researcher evaluated how the symbolic Sufi messages transform listener consciousness from rigid dogmations toward an inclusive, humanistic, and peaceful spiritual awareness (Gadamer, 2004; Hardiman, 2009; Palmer, 2003).

To visually articulate the systematic progression of this analytical framework, Figure 1 illustrates the complete research flow implemented in this study.

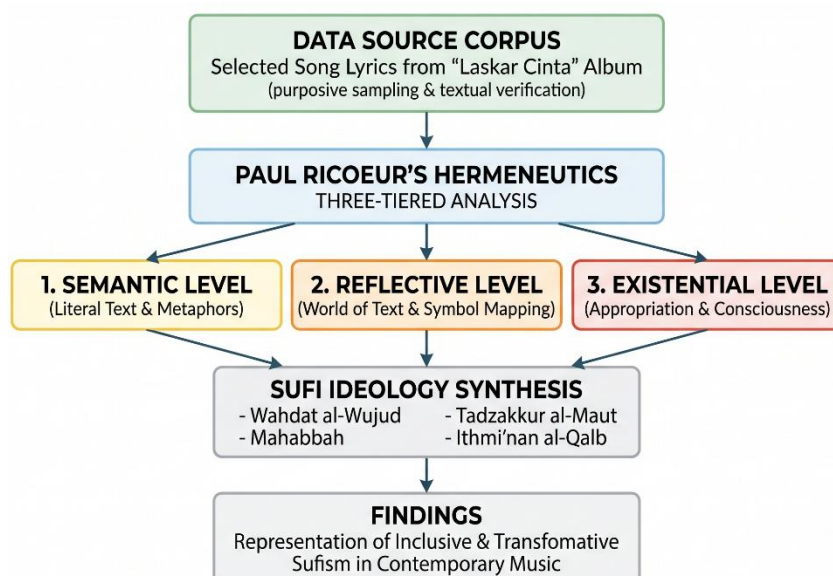


Figure 1. Systematic Research Flow

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The hermeneutic analysis of selected lyrical texts from Dewa 19's album *Laskar Cinta* reveals that popular music serves as a complex symbolic medium for transmitting esoteric Sufi doctrines. By applying Paul Ricoeur's three-tiered interpretative framework—encompassing the semantic level, the reflective level (the world of the text), and existential appropriation—this study identified four core Sufi ideological constructs embedded within the song lyrics: *Wahdat al-Wujud* (unity of existence), *Tadzakkur al-Maut* (remembrance of death), *Mahabbah* (divine unative love), and *Ithmi'nan al-Qalb* (tranquillity of the heart). Table 2 presents a systematic synthesis of these findings across the selected tracks and their respective hermeneutic tiers.

Table 2. Synthesis of Hermeneutic Levels and Sufi Ideologies in *Laskar Cinta* Album

Song Title	Primary Sufi Ideology	Semantic Level (Literal/Metaphor)	Reflective Level (World of Text)	Existential Appropriation Level
" <i>Satu</i> "	<i>Wahdat al-Wujud</i> & <i>Mahabbah</i>	Dualistic pronominal metaphors ("I" and "You") and somatic imagery.	Manifestation of divine immanence (<i>tajalli</i>) and absorption of human agency.	Dissolution of ego (<i>fana'</i>) into absolute divine unity (<i>tawhid al-mahabbah</i>).
" <i>Pangeran Cinta</i> "	<i>Wahdat al-Wujud</i> , <i>Tadzakkur al-Maut</i> , & <i>Mahabbah</i>	Temporal progression markers and physical decay imagery.	Contrast between physical transience (<i>al-mutaghayyirat</i>) and eternal Love (<i>baqa'</i>).	Transcending fear of mortality to achieve eternal spiritual union (<i>ittihad</i>).
" <i>Nonsense</i> "	<i>Wahdat al-Wujud</i>	Paradoxical expressions ("existence is non-existence") and cosmic symbols.	Deconstruction of material reality and reduction of rational ego.	Spiritual verification (<i>tahqiq/dzauq</i>) overriding formal rationalism.
" <i>Hadapi</i> "	<i>Tadzakkur al-</i>	Imperative exhortations	Absolute divine	Achieving serene

Song Title	Primary Sufi Ideology	Semantic Level (Literal/Metaphor)	Reflective Level (World of Text)	Existential Appropriation Level
<i>dengan Senyuman</i>	<i>Maut & Ithmi'nan al-Qalb</i>	("smile", "be calm") and surrendering tropes.	determinism (<i>qada' wa qadar</i>) and spiritual submission (<i>taslim</i>).	soul (<i>nafs al-mutmainnah</i>) through unconditional acceptance (<i>ridha</i>).
<i>"Hidup Ini Indah"</i>	<i>Tadzakkur al-Maut & Ithmi'nan al-Qalb</i>	Somatic transitions ("breathing last breath") and living water symbols.	Death as a sublime gateway to <i>liqa' Allah</i> and restoration via <i>Nur Ilahi</i> .	Existential gratitude (<i>syukur</i>) and humbling human finitude before God.
<i>"Atas Nama Cinta"</i>	<i>Mahabbah</i>	Critical denunciations of religious exploitation and hypocrisy.	Demanding spiritual purity, inner ethics, and anti-commercialization of faith.	Self-examination (<i>muhasabah</i>) and purifying intention (<i>ikhlas</i>) for divine love.
<i>"Sweetest Place"</i>	<i>Ithmi'nan al-Qalb</i>	Metaphorical inner sanctuary ("Sweetest Place") and spiritual sight (<i>'aimul bashirah</i>).	Spiritual purification (<i>takhalli</i>) and dissolution of temporal anxieties.	Inner contentment (<i>qana'ah</i>) and intimate presence (<i>uns</i>) with the Creator.

Representation of *Wahdat al-Wujud*

The doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (unity of existence) is structurally articulated through the interconnected tracks "*Satu*", "*Pangeran Cinta*", and "*Nonsense*". At the semantic level in "*Satu*", dualistic pronominal markers ("Aku" and "Engkau") are strategically paired with somatic metaphors (seeing through His eyes, hearing through His ears). As Ricoeur (1976) posits, poetic metaphors project a secondary horizon of meaning; here, the lyrics shift from literal human interaction to the ontological manifestation (*tajalli*) of the Divine. Reflectively, the text deconstructs rigid dogmatic boundaries by asserting that multi-layered reality is grounded in one Absolute Being. Existentially, as highlighted by Mustamain (2021), the listener is invited to experience *fana'* (ego dissolution), relinquishing self-centered agency to realize that human breath and existence are contingent reflections of divine presence.

In "*Pangeran Cinta*", temporal transience is depicted through surface linguistic markers describing physical decay and changing eras. Beneath these literal representations lies a reflective contrast between *al-mutaghayyirat* (the fleeting material world) and *baqa'* (divine eternity). The figure of the "Prince of Love" serves as an ontological metaphor for the immortal spirit. Concurrently, "*Nonsense*" employs paradoxical formulations ("existence is non-existence") to dismantle rational pride. At the reflective level, physical phenomena are revealed as empty when detached from their divine origin. On an existential plane, this trilogic progression guides listeners through spiritual verification (*tahqiq*), transforming abstract metaphysics into lived intuitive awareness (*dzaug*).

Representation of *Tadzakkur al-Maut*

The remembrance of death (*tadzakkur al-maut*) functions not as an eschatological terror, but as a transformative spiritual mechanism in "*Pangeran Cinta*", "*Hadapi dengan Senyuman*", and "*Hidup Ini Indah*". In "*Hadapi dengan Senyuman*", semantic imperatives encouraging the listener to "smile" and "remain calm" amidst adversity represent the Sufi virtue of *ridha* (unconditional contentment). Reflectively, the narrative projects a framework of absolute divine decree (*qada' wa qadar*), wherein human struggling is re-contextualized as a necessary spiritual trial. Existentially, the paradox of "surrendering

to win” encourages listeners to dismantle egoic control, finding inner peace through *taslim* (total submission).

Similarly, in “*Hidup Ini Indah*”, the semantic phrase “drawing one's last breath” is liberated from tragic biological connotations. Reflectively, death is conceptualized as *liqa' Allah*—the sublime encounter with the Divine. As observed by Al-Ghazali (1994), contemplating mortality frees the human heart from worldly entanglements. Appropriating this text enables listeners to embrace human finitude, transforming the awareness of death into existential gratitude (*syukr*) for life as a mirror of divine beauty (*jamal Allah*).

Representation of Mahabbah

The ideology of unative divine love (*mahabbah*), historically championed by Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah, forms the emotional core of the album across “*Satu*”, “*Pangeran Cinta*”, and “*Atas Nama Cinta*”. In “*Atas Nama Cinta*”, the semantic text forcefully denounces those who manipulate religious symbols for worldly gains. Reflectively, this critique projects a sacred space demanding absolute purity of intention (*ikhlas*) and warning against spiritual hypocrisy. Existentially, as noted by Sya‘rani (1995), the song impels listeners toward self-evaluation (*muhasabah*), stripping away manipulative religious facades to cultivate genuine devotion.

When integrated with “*Satu*” and “*Pangeran Cinta*”, *mahabbah* operates as a hierarchical spiritual ladder. It begins in “*Satu*” as *tawhid al-mahabbah* (realizing that all love originates from and returns to God), advances in “*Pangeran Cinta*” as mystical longing (*isyq ilahi*), and culminates in “*Atas Nama Cinta*” as selfless devotion (*itsar*). Through this structural arrangement, romantic metaphors in popular music are elevated into contemporary vessels for divine union (*ittihad*).

Representation of Ithmi'nan al-Qalb

Tranquillity of the heart (*ithmi'nan al-qalb*) is systematically developed in “*Hadapi dengan Senyuman*”, “*Hidup Ini Indah*”, and “*Sweetest Place*”. In “*Sweetest Place*”, the title serves as a semantic metaphor for an inner spiritual sanctuary (*nafs al-mutmainnah*). Reflectively, the opening of inner vision (*‘ainul bashirah*) signifies *takhalli*—the purification of the soul from temporal anxieties. On the existential level, the lyrics dissolve the painful rift between expectation and reality, leading the listener to spiritual contentment (*qana'ah*) and intimate divine presence (*uns*).

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Dewa 19’s album *Laskar Cinta* represents more than a collection of popular rock songs; it functions as a symbolic cultural text that mediates complex Sufi philosophical ideas through poetic language, metaphor, and musical expression. Through Paul Ricoeur’s symbolic hermeneutic framework, the analysis reveals that the album constructs spiritual meanings through three interpretative movements: semantic meaning, reflective meaning, and existential appropriation. This finding confirms Ricoeur’s argument that symbols and poetic texts contain a “surplus of meaning” (*surplus de sens*) that exceeds their literal linguistic structures and requires interpretation to reveal deeper existential significance (Ricoeur, 1976). In this sense, the lyrics of *Laskar Cinta* do not merely communicate religious messages explicitly but create symbolic spaces where listeners encounter questions about existence, mortality, love, and the relationship between human beings and the Divine.

The identification of four central Sufi concepts—*Wahdat al-Wujud*, *Tadzakkur al-Maut*, *Mahabbah*, and *Ithmi'nan al-Qalb*—extends previous research on religious expression in literature and popular culture. Earlier studies have generally examined Sufi representation through literary works by focusing on moral values, spiritual journeys, or

theological messages (Nur Kholis, 2021; Barokati & Ihsan, 2025). These studies demonstrate that Sufi texts often employ metaphorical language to represent the relationship between human beings and God. However, the present study extends this body of knowledge by showing how similar theological structures can operate within contemporary popular music. Rather than positioning Sufism exclusively within classical poetry or religious literature, this study demonstrates that modern popular music can function as a medium for transmitting esoteric spiritual concepts to broader audiences.

The representation of *Wahdat al-Wujud* in songs such as “Satu,” “Pangeran Cinta,” and “Nonsense” illustrates how Dewa 19 transforms metaphysical ideas into accessible poetic expressions. The use of personal pronouns such as “Aku” and “Engkau” in “Satu” creates a symbolic relationship between human existence and divine presence. At the semantic level, these expressions appear to describe interpersonal relationships; however, through Ricoeur’s reflective interpretation, they reveal a deeper theological meaning related to divine immanence (*tajalli*) and the dissolution of individual ego (*fana*). This interpretation supports previous Sufi scholarship emphasizing that mystical poetry frequently uses human love metaphors as symbolic pathways toward understanding divine unity (Schimmel, 2011; Ibn ‘Arabi, 1980). Nevertheless, the present study extends previous research by demonstrating that similar symbolic mechanisms are not limited to classical Sufi poetry but also emerge in contemporary rock music.

The findings regarding *Tadzakkur al-Maut* provide another important contribution. Previous studies often interpret death symbolism in religious literature as representing spiritual awakening, moral reflection, or preparation for the afterlife. The analysis of “Hadapi dengan Senyuman” and “Hidup Ini Indah” confirms this interpretation but also expands it by showing that Dewa 19 reframes death not as a frightening theological concept but as a transformative spiritual experience. Through Ricoeur’s hermeneutic process, expressions related to mortality are reconstructed into symbols of divine encounter (*liqa’ Allah*) and acceptance (*ridha*). This finding is consistent with Al-Ghazali’s view that awareness of mortality can liberate individuals from excessive attachment to worldly existence and encourage spiritual purification (Al-Ghazali, 1994). The contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how popular music can transform existential anxiety into spiritual reflection through symbolic communication.

The findings on *Mahabbah* further strengthen the argument that *Laskar Cinta* represents a contemporary articulation of Sufi spirituality. In classical Sufism, divine love represents one of the highest stages of spiritual realization, particularly associated with figures such as Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah, who emphasized unconditional love toward God (Schimmel, 2011). The present study confirms this perspective by showing that songs such as “Satu,” “Pangeran Cinta,” and “Atas Nama Cinta” construct love beyond romantic interpretation. Instead, love becomes a symbolic pathway toward sincerity (*ikhlas*), self-reflection (*muhasabah*), and spiritual purification. This finding also challenges interpretations that analyze popular love songs only through interpersonal relationships. By applying Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, the study reveals how apparently romantic symbols may contain transcendental meanings connected with divine orientation.

Furthermore, the emergence of *Ithmi’nan al-Qalb* demonstrates the album’s emphasis on psychological and spiritual transformation. Songs such as “Sweetest Place,” “Hadapi dengan Senyuman,” and “Hidup Ini Indah” present inner peace as the result of spiritual acceptance rather than the absence of suffering. This finding aligns with previous studies on Sufi spirituality that describe tranquillity of the heart as the outcome of purification, surrender, and closeness to God (Mustamain, 2021; Nursi, 2022). However, this study contributes a new perspective by explaining how this spiritual

transformation occurs through a hermeneutic process. The listener does not simply receive religious instruction but actively reconstructs meaning through interaction with the symbolic world projected by the lyrics.

From the perspective of popular culture studies, the findings support the argument that popular media functions as an important arena for negotiating social, ideological, and spiritual meanings. Storey (2018) argues that popular culture is not merely entertainment but a cultural space where identities, values, and beliefs are continuously produced and contested. The present study confirms this perspective by demonstrating that *Laskar Cinta* transforms the concept of struggle (*jihad*) from external confrontation into internal spiritual purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*). This reinterpretation is particularly significant within the Indonesian socio-religious context, where religious discourse has experienced increasing complexity and contestation. Through symbolic language, Dewa 19 presents spirituality as inclusive, humanistic, and centered on love rather than conflict.

The application of Ricoeur's symbolic hermeneutics also provides a theoretical contribution beyond previous semiotic studies of song lyrics. Earlier studies using Saussurean semiotics have effectively explained how signs construct meaning through relationships between signifiers and signifieds (Nurdin et al., 2026; Pranata & Deni, 2024). However, semiotic analysis often emphasizes the internal structure of signs, whereas Ricoeur's hermeneutics explains how texts project a world of meaning that can transform human understanding. Therefore, this study extends existing approaches by demonstrating that song lyrics are not only systems of signs but also existential texts capable of shaping spiritual reflection.

Despite these contributions, the findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the study. The analysis focuses exclusively on textual and symbolic dimensions of one album and does not investigate listener reception or the influence of musical elements such as melody, rhythm, and vocal expression. Future research could expand this approach by combining hermeneutic analysis with audience studies to examine how different listeners interpret and internalize Sufi meanings in popular music. Comparative studies involving other Indonesian musicians or different musical genres could also reveal broader patterns regarding the relationship between spirituality, popular culture, and contemporary identity formation.

This study demonstrates that *Laskar Cinta* represents a significant example of how popular music can function as a contemporary spiritual discourse. By applying Ricoeur's symbolic hermeneutics, the research reveals that the album transforms poetic expressions into deeper philosophical reflections concerning divine unity, mortality, love, and inner peace. The findings therefore contribute to literary studies, religious studies, and cultural studies by showing that popular music can serve as a bridge between classical Sufi thought and the spiritual experiences of modern society.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Dewa 19's album *Laskar Cinta* (2004) functions as a sophisticated, multi-layered contemporary Sufi text that systematically articulates four core ontological constructs of Sufism, *Wahdat al-Wujud* (unity of existence), *Tadzakkur al-Maut* (remembrance of death), *Mahabbah* (unitive divine love), and *Ithmi'nan al-Qalb* (tranquillity of the heart), through the interpretive lens of Paul Ricoeur's symbolic hermeneutics. By directly addressing the central research objectives, this study proves that lyrical structures in popular rock music can transcend conventional commercial entertainment, operating as dynamic communicative channels that mediate profound spiritual transformation within modern society. The structural transformation of meaning is clearly elucidated across Ricoeur's three hermeneutic tiers.

At the semantic level, literal vocabulary, pronominal shifts between “Aku” and “Engkau”, and poetic tropes establish the initial symbolic foundation by anchoring divine immanence within human experience. At the reflective level, these surface expressions project “the world of the text” (*le monde du texte*), effectively re-framing material transience into eternal divine presence (*baqa'*), biological mortality into a sublime gateway for meeting the Divine (*liqa' Allah*), and external socio-religious confrontation into internal spiritual purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*). Finally, at the level of existential appropriation, the text demands active self-examination (*muhasabah*), guiding the listener toward ego dissolution (*fana'*), total spiritual submission (*taslim*), unconditional contentment (*ridha*), and the realization of an inner serene soul (*nafs al-mutmainnah*). Ultimately, these scientific findings demonstrate that popular culture can serve as an inclusive, humanistic, and highly effective medium for bridging classical esoteric Sufi philosophies with the intellectual and spiritual needs of contemporary listeners.

RECOMMENDATION

While this study offers significant theoretical and empirical contributions to literary, linguistic, and cultural scholarship, several methodological barriers and practical limitations must be acknowledged. Primarily, the empirical scope of this investigation was strictly confined to textual and lyrical data from a single musical album (*Laskar Cinta*), without integrating audience reception studies to assess how diverse modern listeners subjectively interpret, internalize, or resist these spiritual messages in real-world settings. Additionally, the analytical focus was heavily weighted toward verbal and hermeneutic dimensions, treating musical compositions, acoustic rhythms, and vocal deliveries as secondary contextual elements rather than primary data units, despite their recognized potential in heightening emotional resonance. To build upon these findings and advance future scholarship, several concrete research directions are recommended.

Future researchers are encouraged to conduct comparative textual and semiotic analyses across broader corpora of contemporary music genres, such as indie, hip-hop, or regional pop, using alternative theoretical frameworks like Roland Barthes's semiotic myths or Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model to examine evolving representations of religious and philosophical discourses. Furthermore, future studies should investigate the pedagogical application of spiritual lyric analysis in educational environments, exploring how incorporating authentic, pragmatically rich song lyrics into literature and language classrooms can foster critical reading competencies, pragmatic awareness, and holistic character education among students.

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