Article

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From Playback to Playfront: Music Performance in 'Globalized' India

Sonu Nigam arrives at the concert in Tu

Abstract

This study investigates the changing dynamics of music labor in the Bollywood and Mumbai music industries in the milieu of globalization (1990 – 2019). By employing a case study of Sonu Nigam, a contemporary musician working in Mumbai, this paper will elaborate on the metamorphosis of the music profession with emerging avenues for performances and evolving musical stardom in these industries. Being considered the most controversial and visually popular singer in India, Nigam's success was and continues to be excessively bolstered by the increased mediatization of music in the country. With a career spanning four decades, he has worked in various capacities for music companies/ Bollywood films/concerts (as a singer, composer, and actor), and TV reality shows (as a performer, judge, and anchor). By identifying him as a force that operates through multiple registers of the music profession, this paper will discuss transforming attitudes and approaches towards music labor enhanced with new visualities of music in post-liberalized India. Using theories of intermediality and approaches of media archeology, this study will invest in mapping the socio-cultural networks and techno-infrastructural practices operating in these industries that enable new configurations and identifications of musical labor in India.

Keywords: music, culture industry, mediatization, music television, stardom

A mighty stadium, a venue what appears to be a pop concert, brims with an ocean of lively spectators. On stage, a music and dance ensemble preps the show for something big to ensue. As the anticipation peaks among the audience, a booming voice declares, "Ladies and Gentleman, we give you Sonu Nigam." After the cue, a pop star emerges from the rabid crowd and heads towards the stage. On the stage framed by a giant LED screen, he flexes his jacket and tosses away his half-burnt cigarette to sing and groove with his troupe. The camera deftly segues between the gleams of stage lights and fireworks, the music star amusing the audience, and the stadium pulsating with hysteria.

Nigam's concert performance

This opening sequence of "*Tu*," a music video starring Sonu Nigam, marks the evolution of music stardom in popular Hindi music. There are mainly two striking aspects to this music video, which comes to represent the newer calibrations in this popular form: - the portrayal of the musician as a star and an aesthetic that is in tune with evolving music consumption. To begin with the latter, this song's lavish deployment of digitally synthesized sounds, special effects, choreography, and swift camera movements attempts to replicate the form and grandeur of a mediatized live concert. By envisioning such a larger-than-life spectacular musical experience for the audience, what becomes conspicuous is the Mumbai music industry's embrace of new modes of entertainment and also its changing address to the music aficionados in liberalized India. Perhaps, the most important signifier of these elements is the figure of the musician, in this case, Nigam, presented as a phantasmic body[i]. Apparently, the video heavily draws on the visual language of concerts and performances of pop icon Michael Jackson, which gets accentuated by Nigam's demeanor. But more than an imitation, this spectacle-driven video points towards the music industry's drive to birth music superstars, and bringing such stars closer to their audiences.

This reconfiguration of the musician as a star performer, I argue, expresses the renewed status of the musicians in Indian media. Because until liberalization, the Indian playback singers were identified by their singing voice and not their visual persona. In contrary, the video under discussion shows via Nigam's star body how the cultural and industrial valence of musicians were in a state of flux post-liberalization. It's representation of massive exhilaration and fanfare around the music star's gestural performance becomes symbolic of a newfound currency in terms of musicians' stardom. As the article will argue, by analyzing this significant stardom that accretes around the figure of the musician, a fascinating history of the Mumbai music industry's transmogrification into a

global multimedia industry in liberalized India will become known.

This article argues that in the liberalization era, the synergies of music and mediatization have established new avenues of performances and means of music consumption, from which musicians have derived newer 'star' lives. While musicians were imbued with a star power that was unheard of in the pre-liberalization, they were also faced with more challenges in music labor. Shaped by these developments, the contemporary musicians, to a great extent, emerged as multimedia stars in show business, juggling multiple roles, that too with a great deal of precarity in their professional sphere. Nigam's star career offers the perfect material to comprehend the aforementioned, as it coincides with the period of liberalization and incarnates in multifarious capacities, constantly highlighting the working of multimedial music stardom in this milieu. Therefore, using Nigam's musicking body as its focus, this article will read into the recalibrations of music labor and thereby the transforming Hindi film and music industries of liberalized India (1991-2020).

The Age of More

Nigam's dominant identity is of a playback singer, yet it is undeniable that he also has an alternative image, i.e., as a visual star, which he developed over three decades as an anchor, reality show judge, film actor, and live performer. If it was not for the multitude of musical avenues that were available for him; it is doubtful to expect the formation of the immense 'visibility' he was able to establish as a music star. This augmentation of India's performance avenues that eventually aided Nigam needs to be grounded to the age of India's economic liberalization and subsequent globalization.

The wide-angle view of the euphoria at the concert

From what Peter Manuel illustrates in his *Cassette Culture,* it can be understood that multimedia stardom of this magnitude was unimaginable for Indian musicians pre-liberalization (1993). As Manuel notes, up until the latter half of the 1970s, the Hindi music industry functioned as an appendage of Hindi cinema, with Vividh Bharati[ii] and mainly record companies like GCI[iii] and HMV[iv] making most of their revenue from the film music (42). Nourished by this network, film music became analogous to the most popular and mass-mediated music in India (41). Film music was primarily consonant to the diegetic picturization, and despite being marketed independently and having its own distinctive commodity value, the audience largely made their affective associations with it through its diegetic contexts (42). The promotional material of this music, i.e., covers of cassettes and records, also complemented this diegetic association by carrying the images of the movie actors instead of featuring the musicians who worked behind the curtains (42). Considering

these hegemonies of cinema that subjugated musicians, Manuel states that "…singers and composers of Indian popular music were not stars themselves..." and there was "…no aura of fantasy and glamor woven around the leading singers, who remain invisible voices singing for the actors" (48). For instance, in comparison to American rock musicians who had a public image to worry about, the Indian counterparts were deprived of an image and consequently stayed anonymous to the audience (49). That way, in India, pop music was wrought around cinematic narratives and film stars and not the cultural "norms, modes and ideologies" of musicians as it is in the West (48). A partial exception from this case that Manuel points out can be observed in the careers of a select few artists, mainly playback singers, who were able to enjoy a substantial fan following and recognition (Majumdar 2009, Jhingan 2013, Sundaram 2010). But essentially, as Manuel rightly identifies, musicians majorly endured creative unfreedom under the dominance of film music and studio-centric music production and the absence of alternative avenues that could imbue sufficient visual exposure for them (1993, 49).

High angle shot of Nigam's performance

As Peter Kvetko observes, some of these unimpressive conditions of labor that the musicians suffered were severely disrupted by Indipop in the post-liberalization milieu (2005). In his view, at this period, India's youth culture and socio-economic conditions became comparably analogous to 1950s America, in the way the latter led to the production of rock 'n' roll culture and its associated stars (10). Moreover, as he considers, four decisive factors gave rise to this formation: thriving consumerism, youth-culture, technological advancements, and stylistic rebellion (10). For him, these factors endowed by liberalization made the Indian middle class, especially the youth, increasingly prosperous and enabled them to gain considerable spending power to forge their individualized lifestyles and consumption patterns (ibid). Keen to extract this 'youth' market, music labels capitalized on the emerging media boom - technologies such as satellite television, cassettes, and CDs - to their advantage and produced music which were styled deliberately different from film songs (ibid). But evidently, many other non-film avenues also emerged to empower the musicians by widening India's musicscape and rupturing its prior industrial conventions (Sarrazin 2013, Booth 2008, 2015, and Mehta 2016).

As I will demonstrate in the following sections, Nigam's career is a testament to the expansion of India's musicscape led by liberalization. His engagement with various media infrastructures shows that musicians like him were able to negotiate with the industry status from a position of strength in the most unprecedented ways. In the contemporary era, even when film music was

a major source of their occupation and fame, musicians piggybacked on other mass-mediatized alternatives such as music talent shows, award nights, chat shows, hi-tech live concerts, music videos to further their creative expressions. Musicians were no longer a shadowy presence behind the curtain of cinema; instead, they were simultaneously audible and visible to the audience. This dynamic bodily presence was turning them into pop-culture idols with an "aura of fantasy and glamor woven" around them. The variety of roles and platform in which musicians like Nigam could present themselves was itself an indication of their desire to assert their stardom within the logic of the post-liberalization media economy.

There is arguably no better example from popular memory to elaborate the zeitgeist of liberalization than Pepsi's wildly popular campaign, "*Yeh Dil Maange More*" (trans. The heart beats for more). Featuring A-listers from Bollywood and Indian cricket, flaunting cosmopolitan lifestyles, in youthful settings, these ads placed their product within a new era of consumption; a period in which the consumer had come of age and was demanding more from life in terms of "experiences, adventures, and fun" (Sikdar, 2018). One such advertisement from this campaign opens with a young boy (Shahid Kapoor) stepping out into the street from a cinema hall, feeling he has exhausted the day's "quota of fun". Holding a Pepsi can in his hand, he dejectedly tells himself, "*Parr Yeh Dil Na Maane, Yeh Dil Maange More*" (trans. But my heart doesn't comply, it yearns for more). Much to his amazement, and as a surreal reckoning of his fantasies, the star cast of the blockbuster youth romance film, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Karan Johar, 1998) — namely, Shah Rukh Khan, Kajol, and Rani Mukherjee — and a host of other youngsters appear from nowhere to cheer him up. After this dreamlike song-and-dance act, the advertisement ends, replacing the young consumer's frustration with elation. That manner the commercial can be read as an allegory of the nation's shift from a socialist ‘command-driven economy’ to a neoliberal ‘demand-driven economy’, implying India's transition into a resurgent globalizing economy with a huge consumer base, full of possibilities, and ready to offer anything that its citizens demanded.

Celebration of a New Era Pepsi’s Yeh Dil Maange More Commercial

Being the economic hotspots and "testing grounds" of new lifestyles, this euphoria of globalization was mirrored in the urban landscapes of India (Brosius 2010, 2). The most recognizable feature of this mirroring was the new "surface culture" that emerged in cities as malls, multiplexes, video arcades, bookstores, coffee shops, ATMs, Electronic Billboards, on which "delirious signs of prosperity, lifestyle images, commodities" were circulating (Mazumdar 2010, 2007). Similar establishments,

including pubs, burger joints, pizzerias, and

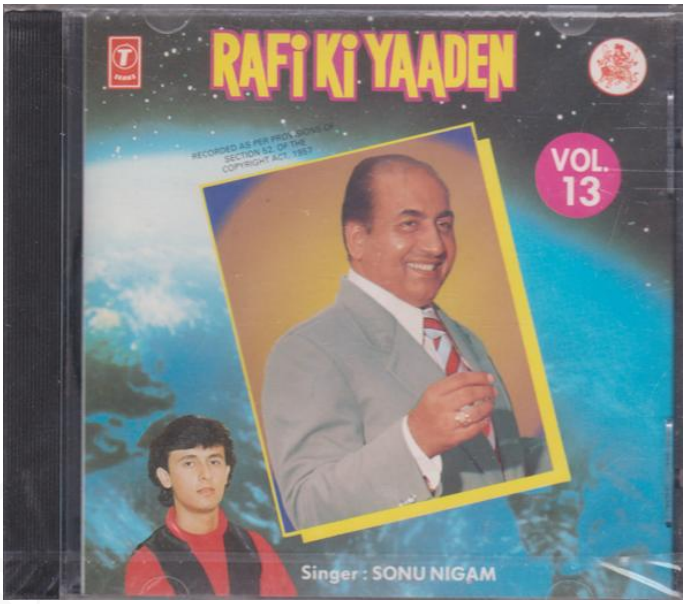
Select advertisements of music devices from the 1990s (Source Filmfare)

restaurants, mushroomed in large numbers, allowing the middle class to gain greater accessibility to such spaces and display their wealth compared to earlier generations. These spaces also provided the youth across genders autonomous spaces for socializing freely; it also made outlets for the performance of music bands, stand-up comedies, poetry recitals, and karaoke sessions (Mehrotra 2012, 115). Apart from the spatial culture, city spaces were swayed by a technological boom, which enabled the Indian public easier access to television, telephones, computers, and other media gadgets. As Ravi Sundaram writes, the urban experience was increasingly becoming 'globalized', with the convergence of telecom, media, and software industries (2010, 6). By the 1990s itself, audio and video cassette markets were flourishing, and over 27 million TV sets were sold in the country, aggravating this 'globalization' drive (Ibid.85).

These techno-cultural transitions of India had a tremendous impact on its entertainment business and music scene. Some of the crucial changes towards this direction were already underway in the 80s when "cassette culture"[v],with its cheap pricing, made music consumption significantly affordable and, thereby set up an expansive consumer base. Buoyed by the cassette technology, a crop of pirate networks, new producers, and new voices broke into the music industry, ripping into monopolies and pre-existing star systems of music professionals (Sundaram 2010, 114). The most significant player in piracy that enhanced the cassette revolution was the music label, T-Series. The company was strategically rising to the top of the music business by tapping into non-film music, mainly folk-pop, and devotional music, and by imbibing certain innovations of cassette technologies from Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong (Mehrotra 2012, 213). The label sold its music not only from music shops, but also through grocery shops, *paan* shacks, and street vendors (Khandekar 2010, 181), and they promoted music like never before using repeated exposure on radio, TV programs, and stage shows (Bhardwaj 1991). Believably taking inspiration from the former, music companies like Tips, Venus, Time, and Weston also devised marketing strategies for music and ventured into aggressive promotion over satellite television (Bhardwaj 1996). As a further step towards conglomeration, T-Series, Venus, and Tips started getting into film production (Duggal

2010, 50). Noticeably, several films from these companies were conspicuously centered on music and music performances *Aashiqui* (1990), *Love* (1991), *Akele Hum Akele Tum* (1995) taking forward their industrial propaganda (Ghosh 2020). Apart from the heavily marketed music driven films backed by music companies, there were also a prominent set of films like *Hum Dil Chuke Sanam* (1999), *Taal* (1999), *Pardes* (1997), and *Khamoshi- The Musical* (1996), which had music as their narrative fulcrum, focusing on the lives of young musicians (Ghosh 2020, 166). Meanwhile, Hindi cinema itself was expanding to 'Bollywood'- a global media industry (Punathambekar 2013) composed of sub-industries of television, music, internet, fashion, and tourism that produced a "feel-good version" of Indian culture and nationalism, export-ready for the international market (Rajadhyaksha 2004, 135). Sangita Gopal calls this configuration of Hindi cinema and associated media ecology as ‘New Bollywood’ (2011). And it is to be understood that central to the global mobility of this media force were songs and dances (Gopal and Moorti 2008, 9).

A great amount of these lavish deployments and investments in music were possibly made, taking cues from the perceptible shift in the listener's taste. Melodies were slowly returning to prominence in film songs, with soundtracks significantly contributing to the success of releases in 1990 like *Aashiqui*, *Dil*, and *Baaghi* (Sadarangani 1991). In the following years, too, it was visible that film music meant big business through a surge in demand for cassettes, that pushed up the revenues and musical rights of films (Bhardwaj and Pillai 1995). In further years, especially with A. R. Rahman's arrival into the Bollywood's music scene, apart from melodies, there was also stress for greater production values and heavier orchestral sounds (Bhardwaj and Pillai 1995) and compositions were increasingly becoming sensitive to global music genres (Sarrazin 2013, 39).



CD and cassette covers of Nigam’s Rafi Ki Yaaden series

Not just the musicians but the lay audience also found access to more technological objects and media platforms to discover music, sometimes even beyond film music. On this front, portable cassette players and mobile phones arrived at the market and expanded the scope of music consumption into a more intimate and personalized experience (Duggal 2010, 16). Simultaneously, MTV India and Channel V, made diverse youth driven music genres, and new codes of performances available to audiences through satellite television. To sum up, as a byproduct of music production techniques and innovative marketing, music exploded through a flurry of outlets altering pre-existing consumer practices. This boom

skyrocketed music's commodity value and, along with that, propelled the possibilities of musicians to be superstars.

Nigam's performance and anchoring in Zee Sa Re Ga Ma

It was in the beginning of this period that Sonu Nigam moved from Delhi to Mumbai to make his musical career in Bollywood. After having a brief stint as a child artist in films like *Pyaara Dushman* (1980), *Betaab* (1983), and *Kaamchor* (1982*)* and 14 years of professional singing experience, he still had much to do in terms of the struggle to rise to the pinnacle of musical stardom. Nevertheless, like the choices of a typical Indian consumer prophesied by the Pepsi commercials, the opportunities before the musician were also becoming 'more' as the music industry was growing exponentially. Nigam's arrival in the world of musical entertainment thus has to be read against a marked transformation in the media ecology and industry practices, harnessing a litany of events, sites, and spaces that echoed this aspirational mood post-economic liberalization. As Brosius has shown, the emergence of the new middle class was marked by the desire for "mobility and adaptability," as well as their exposure to various lifestyle options offered by the globalized economic market and their displays of prosperity (Brosius, 2010).

Playback to Playfront

According to Richard Dyer, "star images are always extensive, multimedia and intertextual" (2000, 605). He also cites that the film star phenomenon is an aggregate of every information (from promotional material[vi] to private life) that is publicly available about the star; he also says that star images unravel depending on how the star and the industry constructs their images and also how critics scrutinize those images and details through their writings and discussions (2000). For Christine Gledhill, the film star archetype is "a social sign….which expresses the intimacies of individual personality, inviting desire and identification…founded on the body, fashion, and personal style" (1991, xi). In the case of popular music stars in the West, audiences make their affective connections and assumptions of the music star's personal lives based on the latter's music and lyrics (Loy, Rickwood, Bennett 2018, 7). According to David Shumway, rock stars were distinguished for star qualities such as political stance, sexuality, and anti-authoritarian rebellion beyond their music (2014, 22). Simon Frith has also highlighted the musician's corporeality and personality as attractions by referring to the pop star archetype as "a site of desire - as a body and as a person". He strengthens this claim by stating that "central to the pleasure of pop is pleasure in a voice, sound as body, sound as person" (1998, 210). These above-mentioned suggestions imply that, the Western audience normally perceived a music star as an audio-visual star; a star who is identified for his music, physicality, and personality, to some extent comparable to film stars for having analogous star qualities.

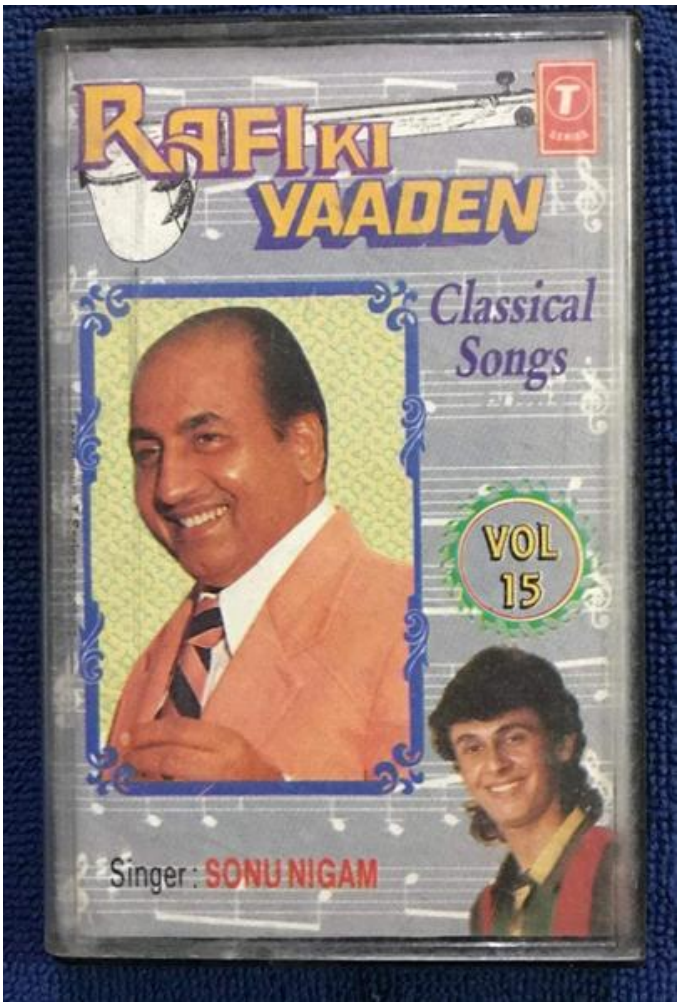
Nigam's performance and anchoring in Zee Sa Re Ga Ma

Opposed to these star systems of music in the West, musical stardom was more restricted in India, at least until the late 1980s. Star discourse was dominated by the film stars who were associated with glamour, fashion, personal style, sexuality, and rebellion. This does not mean that Indian musicians never had any of these attributes, but that there were no media than the film soundtrack to adequately harness and facilitate the reach of these star qualities to the audience. To reiterate, instead of corporeality or any other characteristic, it was far more dominantly the voice/music composition that determined the audience's perception of the music star. However, Nigam's mass-mediatized career signifies a progressive departure from this industry tradition. It indicates the gravitation of Indian musicians towards a space similar to pop stardom, where they as stars were recognized by the audience for both their vocal and physical persona.

It was a 'tribute[vii]' album, *Rafi Ki Yaaden* (1993), brought out by T-Series that attained Sonu Nigam some recognition in the industry. He was a new entrant among the list of singers like Anwar, Mohammed Aziz, and Shabbir Kumar, who often sang in the style of the late playback star Mohammed Rafi, using their similar vocal texture, and tonal qualities to the latter. However, having a similar voice was only a prerequisite to imitation, and as Shikha Jhingan notes, a copy artist (who usually was a fan and therefore had an affective alliance to the aural star) was also bound to be a good listener who could closely replicate the aural star's 'original' rendition through his/her aural memories (2013). Considering this criterion, Nigam was ideal as a copy singer, for being affectively connected to Rafi as a fan[viii], and for being aurally adept in vocally imitating the star, with his highly expressive and nuanced singing. Though his imitational prowess resulted in the repeated successes of his cover versions, it overshadowed his 'versatile' playback outings for folk music, devotionals, films, and TV serials. It was slowly becoming impossible for Nigam to break away from his identity as a Rafi clone. To go by Jhingan's suggestions, this was a usual predicament of copy singers as they were marginal figures in the music industry. As she says, no matter the acclaim that copy singers acquired through their precise imitation of star voices, their labor as an artist usually remained 'invisible' and eclipsed by the aura of the "authentic" aural star (101). But such situations were brought to a transition, atleast in the case of Nigam, with the coming of Television and its music shows.

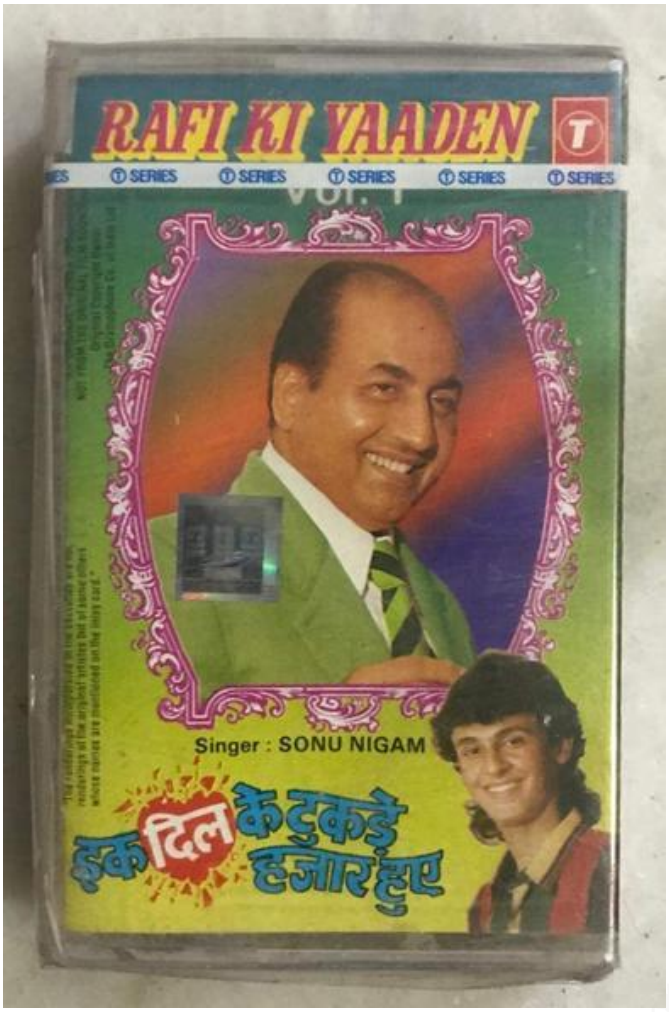
Television emerged in India as the most powerful vehicle of technological

modernity in the 1990s, breaking down geographical boundaries through its spread, and facilitating a uniform temporality of consumption (Sundaram 2009, 83). The televisual landscape further pushed the consumption of music into a mass-consumed viewing experience. This conversion was largely induced by a growing emphasis on entertainment programming of television channels in their race to win audiences. It was in this media ecology that some notable musical shows of the 1990s like *Superhit Muqabla, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, Meri Awaaz Suno, Closeup Antakshari* took birth, which capitalized on the visibility of Indian musicians by putting their manner of speech, dressing, personality on display and thereby expanding an audience for these artists. This was a significant break from the tradition of playback, where the audience only heard the singer and did not see him/her perform music. A special episode of the music countdown show, *Super Hit Muqabla,* featuring playback singer Kumar Sanu, illustrates the new visual experience. The episode opens with Sanu engaged in a telephonic conversation with his 'supposed' fan. As he attends the call, the singer stands next to a cabinet decked with media objects (VCR, music system, audio cassettes) covertly inviting our attention to a large television behind him. In the telephonic conversation, a frenzied voice from the other side tells Sanu that she is an ardent fan and has 'heard' every song that the singer has rendered. She stubbornly expresses that she wants to 'see' him 'immediately' in person. Jubilant yet confused, Sanu wonders how to realize this wish, and this is when the fan promptly suggests him to 'appear' on that day's *Superhit Muqabla*, which is about to be aired on television. After she relentlessly pleads, the singer promises to be on the show canceling all his recordings for the day. Their conversation ends with the fan letting out an ecstatic scream and Sanu appearing on the show performing his songs and anchoring the episode.



CD and cassette cover of Nigam's Rafi Ki Yaaden series

In many ways, the show's prologue is representative of a few yet significant attributes that Frith underlines about television's mediatization of music. According to Frith, television had a significant impact in shaping performing conventions and how the audience perceived performers and their music. It has played a substantial role in star-making machinery by visualizing the performers to potential fans by



CD and cassette cover of Nigam's Rafi Ki Yaaden series

"bringing stage acts to the living room" (2002, 279). The aesthetic of liveness, immediacy, the "sense of something happening here and now" was also pivotal to the televisual landscape. Similar to rock performances, television used technical enhancements including "camera angles, amplification, lighting, editing" to make the visuals appear real, exciting, and happening (284). And together with the live aesthetic and technological wizardry, it prompted the audience to be part of "something out there" (288). The *Superhit Muqabla* episode as discussed above, draws the audience's visual attention in many ways. Firstly, it draws attention to the way television was able to harness the fans' visual engagement with their favorite musicians, implying that Indian audiences were now able to relish the musician's voice through his televisual presence. The musician figure was technologized (surrounded by an assemblage of media objects) and willing to defer his vocal recordings, to make himself 'directly' hearable and visible to his fans. Through the playful use of narrative and editing, this pre-recorded video produces a sense of immediacy, demonstrating how musicians can be accessed both aurally and visually by the audience from anywhere at any time through television.

It was amidst the emergence of this new kind of programming culture that Nigam ventured into television. He hosted the music reality show *Sa Re Ga Ma* from 1995 to 1998 for Zee television, soon becoming a household name in North India through the show's mounting popularity. For the regularly updated rounds that tested the contestants' singing abilities and having the most venerated musicians of Indian classical and film music such as Ustad Zakir Hussain, Naushad Ali, Hariprasad Chaurasia, O. P. Nayyar etc., as judges, this show was one of its kind in the nation's televisual space. Along with the theme of patriotism, the show drew on cultural nostalgia for retro music, especially the film songs of the 50s and 60s (Jhingan 2012, 239). Nigam's similarity to Rafi's iconic voice, a voice that headlined film music of the same era and considered the epitome of playback singing, became a blessing in disguise. According to the staple format of the show, he was an intermediary between contestants, judges, and the audience by his performances and anchoring. His role was to mark the beginning, the betwixt by

vocally demonstrating each round's requirements to the contestants and the end of the show's running time through his singing. Moreover, his performances were mostly based on songs of yesteryear singers, especially Rafi, encashing on his fame as the latter's voice double.

The production design, vivid lighting, and dynamic camera angles, including high angle shots, coalesced to excavate Nigam's graceful and effortless singing of the most complex Hindi film songs. To enhance this screen identity as a prodigy, these performances were supplemented by the shots of the audience's nodding in appreciation and giving undivided attention to his music. The other noticeable detail was that as an anchor, he had more lines to communicate to the audience than, say, the judges, and contestants put together, who in their respective dispositions barely spoke beyond giving instructions and singing. He even accompanied the contestants on the stage and grabbed the limelight on almost every frame of the show. Mostly clothed in traditional sherwanis[ix] and making polite verbal exchanges with the contestants and show's judges, he came to fashion himself as a *sanskaari*[x] 'boy next door'. As Jocelyne Guibault has argued, performances often creates affective alliances between the audience and performer (2010). Similarly, through this show, Nigam was able to build his televisual persona, quite distinct from most of the ostentatious anchors of then; for instance, Annu Kapoor in *Closeup Antakshari*. As a result, while Kapoor was perceived as an amateur singer despite his deep knowledge and passion for film music, Nigam established himself as an amiable and trained professional singer before the audience. Put together, Nigam was able to attract the audience not only towards his vocal prowess but also his personality via televisualization.

Nigam's embodiment of spectacle in Bijuria

Imitation Artist to Bonafide Music Star

Though Nigam made a significant leap in visibilizing himself through the show, it was still insufficient to completely overturn his identity as a copy singer.

His first major hit in Bollywood was "*Sandese Aate Hain"* (*Border,* 1997). Composed by Anu Malik, and sung along with singer Roop Kumar Rathod, the song allowed Nigam to showcase his wide vocal range and skill in voice modulation. Nigam performed the arduous task of emoting for multiple characters[xi] and situations in the film diegesis, proving himself to be a versatile talent. Yet, *Border*'s nationalist fervor and Nigam's own dramatic vocal style made "*Sandese…"* comparable to older film songs, especially the popular patriotic songs sung by Rafi, including "*Ab Tumhare Hawale Watan*", "*Tu Hindu Banega Na Musalmaan Banega*" and "*Yeh Desh Hain Veer Jawanon Ka.*"

Finally, it was with "*Yeh Dil Deewana*" (Pardes), (also released in 1997 along with *Sandese*…) that Nigam was able to show himself having a modern sensibility. "*Yeh Dil*" was indicative of what Natalie Sarrazin

would describe, "the aesthetic of global sensitivity in terms of musical creativity, eclecticism, authenticity, and their approach to psychological character construction, particularly that of the hero" (2013, 49). As opposed to "*Sandese*", "*Yeh Dil..."* was expressively youthful with its pop-influenced soundscape. In comparison to his earlier tracks, in "*Yeh Dil*" Nigam's voice expressed a sense of liberation, particularly in segments where he replicated Michael Jackson's signature singing sounds – "breathy gasps, squeaks, and sensual sighs" (Mercer 2005, 305), coloring the soundtrack with a distinct emotional flavor and an effect of vocal animation. Apart from that, the song was picturized on one of the major stars of the 90s Bollywood, Shah Rukh Khan (SRK). While the SRK's character in the film was of an NRI musician serenading the streets of Las Vegas, Nigam's passionate singing in Hindi and his impressions of Jackson gave a narrative verisimilitude to the former's musical and transnational identity throughout the song sequence. In return, Nigam's voice gained a star persona, significant mobility, and mainstream attention by being SRK's singing voice. Together, the song proved one of the biggest hits of that year, directing Nigam to mainstream stardom.

Nigam's embodiment of spectacle in Bijuria

Nigam, on many occasions, has acknowledged that it was after "*Yeh Dil*", he finally started getting recognized as a versatile and commercially viable singer.[xii] As he maintains, he underwent a drastic reinvention for this song because, until it happened, he was either deprived of work or disregarded by audiences as a mere copy-artist of Rafi[xiii]. Believably, his vocal makeover was achieved by actively listening and imbibing the styles of certain Western musicians. He also regards himself as one of the foremost singers of the 1990s to incorporate Western music-influenced vocal improvisations for films, making it fashionable for the years to follow[xiv].

Arguably, Nigam's overall singing career until "*Yeh Dil*" was predicated mainly on imitation, implementing what Kvetko would call "...appropriating the other in order to express one-self"'(2013,163). But as I understand, "*Yeh Dil*" marked a distinct shift in his vocal style. This transformation can be further analyzed through Jayson Beastor-Jones' notion of "stylistic mediation". As Jones maintains, it is a widespread practice deployed by cosmopolitan composers and performers to blend varied musical styles in film music to cater to a wide and heterogeneous audience (2015, 16). He also cites the examples of the singers Rafi and Lata, who practiced this mediation by incorporating styles from classical and folk genres into their renditions (2015). I contend that Nigam too deployed a certain kind of stylistic mediation, where he conjured the vocal styles of other singers to give his songs a distinct quality (This is explicit in his cover versions of Rafi songs). But especially in "*Yeh Dil"*, his stylistic mediation addressed the new youth cultures, incorporating the performative registers of the new media

landscape where music content of television channels like MTV played an important role. For instance, Michael Jackson's singing style is largely associated with pop music and evokes his animated performances; presumably, these are the qualities that Nigam attempts to transport onto the soundtrack of "*Yeh Dil*" to give it a tinge of pop. This vocal style helped Nigam come out of the shadows of being a Rafi clone.

Nigam in Tera Milna (Jaan) and Jeena Hain Tere Liye (Yaad)

Another way to understand this phenomenon is by engaging with the suggestions offered by Jhingan (2013) and Kvetko (2005); both have argued that mimesis can be constructive and productive. According to these scholars, the artist's individuality often emerges in his/her mimetic processes, establishing a degree of sameness and difference to his/her sources of inspiration. Jhingan has suggested that version singers were emulating aural stars as closely as possible (2013, 104), while Kvetko has established that Indian pop musicians were appropriating the styles of international stars (2005, 163). The musicians under discussion inferably, were developing their individual styles by expressing themselves in novel and constructive ways through their mimetic practices. Nigam's performance also needs to be recognized for the mimetic processes that led him towards individuality.

Nigam's appropriation gained a venerable status not because of his ability to imitate older playback singers; rather it was the way he presented these as 'tributes.' In various video shows and interviews, he has drawn attention to his devotion to Rafi and indebtedness to thespians like Manna Dey, Mukesh, Ghulam Ali, Asha Bhosle, Lata Mangeshkar, and Hariharan from whom he has learned thoroughly. Similarly, he has admitted to taking inspiration from singers like Kumar Sanu, Udit Narayan, Lucky Ali, and Western music stars like George Michael, George Benson, Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston, and MJ[xv]. In one such instances, he even gave a vocal demonstration of how he appropriated Lucky Ali's vocal style for his "*Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon*"[xvi]. Drawing on other artist's work and performing them as his 'tribute' was a regular part of Nigam's live concerts and reality show performances. Over a period of time, Nigam was able to draw attention to his affective labor,[xvii] communicating to audiences his efforts in active listening and expanding his skills in a wide variety of voices, styles, and genres. Using this recurring mediatic presence, he asserted himself as a true fan of other (mostly yesteryear) singers. Therefore, unlike a studio-bound copy singer, he was able to claim his authorship and find acceptance for his appropriations through visual mediatization.

Speaking of his rendition of Rafi's "*Badan Pe Sitare"* for *Fanney Khan* (2018), the singer states:

"I basically was avoiding doing it because I don't like to tamper with the original

songs anymore. I've done enough versions in my past. And it's Rafi sahab's song. Who wants to mess with it? He is my guru; he is my musical father. But Anil Kapoorji insisted …. He said he was playing an ardent follower of Rafi sahab in the film, and that's why he wanted me to give him my voice."[xviii]

Nigam seems to be marking a shift in his recent work from his past performance style, emphasizing that in *Fanney Khan*, he was cast to sing a Rafi song because of his reputation as a singing fan and not a copy singer. This is a key moment of Nigam's transition from an imitation artist to a star musician whose fandom is well known to his audience and attested by a popular film star. Behind this phenomenon lies the role of multi- media, which will be discussed in the forthcoming sections.

Between 1997-2012, Nigam became one of Bollywood's playback aristocracy, singing in musical hits "*Kal Ho Naa Ho*", "*Abhi Mujh Mein Kahin*", and "*Suraj Hua Madham*" and that too lending his voice for mega stars like Salman Khan, Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan, and Hrithik Roshan on-screen. In his work "The Cultural Biography of Things," Igor Kopytoff notes that excessive commoditization homogenizes the value of the commodity, and singularization offers it a cultural power (1986). In Nigam's transition from a copy singer to a star, a similar singularization can be witnessed. His "*Hum Hain Rahi Pyaar Ke*" (*Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi,* 2008) "*Yamla Pagla Deewana*" (*Yamla Pagla Deewana*, 2011) "*Badan Pe Sitare"* (*Fanney Khan*, 2018), were version songs, yet they were marketed as tributes – upscaled commodities with a higher cultural value.

Further, his entertaining vocal imitations of other singers have further helped him consolidate his star value, gaining recognition for his talent and virtuosity. As a testament to this, he is now considered an ideal singer who could simultaneously evoke nostalgia for India's cultural past through his Rafi-like voice and exhibit a global sensibility singing in pop music styles. However, his media stardom needs to be read in a broader context.

CD covers of Nigam's various music album

Musician as a Music Video Star

Though *Sa Re Ga Ma* gave Nigam a 'face' to his voice, it was 'music video culture' that converted him into a full-fledged entertainer. While making a transition towards Indipop, music labels were fielding their videos and music stars against Bollywood film songs and film stars. Therefore, music videos were often mounted on a bigger scale and higher production value in relation to film songs. Music labels, due to very many reasons, found Nigam as a potential superstar to be promoted, owing to his multifaceted appeal.

CD covers of Nigam's various music albums

It is crucial to understand the history of Indipop before discussing its impact on Nigam's journey as a star. Established in 1994, music label Magnasound, had a significant role in the consolidation of Indipop music by frequently producing videos featuring music artists of India. Through these videos, the audience saw a unification of musicians' bodies with their voices and musical artists displayed as "authentic" performers (Kvetko 2005,185). Considering the general lack of visibility of musicians in India's popular music, the music video form could give an instant spotlight to the singer, disrupting the hitherto film-industry driven entertainment business. Due to the sustained efforts of Magnasound and its alliances with the programming of MTV and Channel V, this 'music video culture' became a significant pop-culture trend, further strengthening the star value of musicians. This set the stage for the ascent of music artists like Alisha Chinai, Baba Sehgal, Colonial Cousins to superstardom. However, towards the 2000s, Indipop and Magnasound were more or less enervated, thus allowing space for national and international companies such as Sony, Virgin, BMG Crescendo, Universal, Tips, Venus, and T-Series to join the bandwagon of music video production.

Around 1997-98, Nigam started working with Magnasound, gaining considerable visibility through albums like *Kismat* and *Mausam*. Soon, he was also hired by T-Series to make a few private albums. While most of his notable works are with these two companies, he has also been associated with labels like Sa Re Ga Ma and Tips. Most music videos presented him as an energetic performer, highlighting his strong screen persona as a versatile artist. This image was markedly different from his earlier outing in the music show *Sa Re Ga Ma*, where he seemed to be circumscribed by a different set of rules as a television host. Using Marsha Kinder's suggestion (1984), a general modality of these videos can be grasped. According to Kinder, music videos are composed of separate segments such as music performance in an identifiable music genre; a narrative segment shot like minifilm in a recognizable film genre; and dreamlike visuals which play with spatial and temporal incoherences (1984, 4). Modeled on the visual codes of TV commercials and their repetitive appearance, music videos, according to Kinder, leave a strong visual trace and association in the mind of spectators; so that even when they are hearing the song, the memories of its visuals and "the desire to see them again" gets reinforced (3). Overall, this structure where a music video gets repeatedly

played on television needs to be considered while analyzing the popularity of musicians as stars. The recurrences of both the structure of television and the music video form enable the creation of a singularized identity of musicians to emerge. An exploration of Indipop videos will demonstrate how musicians were able to build a certain image of themselves.

Lucky Ali's image as a globetrotting gypsy ("*O Sanam", "Kabhi Aisa Lagta Hai"*, "*Dekha Hai Aise Bhi"*) and Adnan Sami's portrayal as a distressed lover (*Dil Keh Reha Hai*, *Tera Chehra*, *Kisi Din*) can be seen as examples of musicians conferring themselves distinguishable identities in their videos, which, over time became what they are known for. Added to that, the visual codes amplifying lead musician's fundamental talent within narrative/ performance/ dreamlike form also enhanced their persona, giving legitimacy to their versatility and skill. This ranged from his/her expertise in playing musical instruments (Adnan's Sami use of tabla "*Bheegi Bheegi Raaton Mein*" or Lucky Ali playing a lute in "*O Sanam"*) or danceability (Raageshwari in "*Oye Shaava"*) to their acting skills (Palash Sen in "*Ab Na Jaa"*). Music videos' emphasis on the musician's lifestyles, locating them in gigantic mansions, or in luxury automobiles, attired in extravagant outfits played a key role in the way they differentiated their star personae.

Looking for similar aspects in Nigam's videos, his screen image was split mainly between a vivacious youth and a brooding romantic. His quirky side is particularly visible in one of the early videos of his career, "*Bijuria"*, where the song's narrative and dreamlike visuals draw heavily from the horror themes of Backstreet Boys' "*Everybody", The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), and most prominently, Micheal Jackson's "*Thriller*" and "*Ghosts*". In the song, Nigam appears as a ghost who haunts a stranded traveler (Ishita Arun) seeking refuge in his mansion. The entire video unfolds as a song and dance, scare tease by Nigam and his supernatural sidekicks (including a Michael Jackson look-alike). Apart from its music, the special effects remain the key attraction of this video where Nigam's phantom body pierces through walls, splits into several versions of himself, and shows him moonwalking[xix] upside down on the ceiling. Referencing Jackson in *Thriller*, he can be seen sporting fangs and wearing colored devil-like contact lenses. Altogether, his agile dance movements and magical acts in video lend him a boyish charm in this performance, and this quirkiness expressed through body transformations and dance is revisited by his other videos such as "*Sapne Ki Baat*", "*Kajra remix*" and "*Kahan Kho Gaye Woh Yaar."*

Nigam's accentuated display of his physical makeover in Soona Soona

On closer examination, in many of his album songs like "*Jeena Hai Tere Liye"*, "*Tera Milna", "Aa Pukare Tujhe",* and "*Soona Soona,"* we see a recurring articulation of a romantic and masculine

persona. Examining the album jackets of *Kismat* (1998), *Mausam* (1999), *Yaad* (2001), *Chanda Ki Doli* (2005), *and Classically Mild* (2008), this evolution from a spirited youth to a masculine hero is evident. Further, one can see that Nigam is distancing himself from his earlier style of wearing baseball hats and t-shirts. This intended sobriety gets further accentuated by his shoulder length hair and donning of leather jackets and overcoats. Alternatively, we also see him reveal his shredded body.

Nigam's accentuated display of his physical makeover in Soona Soona

In the music videos of these albums, Nigam is seen romantically paired with Bollywood actresses like Bipasha Basu, Dia Mirza, Richa Pallod, Nandana Sen, and Riya Sen. In "*Soona Soona"*, his character is desired by the female protagonist (Pallod) and to exteriorize this partially erotic desire the camera places its focus on his physique. Such fantasy-driven narrative efforts accorded a sexual charisma to his image, projecting his body as a site of visual pleasure. Moreover, through a transformed body, we see Nigam responding to Bollywood's reconfiguration of the male body as part of its recurring use of the 'six-pack' phenomenon. Stylized performance combined with his sexualized demeanor, and the strategic use of locations and props were deployed to feed into his star identity. In "*Jeena…"* Nigam figures as a tormented singer in a ruinous desert, pursuing his love interest (Riya Sen). While he acts out his character's suffering, an electric guitar and cruise bike accompany him, reminding the audience of his identity as a pop musician. In "*Jaane Kyon Mein Tujhko*" he could be seen ballroom dancing and playing a grand piano, whereas in "*Tera Milna"* and *"Jeena"* he navigates dreamy locations[xx] redolent of the West. The comfort with which Nigam is shown to easefully fit in these situations and spaces is indicative of his cosmopolitan quality. There are similar indications about his cosmopolitanism in his appearance in a vintage car and a gothic mansion in "*Chanda Ki Doli"* and his physical makeover as a Greek figure with long curls in "*Soona Soona".*

Apart from such videos that emphasize his style, fashionability, and globality, Nigam also associated himself with themes of religiosity and spirituality. In *Hari Mere Ghar Ko*, released by Magnasound, he revisits his '*sanskaari'* avatar reminiscent of his *Sa Re Ga Ma* appearances. This video mobilized the romanticization of "Indian culture"[xxi] very much in tune with the Bollywood family dramas of the 90s, emphasizing a normative 'Hindu' tradition with an overt display of family driven rituals as the epitome of human virtues. While performing the songs, Nigam can be seen underlining the expressive quality of the lyrics,[xxii] as a gentle prayer to God, wishing the wellbeing of his family. While its verses equate parents to gods and the significance of sibling relationships, the video picturizes a household's interiors, embellished by Hindu idols and iconography, children exchanging sweets and tying *rakhis*[xxiii] to each

other's wrists. Towards the end of the video, Nigam is shown emotionally touching the feet of his on-screen parents.

Nigam in Tera Milna (Jaan) and Jeena Hain Tere Liye (Yaad)

Taking on board Nigam's performative style in the narrative and spatial context of his music videos, one can conclude that he became a larger-than-life musician who could straddle a variety of music genres, enact varied roles, and cater to the diverse tastes of the highly heterogeneous Indian audience. Further, these music videos showcased him performing a wide range of gestures and dance movements that were combined with an eclectic arrangement of image and sound. Through his embodied and dense performance, Nigam was able to articulate both traditional/ national as well as global cultural form and expand his appeal to a diverse range of audience.[xxiv] Since private albums were non-film avenues of performance, they also helped him have a creative expression independent of cinema's patronage.

Musician as a Live Performer

For Nigam, live shows played an equally important role in establishing a certain level of individuality. As his non-film albums and their music videos found recognition, he became dually associated as an established playback singer and as a pop musician. His live concerts became important platforms that allowed him to draw on his star value of these intersecting fields. He was able to reach out to his fans by easily shifting between diverse genres and codes of performance often referencing his familiar acts in music videos that had become part of the music television landscape. For example, if he performed "*Bijuria"*, a double enactment[xxv] was visible, as he would dance his hook steps from his music video, while simultaneously showcasing his virtuosity as a singer with an ability to do complex vocalizations. With this kind of self-referentiality and his adaptation to gestural performance codes, he arguably had the edge over many of the playback stars of the 1990s like Kumar Sanu and Udit Narayan, who were unable to adapt to these changes.

According to Narayan:

"A playback singer shouldn't do too many shows. To entertain, you have to do little *dhamaal*, *masti*[xxvi] on stage. This causes some stress and strain on your voice. You waste a lot of energy on such antics which can cause untold damage in the long run."[xxvii]

Despite Narayan's criticism, Bollywood and its ancillary music industry were constantly looking for artists like Nigam who could consistently perform shows with high energy. Nigam's performances commonly featured his highly expressive and brisk dance moves, playful banter with his troupe, and comic impersonations of popular musicians[xxviii]. Along with such performances, the grandeur of Nigam's concerts also deserves a special mention. Beginning from humble shows in 1980s with a small orchestra and meager pay, by 2019 he was touring extensively in the national and international concert circuit,

accompanied by over 75 troupe members. Irrespective of their locations, his gig venues are gigantic, with his stages calibrated with giant video screens, exquisite lighting, and high decibel sound systems. It is in such a spectacular setting that he expanded his stardom performing yesteryear classics, his Bollywood and private album hits before live audiences.

The history of these spectacular enhancements can be traced to the concert boom in India starting from the 1990s to the late 2000s, where live performance scenarios underwent a major overhaul. According to Ranjani Mazumdar, this revival was reflected in Bollywood shows through their "lavishly mounted extravaganzas of stars, dance, fashion, music, brand advertising, and technological wizardry" (2012, 836). As Mazumdar mentions, networks of television partners, event management teams, global audiences, international promoters, and stars came to orchestrate such globe-trotting shows (836). And apart from the Bollywood centric shows, event management companies produced large scale musical concerts like Submerge, Sunburn, Mahindra Blues Festival, VH1 Supersonic and NH7 Weekender, while permanent live music venues like Hard Rock Cafes, Blue Frog, Firangi Paani in various parts of the country also became popular haunts for young listeners (Britto 2018). Simultaneously, the musician-run individual concerts like Nigam's with corporate backing emerged as popular mega events creating a foot print in diasporic circuits abroad.

Nigam says:

"… my concerts are my ways of connecting myself to the almighty and the audience… You see, I don't need an arbitrator between me and the audience. Whatever I do goes straight to the audience, if I am good, they would appreciate and if I am bad, they would reject me. So live shows are my passion and I would love to keep doing them for my entire lifetime."[xxix]

Here, Nigam emphasizes on the 'direct' connection he is able to forge between him and his audience by performing at concerts. What makes concerts even more significant for him is the immediate feedback and the lack of intervention and dictates of an 'arbitrator', possibly a music label, making the performance space a more private and personal space between him and his fans. But, besides the affective relationship with the audiences, the success of these shows meant a great deal of financial independence for musicians. Through live shows, musicians were supposedly earning far greater than their revenues from film gigs.[xxx]

By the mid-2000s, the purpose of the concerts was also to sustain musicians on the onset of music piracy. Because along with the enlargement of musicscape, a revival of piracy also occurs enhanced by the digital technology (Beastor-Jones 2015) and therefore file sharing, and unauthorized copying was surging via multimedia platforms, eating into the revenues of the music business (Booth 2015, 280).

According to the singer, Kailash Kher:

"I think it (concerts) is the best gift for musicians these days. We all know that piracy is cancer for our industry. People don't always buy music anymore."[xxxi]

Kher affirms the importance of live concerts for musicians to directly connect with their audiences, besides giving them

greater opportunity to earn more revenue (Adhitya 2013). However, from Nigam's career, it can be seen that Bollywood playback singers were the biggest beneficiaries of this concert boom as they were able to capitalize on the live concert economy, drawing on both their individual appeal and the performance of actors in star-studded spectacle-driven shows. Since Nigam had prolific success through his ticketed shows, event managers of Bollywood shows, were keen to tap into his live performance persona. Though these mediatized-live performances mostly banked on his Bollywood songs, they were remarkably capable of exposing his artistic abilities other than singing.

One of his musical skit performances[xxxii] in 1st Global Indian Music Awards (GiMA) 2010, is an example of how the live show utilized his versatility. In this performance, he is mainly mimicking the popular musicians (A R Rahman, Shankar Mahadevan, Pritam, Himesh Reshammiya, and Adnan Sami) conjuring their voices and mannerisms in himself. The basic plot of the skit revolves around a fictional music *guru*, Sangeeth Singh Hoshyapuri (played by Nigam), and his jibes on his popular pupils (the aforementioned artists). Followed by each humorous reference that Hoshyarpuri makes on his disciples, he transforms into the looks of the referred music artist with the help of costumes and makeup. Parodying their signature musical numbers, he sings, dances, and impersonates their identifiable physical gestures with great dexterity. Over several such mediatized live shows, Nigam was able to expand his persona as a multifaceted 'live' performer by singing, dancing, compering, and performing comic sketches. Making use of the circuits of live music and his professional versatility, Nigam created an active presence in 'globalized' mega-concert scene.

Musician as a Multimedia Superstar

Here I wish to discuss select instances and events across media outlets that reflect Nigam's superstardom and how they signify his presence on multimedia platforms.

Nigam's stardom spilled into cinematic roles as he started performing lead roles in films like *Jaan- E- Dushman: Ek Anokhi Kahani* (2002), *Kaash Aap Hamare Hote* (2003), and *Love in Nepal* (2004) as a romantic hero. But each of these attempts to be a film star turned out to be disastrous at the box office. Nigam attributed the failure of these films to his massive popularity as a musician[xxxiii]. His off-screen persona as a singer, television anchor, and music video star, as he notes, overpowered the narratives, creating a disconnect with the characters that he played in these films. Despite these set-backs, Nigam continued to diversify his career through the means of cinema. For instance, he made a special cameo in "*Hirava Nisarg Ha Bhavatine*," in the Marathi film *Navra Maaza Navsacha* (2004). The song shows him stranded on the middle of an unknown road as his car breaks-down and is offered a lift by a passing bus. As he enters the bus, the travelers get ecstatic seeing 'Sonu Nigam, the star'. In a casual chat, he informs the co-travelers that he has to be at a show for which he has been nominated for the Mohammed Rafi award. Hearing this, they shower praises on him and some even start politely complaining about his 'unaffordable'

concerts and use it as an excuse to make him sing for them. Meanwhile, he receives a cellphone call informing him that he has bagged the award. Elated, he begins to serenade his co-passengers. The song cleverly draws attention to Nigam's popularity across diverse media, signposting his popularity as a star performer in big-ticket live shows, while specifically alluding to his affective connection with Rafi.

Nigam's cycle of stardom from being a playback singer to a superstar can also be partially traced from Indian reality shows post-2000. Shows like *Indian Idol* and *Star Voice of India* had special episodes in his honor in which contestants performed a compilation of his hit songs. In general also, reality show contestants were singing his hits along with songs of the stalwarts like Lata and Rafi. And these hits included not just his Bollywood numbers but also his non-film albums. Some contestants like Emon Chatterjee and Rahul Vaidya (both from *Indian Idol*) were also famous for their imitations and fandom towards Nigam's singing style. Added to that he was also portrayed as a 'star' judge in music reality shows like *Voice of India, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Lil Champs, Indian Idol* and, *X factor India.* Even when his role was of a judge, the shows made him perform rather frequently, and especially *X factor India* (2011) had a repeated emphasis on star status. The show featured several of his grand solo performances, and among those, some of those were particularly memorable for depicting him make a rockstar-like entry on the stage on a sports bike, and sometimes, with contestants hailing from different parts of the country revealing to the camera that they auditioned to the show only to get a glimpse of him. Specially, these activities of fandom in reality shows imply that a new generation has emerged listening and 'watching' Nigam through various media platforms. In this new equation, Nigam can be seen as a venerated star idolized by his fans and emulated in a similar way that he had modeled himself on Rafi. The transforming journey from an anchor to a judge also indicates his ability to constantly reinvent himself through the shifting media ecology, while retaining his unique persona. Similarly, his international collaborations along with pop icons including Britney Spears in *I Wanna Go* (Desi Remix), Jermaine Jackson in *This Is It* and Avicii in *Indian Levels,* or with City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) for the concert *Rafi Resurrected,* also demonstrated his success as global star.

So far, the analysis has emphasized the construction of Nigam's star image across 'multimedia' platforms (soundtracks, films, reality shows, music videos, etc.). If these instances prove Nigam's formidable stardom, its multimediality could be further explained with the discussion of YouTube. It is largely through the internet, especially YouTube that I was able to gauge Sonu Nigam's multimedial stardom, piecing together his ever-expanding archive of songs, video performances, interviews and Vlogs. Here I use the term 'multimedia' loosely to refer to multiple media systems in which music is mediated and consumed, and I consider YouTube as a multimedia archive where much of Nigam's oeuvre has to come to repurpose. According to Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, YouTube is a site of participatory culture that engages in the

business of sharing online videos generated by its users to be consumed and sometimes altered by new audiences and participants (2009,4). It also facilitates media producers to grab attention to their content and to gain revenues from advertising (4). That way, YouTube is also what Henry Jenkins would consider an enabler of convergence culture, "where consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content" (2006, 3). As a convergence medium, YouTube has been able to chronicle the multimedial expanse of Nigam's star career with music fans, music labels, and the musician himself uploading content that is related to the latter. While watching the snippets of his concert videos on YouTube, I could see that Nigam has come a full circle from 'constructed' popularity in *Tu* and to 'robust' stardom in the contemporary. A video titled "GRAND ENTRY OF SONU NIGAM LIVE AT ROTTERDAM……"[xxxiv] showed me the pre-concert footage of a jubilant crowd, and particularly female fans adoring and reaching out to touch Nigam as he is entering the concert venue with his entourage. Another event was the opening ceremony of ICC cricket world cup 2011, where many artists, including Canadian Rockstar Bryan Adams, performed. Set in the gigantic Bangabandhu National Stadium of Dhaka, the performance began with Nigam, sporting long hair and clad in a glossy blazer and harem pants emerging on a platform from beneath the annular stage. The video, picturized from high angles and wide shots, showed the stadium reverberating with its voice while innumerable floodlights and flame projectors across the circumference of the stadium were lighting up. From spectacular media events like this and their presence on the internet accompanied with much fanfare, the intensity of Nigam's stardom can be gauged. The countless regurgitation of many of his such videos, performances, songs on the internet also illustrate the expanded capacities and spaces for performance that could facilitate the musician in creating, transforming, and maintaining his star image. Finally, it can be inferred that these media outlets allowed a musician like Nigam to express his creativity and his spectacular persona.

Musician Vs. Music Empires

The discussion until now implied that through various media avenues, Nigam acquired a robust public image as opposed to Indian playback musicians and music composers of the pre-liberalization era. In my understanding, he has leveraged his star image to raise questions regarding the crises he has faced in the music industry. He was mediatized not solely for his musical performances but also his bold utterances about the Hindi music industry that often made him a controversial figure. Despite being emblematic of the exponential growth of the music industry and rise of musical stardom as an intersecting phenomenon, Nigam constantly drew attention to the increasing vulnerability of the musical star and the precarity of labor in the music industry. Labor in globalized media industries is already deemed 'precarious' because of certain industrial tendencies, including conglomeration, corporatization, hyper-technologization, subversions of unionization, and casualization of employment (Micheal Curtin and Kevin

Sanson 2016, Susan Christopherson 2008). According to Susan Christopherson, such industries are dictated by global trends demanding higher adaptability and flexibility from the laborer (2008). But for John Williamson and Martin Cloonan, irrespective of globalization, labor in music industries across the world were inherently precarious as they are gig[xxxv] economies (2017). What Nigam's interventions present is a blow-up of this precarity in the Indian gig economy of music resulting from globalization and subsequent digitalization.

As the article has previously highlighted, Nigam had a protean capacity to adapt to the unstable trends of the 'globalized' Hindi music industry, and by tapping into various music avenues, he was ascending to superstardom; yet there were acute challenges in his career path. While analyzing his star career, it is inevitable to scrutinize his professional association with T-Series as this relationship would elaborate how the industry also drives the musician into adversities.

T-Series' chairman, Gulshan Kumar, had played the role of mentor to Nigam in the formative years of the latter's stardom. According to Nigam:

"...He (Kumar) went out of his way to promote me. He made video cassettes of my songs and advertised them very well in the market. So today people can recognize my voice as well as my face…"[xxxvi]

This validation of Gulshan Kumar however contradicted the popular opinion of another set of musicians who accused him of exercising excessive control over the inhouse artists of T-Series, including Anuradha Paudwal and Nadeem-Shravan. According to the composer duo, Jatin-Lalit:

"No self-respecting musician will take his (Kumar's) nonsense. He thinks a music director is like an employee who can be pushed to the ground. Isn't it a pity that Anuradha Paudwal has stopped recording outside? She is such a good singer."[xxxvii]

Nadeem-Shravan also cited Kumar's high-handedness after their fallout with the latter:

"He tends to treat those who work with him as his personal property. Initially, things were okay, but gradually we started feeling suffocated. He'd interfere too much in our work. His short-sighted approach was responsible for the music of *Dil Hai*… (*Dil Hai Ke Maanta Nahi*,1991) not becoming as big a success as *Aashiqui*'s…When he fell foul with Kumar Sanu over some insignificant issue, he became vindictive and got the cassettes of *Dil Hai* withdrawn from the market and had Sanu's voice dubbed by singers like Babla Mehta, who are not in the same class. The new cassette was a disaster. So, he panicked and had the original version released again."[xxxviii]

But opposed to aforementioned musicians, Nigam continued to express his admiration for Gulshan Kumar till the late 90s:

"...I will never leave Gulshanji ….. He has never imposed any restrictions on me"[xxxix] By the early 2000s however, we can notice a shift in Nigam's stance as he opened up on how his association with T-Series restricted his talent. In an interview, Nigam had shared that he had an informal agreement with Kumar, where he was to work exclusively for T-Series, and unless for playback-singing for films, he was not to collaborate with other

music labels[xl]. He also acknowledged in the interview that this arrangement prevented him to crossover to private albums and music videos. And to read between the lines, it was only after the death of Kumar in 1997 that Nigam was out of the stronghold of T-Series. His relationship with the company was rekindled when Kumar's son, Bhushan Kumar inherited it. Between late 1990s and mid-2000s, together Bhushan Kumar and Nigam made several hit private albums like *Deewana, Jaan, Yaad*, without the latter being legally tied to T-Series. But gradually, a serious rift was to emerge between the two as the industrial geography was rapidly evolving.

This period (2000-2020) needs to be read in the wider context of the shifting landscape of labor in the industry after the introduction of digital practices in music recording. Globally, after digitalization of music, music production was relatively more democratized (Taylor 2016, 121) as software recording facilities such as Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) namely Logic, Reason and Garageband became cheaply available to both amateur and professional musicians (Prior 2009). Such software tools made fundamental changes to music production, making music "instantaneously malleable" and capable of producing endless versions of itself (2009). They enabled the users to use pre-recorded sounds, to rework the song's elemental characteristics including tempo and pitch at any time and facilitated its music's seamless integration to multiple sources (Morris 2005). By and large, digital technology handed over to its users an unprecedented control to manipulate music.

Taking cues from the global scene, in India too, digitization led to the formulation of personal studios adhering to international standards where smartphones/computers/synthesizers/samplers invaded the music sphere (Booth 2019). Music-making became more individual-centric[xli] as composers were empowered to be arrangers, programmers, and producers all at once (Booth 2019, Sarrazin 2013). Computer-based digital recording facilities also allowed musicians to experiment freely (Booth 2008, 7) and provided ample scope to promote their individual creativity (Sarrazin 2013, 40). If music composers enjoyed some prominence in this individual-centric work culture, that creative prominence was to some extent debilitated by music companies as the latter were acquiring more power and dominance in the industry, exploiting the enlarging music market. These companies started devising systems like music banks[xlii], multi-composer albums[xliii], and remix culture to keep a strong hold on its partnering composers. For instance, the multi-composer albums were a formulation of music labels to produce an album cheaply and conveniently in a shorter duration relaying on multiple composers at a time (Ghosh 2020). This method prevented solo composers to connect to the narrative arc of the entire film and contribute to its soundtrack, in tune with its overarching theme (Ghosh 2020). Since the labels thus restricted the creative control of composers, it reduced the latter a sense of ownership in the album (ibid); Apart from these mechanisms, fewer songs were being produced in films. Gradually losing its prominence in narratives, film music ceased to be the dominant source of income for the musicians of the industry

(Booth 2019). As a result, music composers like Salim-Sulaiman started diversifying their labor by performing not just in films but also in live shows, weddings, commercials, and music shows like MTV Unplugged (Booth 2019). In this shifting media ecology and music labor, Nigam's career was adversely affected by everything starting from the trends set by digitization the coercive practices of music companies to the music composers' diversification of their labor. A major indication of this was in the mid-2000s, when his playback career suffered a significant dip despite his robust multimedia stardom. When he was inquired about this hiatus, he pointed his fingers straight at the music composers and their 'concert driven' creative choices:

"It is sheerly the music director's call, even if a song is meant for me, some people would think, "why should we take Sonu Nigam. If we take him, probably the song will become his, he will get the credit for it." Therefore, if the same song is given to a lesser-known singer, they can outshine the singer's aura. Now all these music composers are performers, they also do concerts….so why would they want to feed a monster more. They already consider me a monster in concerts, they feel that I get the best shows and I charge more money. Why would they feed me more and create the competition even tougher?"[xliv]

He has also opened up in another interview on the existence of camp-ism and lobbying within the music industry:

"Today each composer has their frequent collaborators among singers and have their own concert business, similarly since music companies have become artist management companies, they solely promote their own artists. I am part of neither camp and I would like to say that today not solely talent but connections with the right people at the right time is what matters in the industry. [xlv]

Towards 2014, Nigam was not just facing a shrinkage in the playback offers, but the handful of songs that he recorded were getting dubbed[xlvi] by other singers. The issue became a much-discussed controversy when Nigam revealed in his media interactions that his song "*Hangover*" (*Kick 2014*) has been re-dubbed by the actor Salman Khan. Further, his voice was removed from the soundtracks of *Heartless* (2014), and *Main Tera Hero* (2014). Incidentally, T-Series held the music rights of these albums and according to Nigam, the label was penalizing him for his fight for royalty[xlvii]. As he explains:

"For the longest time, we had to sign exploitative contracts where we have to indemnify them (music companies), they can even sue us. For singing a song why sign such atrocious contracts. …If proper royalty was in place, many of my iconic songs would have fetched so much money. But this issue is not about money, it is about respect. If they don't respect me then how are they going to respect newcomers like Arijit who haven't seen as much success as of now…. Singers perform these songs each time to get money, whereas music companies just by sitting at home make 10 times more than we make. When I perform, it is not just one song but 40 more songs that I have to perform and for that I am working hard, sweating like crazy, I spend 9 hours of a day in travel and workouts and then I get the money…This whole thing has come up because of jealousy, of the thought that

singers have to be poorer than the music company. Why is it necessary? In other countries singers have their own aircraft, do the companies there question Michael Jackson for owning Neverland?"[xlviii]

The sour relationship between Nigam and T-Series, grew into a much bigger strife by 2020. Nigam used social media platforms like Instagram to release his Vlogs,[xlix] accusing the music company for operating like a "mafia," resorting to nepotism and highhandedness that could potentially lead to the suicides of upcoming musicians[l]. One of his main concerns was regarding the dubbing of songs itself; he said it has become an 'unhealthy' norm in the industry where singers were repeatedly coming to know that their recordings were either removed or were not used for the film. Similarly, Adnan Sami also expressed his dismay at the way new and older singers and composers were being treated by the music industry, referring to them as 'music mafia'[li].

Neha Bhasin also had opined: "Of course the music mafia exists and it is the record labels. Who are we kidding…. My song from *Tumhari Sulu* was removed because T-Series and I had a misunderstanding and I was told by them to get lost …"[lii]

However, from the redubbing of songs by playback singers like Nigam and Bhasin, it becomes clear that music labels like T-Series were using the creative affordances of digitization not just to penalize music composers. The larger implications of such erasure of voices by music labels and the resultant anxieties of musicians needs to be comprehended as outcomes of digital production of music, which was providing music labels the power to selectively erase and insert voices in their copyrighted soundtracks. Using the digital provision of endless manipulation of music, music labels were able to discredit, and intimidate and largely enhance the vulnerability of playback singers. The industrial conflicts that Nigam had to confront, underlines that even the mightiest star-musicians were subjected to precarious work conditions. And music labels who evidently remain in the top rung of the hierarchy in the music industry contributed to this plight of musicians by deploying everything from digital technology, contracts, and copyrights.

The conflicts between Nigam and T-Series continue to date, and in 2020, the singer started his own label 'I Believe Music' to exercise more creative autonomy in the music industry. On the whole, Nigam's actions and disclosures imply that musicians like himself were rising above their conventional statuses in the Hindi music industry. According to him, musicians were achieving superstardom at such an unprecedented scale that even music companies perceived them as potential threats to the latter's control in the market. It is to be understood that the exponential growth of the Indian music market post-liberalization and digitalization had led to such star formations and resultant disruptions in the industry.

Conclusion

According to Jacques Attali, the definitive birth of the star musician took place when music became a commodity, and it is the evolution of stardom that "...really developed the economy of representation and necessitated a guarantee of remuneration, an

exchange-value, for popular production" of music (1985,72). And music became a commodity when musicians began to claim their ownership of labor, by performing outside private recitals of court and festivals, into cafés and concert hall performances where clients began to pay for their music (47). To use this analogy on Nigam's cycle of stardom - he had transitioned into a superstar musician only because he was able to disperse his talent via a multitude of platforms. Until he found professional independence from T-Series, he was predominantly a copy singer or playback singer, and the dissemination of his works was largely limited to the medium of soundtracks. But his stardom, as I have demonstrated in this article, was amplified when he established his own concert networks, and diversified his labor through reality show appearances, social media activities, films, and music videos. Along with his vocal identity, his visual persona also was made significant by his multimedia interactions, where he was able to visualize his affective labor. It is notable how Internet platforms such as YouTube retained his relevance as an entertainer by mediating and remediating his performances for repeated consumption of audiences. Since the spread of his mediatic presence was extensive, even when his playback career plummeted, he was able to sustain his superstardom and was able to raise questions against the malpractices of music labels and draw attention to the precarity of musical labor. This unparalleled outreach to the audiences through a variety of media avenues illustrates how Nigam benefited from globalization-led- influx of musical outlets in India. His career also exemplifies how playback musicians, enhanced by the expansion of the music industry, were emerging as multimedia forces that even music moguls had to reckon with.

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[i] According to Mary Ann Doane, it is a body unified by sound and image (1980, 34-35).

[ii] Vividh Bharati is a commercial service devised in 1957 by All India Radio to compete with Radio Ceylon for broadcasting Hindi film music.

[iii] GCI (Gramophone Company of India) was formed in 1946.

[iv] HMV (His Master's Voice), was one of the earliest recording labels in the country, which disbanded around the early 2000s.

[v] Peter Manuel uses this term to refer to the ubiquity of cassettes in the markets that altered the consumption of music in 1980s India.
[vi] pin-ups, studio handouts, interviews, biographies, and press coverage.
[vii] From the 1980s, T- Series was in the path of invading the music business scene, using a new host of talent (Sundaram 2009, 85) This new host of talent was mostly version singers who covered the songs originally sung by well established artists (Jhingan 2013). Many of the then-upcoming talents like Anuradha Paudwal, Kavita Krishnamurthy, Bela Sulakhe, Sadhana Sargam and Vandana Vajpayee vocally emulated the aural star, Lata Mangeshkar to find a foothold in the music industry. According to Jhingan, this imitation culture emerges as a dual-edged sword, that erratically rewarded these version singers/ dubbing artists with stardom among the audience, also trapping the former in the image of counterfeit artists. For this reason, some of these vocalists had to slog for years in the industry to make their own identity.
[viii] Nigam considers himself a devotee of Rafi.
[ix] Sherwani is long coat garment and is considered an ethnic wear in India.
[x] I am using this word to distinguish people who display themselves as bearers of India's culture, this projected Indian culture was also problematically Hindu culture and not representative of India's wide cultural diversity.
[xi] For the four characters portrayed by actors including Puneet Issar, Suniel Shetty, Akshay Khanna and Kulbushan Kharbanda
[xii] "FTF Sonu Nigam 17 11 2001," Jan 4, 2012. YouTube video. Posted by itvindia. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmNDJ9tDnWE.

[xiii] "Sonu Nigam - Cover Story Interview (2006)," Nov 25, 2011.YouTube video. Posted by Nahida C. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OITn2CuWi10.
[xiv] "Sonu Nigam - Cover Story Interview (2006)," Nov 25, 2011.YouTube video. Posted by Nahida C. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OITn2CuWi10.
[xv] "Seedhi Baat Sonu Nigam with Prabhu Chawla," YouTube video, posted by Prabhu Chawla. Jun 8, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bp0evGwJr3s.
[xvi] "Master Sonu Nigam Talking about Lucky Ali and Singing O Sanam," YouTube video posted by Lucky Ali Live https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwq_44kpT8Y.
[xvii] According to Hardt and Negri, affective labor means the manipulation and creation of affect (2000, 292).
[xviii] IANS.2018. "Anil Kapoor convinced Sonu Nigam to revisit Rafi's 'Badan pe sitare'," Accessed November 22, 2020.https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/anil-kapoor-convinced-sonu-nigam-to-revisit-rafi-s-badan-pe-sitare-118073101344_1.html.
[xix] Moonwalk is a dance move popularized by Michael Jackson.
[xx] canyons, Parthenon and other Greek ruins, a lighthouse, and a scenic dock.
[xxi] In Bollywood films, the family becomes the cohesive force between exchanges of the national and global, and a "marker of cultural stability and ritual space where the idea of "Indianness" is constantly played out" (Mazumdar, 118).
[xxii] which Nigam wrote along with Ajay Jhingran & Pandit Kiran Mishra.
[xxiii] According to Hindu religion, it is an auspicious thread that is tied to sisters by their brother as a symbolic gesture of offering protection and love.
[xxiv] whether it is as a traditional man or computer-generated imagery, dance visualizations like those of Michael Jackson, or fusion of Indian and global musical styles
[xxv] Simon Frith has suggested the term double enactment, where the singer enacts the personality of the song and also his star personality while performing (1998, 212).
[xxvi] *Dhamaal* and *Masti* are Hindi words used to indicate the acts done in merriment.
[xxvii] Bhardwaj, Praveena.."Udit Narayan: I am No Copycat," *Filmfare*. May 1994.
[xxviii] Patel, Prashant. "Sonu Nigam live in Auckland - Funny Vegetable Song," YouTube video, May 4, 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQi4ZnYbHJE, what2say. "Sonu Nigam Moonwalk," YouTube video, Aug 16, 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hS2zAQ2or7s.
[xxix] "Sonu Nigam," *The Score Magazine*, November 14, 2016.p14
[xxx] composer A. R. Rahman has once spoken about this: "The biggest offer I get is for 'live' shows. The amount of money that I get for one concert is much more than what I would earn slogging on 10 films."
[xxxi] Adhitya, Sai.2013 "Kailash Kher," *The Score Magazine*, November 1, 2013.p10
[xxxii] "Sonu Nigam Mimicry at Global Indian Music Awards GiMA 2010," YouTube video, posted by Arkanand Kundu, September 8, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Bjd_2aMbFA&lc=Ugj1MKzeHJbzzngCoAEC.
[xxxiii] "Seedhi Baat Sonu Nigam with Prabhu Chawla," YouTube video, posted by Prabhu Chawla. Jun 8, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bp0evGwJr3s.
[xxxiv] "GRAND ENTRY OF SONU NIGAM LIVE AT ROTTERDAM, NETHERLAND..... 28.07.18," YouTube video, posted by Tanmay Mishra. July 30,2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7HxnzlOZdw.
[xxxv] Gig", according to Geoff Nunberg, is more than a century old terminology used among musicians to describe their musical engagements (2016). John Williamson and Martin Cloonan, notes that this phrase gained prominence within UK's Musicians' Union by the 1940s was subsequently adopted by fields beyond music, to broach upon precarity and exploitative labor

conditions (2017, 493). In Williamson and Cloonan's inference, the gig economy largely figures as a freelance economy based on the temporary and unstable nature of labor, that has its share of risks and shortcomings (493).

[xxxvi]Mishra, Kavita.1995. "Sonu Nigam: Voice and Virtue," Filmfare. March 1, 1995.p.104

[xxxvii] Vijayakar, R.M.1992. "From Mandhir-Jatin to Jatin- Lalit," *Filmfare*, September 1,1992. p.71

[xxxviii] Ahmed, Rauf.1992. "Nadeem-Shravan:The Designer Duo," *Filmfare*, October 1,1992.p.61,62

[xxxix] Mishra, Kavita.1995. "Sonu Nigam: Voice and Virtue," *Filmfare*. March 1, 1995.p.104

[xl]"FTF Sonu Nigam 17 11 2001," YouTube video, posted by itvindia, January 4, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmNDJ9tDnWE.

[xli] large scale orchestras were replaced and and since the internet has facilitated long-distance collaboration work culture became more sedentary and asocial as opposed to pre-digitization.

[xlii] A music label owned repository of songs done by various composers, which allows the director to choose from several compositions.

[xliii] Albums like *Aashiqui 2* (2013) and *Kabir Singh* (2019) are examples of multi-composer albums which allowed their makers to rope in different composers to make different songs for one single album.

[xliv] "They Consider Me Monster In Concerts - Sonu Nigam," YouTube video, posted by Bollywood Hungama.com. Dec 10,2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coMzYm14.

[xlv]" Swag Sessions Episode 8 | Sonu Nigam | Indian Idol | MissMalini," YouTube video posted by Missmalini.Jan 11, 2017.https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WPqmIsFE6U.

[xlvii] It was a united plea from the side of several artists from fraternities like Indian Singers' Rights Association (ISRA) and Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS), Nigam out of his stardom and vocalness on the issue was the face of the movement.

[xlviii] "Sonu Nigam Exclusive On The Royalty Issue," YouTube video, Posted by Bollywood Hungama. March 20, 2014.

[xlix] Video Blogs

[l] "Sonu Nigam Calls Out 'Music Mafia' in Bollywood, Warns About 'Suicides in Music Industry'," News18, June 19, 2020.https://www.news18.com/news/movies/sonu-nigam-calls-out-music-mafia-in-bollywood-warns-about-suicides-in-music-industry-2676533.html.

[li] "Adnan Sami slams Bollywood, music mafia for 'trying to play God': 'Old and new singers, composers being exploited'," Hindustan Times, June 23, 2020 https://www.hindustantimes.com/music/adnan-sami-slams-bollywood-music-mafia-for-trying-to-play-god-old-and-new-singers-composers-being-exploited/story-KxvOpRhCOhZK90IjL2fdFJ.html.

[lii] Sridhar, Shubhanka.'Of Course The Movie Mafia Exists, It's The Record Labels'- Singer Neha Bhasin. https://www.missmalini.com/2020/06/23/of-course-the-movie-mafia-exists-its-the-record-labels-singer-neha-bhasin/.

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