



# Religious music and its role in preserving and promoting Iranian national music

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## Introduction

When Arabs captured Iran, established their caliphate in it, started implementing Islamic sharia laws, thus banning music, Iranian advanced music began to be less and less practiced. Yet, this Iranian art went through such a vast development and vogue during the Sassanid era, especially in the reign of Ḥosrow II (590-627), and it was so integrated with Iranian life that it did not simply disappear in the short period (between the end of the Sassanid empire and the rule of Arabs over Iran). Despite all the depression and hardships that they went through, the many singers and minstrels who were scattered all over Iran in the late Sassanid period, did not stop playing music or forget it. Rather than losing their artistic talents, they continued their work and revealed their inner desires and artistic and intellectual productions in every possible way. This was especially the case in distant and hard-to-reach areas such as mountainous regions and parts away from the caliphate center which had not been easily captured by the Arabs. Against all the odds, Iranians protected the foundations of the music of the Sassanid period, orally recording and passing it from generation to generation. The Iranian musicians who loved their country tried hard to keep the Sassanid civilization, their national customs, ceremonies and local arts alive and never stopped practicing their national art of music.

With all the damage and depression afflicted on them due to the dominance of Arabs over their country, and despite their lack of enthusiasm, sense of freedom and merry spirit needed for holding cheerful ceremonies and playing music in their leisure time, the Iranian musicians never completely neglected and abandoned their musical practice. Although they didn't like to listen to merry and cheerful music anymore, they didn't dislike engaging in doleful melodies because playing musical instruments and singing songs were not restricted to happy occasions

only, and there were as many sad but consoling melodies as there had been cheerful ones. As a poet writes, "Minstrels were dirge singers in this ceremony/ For this the *setār* began a doleful melody."<sup>\*</sup> During this period, Iranians consoled themselves and reduced their suffering with these sad and mournful songs and melodies in the same way that people achieve peace and tranquility by crying and mourning on sorrowful occasions.

Just as Iranian local and national language, customs and manners were retained, Iranian music survived in spite of the Arab reign because there were still local governments which had not been dominated by the Arabs. The inhabitants of these regions kept struggling against the Arabs to keep their own national rites and customs alive. This situation continued well into the Abbasid caliphate up until the time when Baghdad became the caliphate capital, the Muslim Arabs gradually lost their earlier power and Iranians began to influence the caliphate so much so that the caliphate turned into an image of the Sassanid imperial palace. At this time, the caliphs' palace replaced the Sassanid one where some Iranian patriots acquired powerful positions and paved the way for the emergence of some Iranian civilizational and artistic characteristics at the caliph's palace in Baghdad. Therefore, Iranians did not stop either writing poetry, which was closely interwoven with music, or playing their music. Rather, poetry and music, which were completely interconnected, went on, even though less than before, until Iranians managed to establish their own independent and semi-independent governments.

The Buyid sultans were among the independent rulers of the 10<sup>th</sup> century who captured large parts of Iran and Iraq. Ahmad Mo'ez zod-Dowle, who was son of Abu Šoġā Buye and ruled from 946 to 968, captured Baghdad in 946 and later replaced the ruling Abbasid caliph Al-Mustakfi with Al-Muti'u Lillāh, who ruled from 974 to 982. Azed zod-Dowle (Fanā Ḥosrow, who ruled in the years 974-992) also controlled Baghdad, manifested Iranians' power and revealed the Abbasid caliphate's weakness. The house of Buyids ruled over Baghdad up to 1014. The house of Buyids were Shia Muslims and made this branch of Islam the official religion of Iran. After capturing Baghdad, they appointed new Abbasid caliphs who were caliphs in name only. The Abbasids apparently continued to reign for another 300 years, but in truth the caliphate was under the control of Iranians.

During the reign of the Buyids, Shiites mourned the death of Imam Hossain<sup>\*1</sup> in the public, to explicitly defy the caliphate, during the first ten days of Muharram. Mo'ez zod-Dowle was the first sultan to order Baghdadi people to wear black clothes, cover the walls of the bazaars in black and run mourning ceremonies in memory of Imam Hossain during the first ten days of the month of Muharram. He also decreed that people should close their shops and refrain from cooking on the tenth day of Muharram, Āšurā,<sup>\*2</sup> and treat it as a holiday. This custom was

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\* [This is a poem often quoted in older texts. Unfortunately, the poet is not mentioned. In general, sources are often not specified in this essay and there is no bibliography. B. N.]

<sup>\*1</sup> [Shiites' third Imam and successor to Prophet Mohammad. A. M.]

<sup>\*2</sup> [Muharram 10 of the year 61 in Islamic calendar (October 10, 680 AD) when Imam Hossain and his companions were killed in the Battle of Karbala in Iraq. A. M.]

practiced all over the Islamic territory until the early years of the Seljuk dynasty, that is, the end of the Deylamite reign.

The devastating invasion of Iran by the barbaric Mongols and its terrible blow to our country had universal effects on all aspects of Iranians' life. The attack stopped the natural course, and deviated the direction, of Iranian civilization, culture and arts, including music, which were flourishing at the time. The cheerful melodies were replaced by sad tunes and the happy songs gave place to sighing, moaning and complaining. Similarly, the happy themes of youths' love, enthusiasm and worldly pleasure were displaced by the themes of unreliability and uselessness of the world, which were increasingly drawn on by the poets of this age. Sa'di, affected by the instability of the Mongol reign, writes: "The world is not worth envy; losing it not worth suffering/This house will surely get ruined; happy those who think of another dwelling." Likewise, the poet Hafez, who witnessed Tamburlaine's destructive invasion of Iran and all the following massacre, devastation and corruption, composed many poems about such issues. Therefore, music, which was closely intertwined with poetry, was affected by the atmosphere and situation of the time, thoroughly reflecting the day's thoughts and conditions since artists are generally interested in the beliefs, customs, understandings and other characteristics of their contemporary people as well as the conditions of their times.

The massacre, rampage and corruption that followed the barbaric Mongols' capture of Iran killed the spirit of joy and hope in the people and sowed the seed of despair and sadness in them. The poor people of Iran lost all interest in worldly life and completely ignored it in order to reduce their pain and suffering. Instead, they focused their attention on the other world and reduced their suffering by resorting to religion.

Gradual change and development in art is normal, but, as our poetry and music best reveal, the dominance of the Mongols made for quick developments in, and deep effects on, the country's conditions and the people's attitudes and mentality.

In this context, when religion was making much progress, Shiism flourished and gained momentum, especially in Iran, in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. During mourning days, Shiites held mournful ceremonies. In this period, writing elegiac poetry on the deaths of Shia Imams and the martyrs of Karbalā, composing dirge lyrics and singing them during the mourning ceremonies were all too common.<sup>1</sup> An example of elegiac lyrics and dirges can be found in the poetry of Sayf Farḡāni, who composed poems in the 13<sup>th</sup> century on the martyrs of Karbalā. The following is from one of his dirge lyrics:

O people! Weep in this mourning!  
Weep for the one killed in Karbalā!  
How long can you laugh with your dead heart?  
Weep in this mourning ceremony today!

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<sup>1</sup> Singing dirges and beating breasts were common among Arabs and were introduced in Iran after the Arab conquest.

They killed the son of Prophet.  
 Weep everyone, for God's sake!  
 Make tears with your blood now!  
 Weep for the pearl Ali lost!  
 Ye who are broken-hearted for Hossain's death,  
 O broken-hearted people, weep for him!  
 While crying, you may not speak appropriate words,  
 So, I will sing while you all weep for him.  
 Laugh at this transient world!  
 Weep! For the world is full of pain.  
 Mourn in weeping with every word!  
 Weep in music with every song!

Whenever Shiites held sway, the common religious ceremonies such as dirge singing (*nohe ḥāni*) and breast-beating (*sine zani*) became widespread. For example, during the reign of the Safavids, when Shiism became official in Iran and was spread all over the country, singing dirges, breast-beating, *rowze* recitation (*rowze ḥāni*) and mourn-marching in groups (*daste gardāni*) during the months of Muharram and Safar and the mourning days of the month of Ramadan were quite common. The Safavid kings, especially Shah Abbās I, showed special interest in such ceremonies and personally took part in them by joining one of the marching groups.

Shah Abbās, like the other Shia kings of Iran, deemed it necessary to openly reveal his allegiance to Shia values in order to help fulfill his political purpose of eradicating the caliphate ways. Later, these ceremonies, which had turned into Iranians' habits, became essential on mourning days.

The lyrics of the dirges were written to be sung along with the ritual of breast-beating. A vocalist would sing, and the others would beat their breasts to go with his voice and with the tune and rhythm of the dirge. Elegiac poems, however, were sung in mourning sessions to make the audience cry and express its sorrow over the death of the martyrs of Karbalā. This practice was different from *rowze* recitation.

The emergence of the class of *rowze* reciters and running *rowze* sessions as practiced today originate in the Safavid era while religious drama (*šabih ḥāni*) or *ta'zie* has its origin in the post-Safavid period and will be explained later.

As religious music, including *rowze*, which predates *ta'ziye*, has played an effective role in preserving and developing old national melodies of Iran to date, it would be appropriate to present here a short history of its development during the Safavid and, especially, Qāğār eras. I will talk here about the effect *rowze* had during these periods on preserving the melodies and songs of Iranian old and national music; of the Shia interest in this religious custom, encouraging good-voiced singers to join the class of *rowze* reciters and spreading the art and lessons of singing; about the way *rowze* has become a means for lovers of Iranian art of preserving this noble art; and about the excellent musicians and renowned singers who emerged initially as *rowze* reciters.

## Rowze

Mulla Hossain Kāšefi (d. 1504) was a good-voiced and talented 15<sup>th</sup> century preacher and scholar of Sabzevār, who, during the reign of Sultan Hossain Bāyeqrā (1469-1505) migrated to Herāt<sup>\*3</sup>, which was the Sultan's seat of government at the time. As a knowledgeable preacher enjoying an excellent memory, a strong talent and an attractive voice, Kāshefi quickly gained fame and attracted so many people to his preaching and *rowze* sessions, including the sultan, the princes and other high state authorities such as the king's learned and art-loving minister, Amir Ališir Navā'ee. Kāshefi was an eloquent and proliferate scholar and poet who produced more than forty books and treatises, including *Rowza taš-Šuhadā'*.

Kāshefi composed *Rowza taš-Šuhadā'* on the events of Karbalā in Persian, and since the preachers read out the book loud in mourning ceremonies to the audience, those who read it on such occasions came to be known as *rowze* reciters (*rowze ḥān*). Although gradually the practice stopped and preachers, having committed the book contents to their memory, would simply recite the passages from memory. During the Safavid period, when running *rowze* sessions was quite common, people who enjoyed a good voice took *rowze* reciting as their vocation.<sup>2</sup>

In the Safavid era, holding mourning ceremonies was widespread and Shah Abbās, who reckoned himself to be a descendent of Imam Ali (Peace Be upon Him), openly carried praising and honoring Ali and his household to extremes. Shah Abbās would hold mourning sessions on the anniversaries of Ali's or his household's death or martyrdom. Every year, the king, along with the nobility and governmental dignitaries, would run *rowze* gatherings on Ramadan 19-27 to mourn the martyrdom of Imam Ali<sup>\*4</sup>, as they also did on the first ten nights of Muharram.<sup>\*5</sup> On the eve of Āšurā as well as on Ramadan 21, breast-beating and stone-beating groups, as well as other groups of mourners, marched and held the same ceremonies as are now common in most Iranian cities.

A European tourist who had witnessed the mourning ceremonies of Ramadan 21, 1617, writes:

On the anniversary of the death of Ali, Shiites' greatest holy man, Iranians hold ceremonies which are worth describing. On this day, two groups of mourners start marching from two points in the city and are joined by the state authorities who choose their own favorite groups. Even Shah Abbās, if present in the city, joins the group he likes. Before the groups go some horses, all decorated, as is customary in Iran, with precious jewelry and other decorating stuff.

<sup>\*3</sup> [Then part of Iran, now in Afghanistan. A. M.]

<sup>2</sup> As Nāserābādi notes about the poet Kāzemāy in his book, Kāzemāy was a teacher who recited *rowza* on Āšurā days.

<sup>\*4</sup> [Imam Ali, considered by Shiites as the first lawful successor of prophet Mohammad, received a sword blow at dawn of Ramadan 19 while saying the morning prayer at mosque and died of the injuries on 21. A. M.]

<sup>\*5</sup> [Muharram is the first month of Islamic calendar. A. M.]

They put things such as bows and arrows, swords, and shields on the saddles, while on the cantle, they put a turban representing that of Ali. The horses are followed by people arduously carrying various flags as well as big tall *alams*<sup>\*6</sup> decorated with varied ribbons. The top of these *alams* are so high that they bend down under their own weight. Following these are some people who take one or a few coffins symbolic of Ali's. The coffins are covered with black velvet and are topped with expensive guns, colorful feathers and other things. After these coffins come a few people who sing dirges and some people who produce extremely loud noise with drums, cymbals and flutes. The singers frequently move their bodies up and down and make very unusual cries. Dignitaries ride horses to accompany the mourning groups, and innumerable people walk along.

The groups normally go round Isfahān's square and briefly stop in front of the king's Āli Qāpu palace and the great mosque across the palace and disperse when the mourning and praying ceremony is over.

The minister of Isfahān and the king's treasurer stand on both sides of the square in front of the spectators to help make way for the mourning groups and make sure that the groups do not start a fight and innocent people are not killed or injured, as it has frequently happened before. Shah Abbās, however, intervenes for fun and, after making two groups start a fight, quickly leaves the middle of the square, stands near a house window and watches the terrible results.<sup>3</sup>

The same tourist describes in detail the ceremonies held on Āšurā of 1618, which could be summarized as follows:

On the day of Āšurā, the anniversary of the death of Imam Hossain, son of Ali and Fatima (Prophet Mohammad's daughter), Iranians hold special ceremonies. On the first ten days of the month of Muharram, people look sad and sorrowful and behave and dress in a way as if they suffer from an inconsolable bereavement. Even most of the people who do not ever wear black clothes dress in black on these ten days to signal their mournful hearts. Nobody shaves or takes a bath in this period.<sup>4</sup> In addition to avoiding sins and illegal actions, people also abstain from normally acceptable merry-making, sex and enjoyments. A number of people walk nakedly in the city square, covering their parts only with black clothes or large black bags.<sup>5</sup> These people blacken their whole bodies, symbolizing their mournfulness for the death of Hossain.

There is also another group of naked people with red bodies representing the blood of Hossain and his followers who were killed on Āšurā.

They sing dirges in the bazaars and neighborhoods, sadly narrating the terrible way in which the Shia Imam was martyred. At the same time, they hit together two sticks of animal chest bones, thus provoking sorrowful cries in the spectators [...]. On all these ten days, around noon, the Mullahs, mostly descendants of the prophet of Islam and generally titled "Seyyed," address the

<sup>\*6</sup> [Cross-like structures made of wood and metal, with metal pieces and big feathers vertically attached to the horizontal piece. A. M.]

<sup>3</sup> Pietro Della Valle. Vol. 3, pp. 38-42. Quoted from the third volume entitled *The Life of Shah Abbās*.

<sup>4</sup> He has made a mistake here.

<sup>5</sup> He means black loose-fitting trousers, which are common in Isfahān.

people in Isfahān's square, where groups of people have been lamenting and moving their bodies. The Mullahs sit on a *menbar*<sup>\*7</sup> and recite *rowze* to many men and women sitting or standing around, that is, they praise Imam Hossain's virtues, piety and courage and describe his martyrdom, occasionally showing pictures on pieces of cloth to go with their descriptions.

Finally, by narrating mournful words of the prophet and Imams, the clergy make the audience weep. These preachers are seen reciting *rowze* every day in the mosques, and even at night in big neighborhoods and market places which are lit up by many torches and covered by sorrowfully black pieces of fabric [...]. On the tenth day of Muharram, known as "Āšurā," huge groups of mourners, like those marching on the anniversary of Ali's death, march around [...] while many people follow coffins and others sound drums and cymbals, and yet some others move their bodies up and down.

Another tourist who visited Iran in 1602<sup>6</sup> and witnessed the Āšurā ceremonies in the city of Shiraz depicts the situation in the following way:

Iranians hold a ceremony which pertains to Hossain, son of Ali. The ceremony goes on for ten days when people do nothing else. I could not tell, however, whether people celebrated or mourned during this period since some people laughed and danced and sang while others wept and mourned. [After describing the group of mourners, the tourist adds] Some coffins followed.

The city governor, Allāhverdi Ḥan, and other state authorities walked behind them, until everyone entered the great mosque of Shirāz. There, a Mullah climbed and sat on a *menbar* and recited *rowze*, and everyone cried.<sup>7</sup>

This was a time when musicians were rejected and practicing music was forbidden as sinful and when it was little valued and on the decline. Yet since poetry and music played a great role in mourning ceremonies, manifestations of songs and tunes of national music, such as mourn-marching and dirge-singing, which included songs with religious words and themes, along with various rhythms in breast-beating and *rowze* reciting, were carried out.

The appearance of *rowze* reciters whose most important privilege was their good voices and who prospered for their knowledge of the subtleties of singing, effectively helped spread the art of singing as well as the songs and melodies of national music and, to a great extent, safeguarded this art against historical events and neglect.

Running *rowze* sessions, mourn-marching, lamenting and breast-beating ceremonies gained increasing momentum during the Safavid era and became quite widespread during the reign of Shah Abbās, who showed much interest in such rituals and all their formalities. As a result, teaching and learning the art of singing came into vogue among the *rowze* reciters and lamenters and continued into later Safavid years and Qāğār period up to the present time.

\*<sup>7</sup> [A stair-shaped seat. A. M.]

<sup>6</sup> Antonio de Govea, a Spanish priest.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio de Govea's Travelogue. pp. 75-6. Quoted from *The Life of Shah Abbās*, vol. 3, by Nasrollāh Falsafi.



Many of the songs and tunes of national music and the manner of producing them were preserved by such singers, some of whom became masters of the art of music and greatest teachers of the art of singing (along with the actors of religious drama which became popular later).

Breast-beating ceremonies were the best way of keeping and spreading rhythmical melodies of national music, and the survival of this kind of music was, to a large degree, due to this religious rite, especially since this religious custom became even more popular in the Qāḡār era and most singers were originally *rowze* reciters. The lamentation songs used in breast-beating enjoyed rhythms and melodies composed by expert musicians taking care of technical features of musical composition. These songs were different from other rhythmical and musical pieces in terms of their themes and lyrics only.

As foreign tourists' writings suggest, the mourning rituals of the Qāḡār era (except for the *ta'ziye* which appeared after the Safavid period), like other formalities, were more or less modeled on those of the Safavids, except for some little changes that responded to the requirements of the Qāḡār days. The difference was that, in the Qāḡār period, they further developed the ceremonies, adding more details, luxury and formalities to the mourning sessions and mourn-marches.

During the Qāḡār era, especially in Nāser od-Din Shah's reign, *rowze* sessions were held with more luxury and formalities. Most ministers, aristocrats and authorities turned *rowze* gatherings into occasions for showing off and stressing their distinctive privileges as well as for visiting each other. The sponsors of these gatherings invited and made use of renowned preachers and good-voiced *rowze* reciters and dirge singers who sang religious and mystical lyrics with pleasantly mournful melodies.

Hajji Shaikh Mohammad Hossain Āyati has written a book titled *Bahārestān* on the history and lives of the renowned people of Qā'enāt and Qahestān. For the entry "Birḡandi Sonnet", he has provided explanations which could be summarized as follows:

The heretical gatherings of the Sufis, which consisted in dancing and singing and were very common in the Timurids' days, gave way to *rowze* and *tekye* activities due to the efforts of [Ayatollāh] Maḡlesi and the Safavids who attached importance to such religious rites and helped spread them. People honestly welcomed these rituals. Many reciters and elegiac poets appeared there and police and directors helped organize the ceremonies in good order and prevent conflict. Those who did not truly believe in such rituals took them as a means of showing off their own grandeur, importance, wealth and luxury to other lower classes of people, thereby taking away the original true value of the ceremonies and sometimes reducing them to heretical forms involving sinfully provocative music and singing [*ḡenā*].<sup>8</sup>

In short, running *rowze* sessions and inviting good-voiced *rowze* reciters and top preachers made for the prevalence of mourning sessions and their popularity

<sup>8</sup> "Ġenā," meaning song and singing (Ānandrāḡ Dictionary).



which, in turn, encouraged good-voiced people to join the class of *rowze* reciters, *ta'ziye* actors and lamenters. Thus, the singers of religious lyrics and, therefore, the best singers and musicians of the Qāğār era, especially from Nāser od-Din Shah's reign on, emerged from the class of *rowze* and *ta'ziye* reciters.

Teaching and learning the art of singing were prevalent among the community of reciters since a good knowledge of the subtleties of this art would help enhance their fame and popularity. Thus, those good-voiced people who also mastered the art of music were more respected and valued by the sponsors of mourning ceremonies, aristocrats, elders, audience and other people. As Abdollāh Mostowfi writes,

At this time, there were two classes of *rowze* reciters. One consisted of preachers who started with an introduction, recited a Koranic verse, discussed it, talked about some important religious and moral concepts, spoke about the suffering of Imam Hossain and his family and finally prayed for the Shah, all Muslims and the sponsors of the ceremonies. The second class of reciters included *rowze* reciters proper who would start by hailing Imam Hossain, immediately followed by a speech on his and his family's sufferings in a combination of prose and verse and would finish with the aforementioned prayers. It was important for preachers to possess a good knowledge in the same way that a good-voice was demanded from reciters. The aristocrats and authorities took *rowze* recitation ceremonies as a chance to show off luxury. The aristocrats also took them as opportunities for visiting each other, while the masses considered them as means of amusement.<sup>9</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the *rowze* reciters with a better voice and good expertise in singing were more famous and earned higher incomes. A number of renowned musicians, some of whom were prefect masters of music and were visited by some of today's elderly people who praise them as masters of singing, appeared among *rowze* reciters and preachers who often enjoyed a good voice. As the author of *My Life* reports, Hajji Mirzā Lotfollāh Isfahāni—also known as “Dasta-ye Banafša”—who had a good voice, and Hajji Tāğ Nayšāburi, known as Tāğ ol-Vā'ezin, who was a distinguished singer and well-known musician to people and artists of the time and ended up as a dervish, were among the preachers and *rowze* reciters of the Qāğār period who became masters of music as well.

I have personally heard much about Tāğ's command of music and pleasant singing from the elderly and I will relate here an anecdote told by the author of *The History of Music* in the first chapter regarding this *rowze* reciter:

Once, in Aḡavi Sādāt's<sup>\*8</sup> *tekye*,<sup>10</sup> Hajji Mirzā Lotfollāh was sitting on the *menbar*, singing so pleasingly that nobody thought anyone else could equally grab people's attention after his performance. Thus, the sponsor called it a day

<sup>9</sup> *My life*. Vol.1, p. 275.

<sup>\*8</sup> [The word “sādāt,” in Persian, is used as a plural form of “seyyed,” which denotes a descendent of Prophet Mohammad. The other plural form is “seyyed-hā.” A. M.]

<sup>10</sup> Located in the Sarčešma neighborhood (now Sirus Street).

and ordered the servants to serve tea and hookahs.<sup>11</sup> At this time, Hajji Tāg entered the *tekye* and Shaikh Ali Zargar, himself a good-voiced great musician, informed him of people's opinion about Lotfollāh's unmatched performance, saying, "I don't think you would be able to emotionally move people after Hajji Mirzā's artistic performance." Hajji Tāg briefly thought and replied, "I am going to sing three songs only, and I hope to pull it off." After serving tea, when the crowd was busy murmuring, Hajji Tāg went up the *menbar* and sang the first song in such an attractive and pleasant voice that everyone became quiet. He sang two more songs so masterfully in the style of renowned singers, making perfect trills, stepped down the pulpit and said to Shaikh Ali, "That was enough proof!" Upon which Shaikh Ali praised Tāg's mastery.

It is reported that Tāg's voice was so attractive to people that as soon as he finished singing in a gathering, most attendants would get up to catch up with his next performance in the following ceremony and make the most of his pleasant voice.<sup>12</sup>

Hajji Tāg passed away at the age of 75 around the end of Ahmad Shah's reign.

The aforementioned Shaikh Ali, known as Zargar (son of Zargarbāši), was a master of singing and musical *radif*. Hajji Shaikh Zayn ol-Ābedin was another well-known singing preacher of Tehran.

Hajji Seyyed Hassan, founder of Shirāzi Sādāt, was yet another *rowze* reciter who enjoyed a good loud voice. The Shirāzi Sādāt, their posterity and relatives all had good singing voices and formed part of the *rowze* reciters of north Tehran, where some of them still live.

Of the well-versed and masterly singer-preachers who lived up until our time, we may refer to Seyyed Bāqer Ġandaqi and Shaikh Tāher Ḥorāsāni, also called Ziā oz-Zākerin. Both of these were among the best, honorable, knowledgeable, artistically talented, highly religious, good-mannered, kind and modest musicians and singers. They had a perfect command of the *radif* of Iranian *dastgāhs* and many old Iranian national melodies which are presently neglected by the elder masters of this art.

Ziā oz-Zākerin was also unique, or almost unique, in his knowledge of the common musical rhythms and *tasnifs* of the time, and the way to sing them.<sup>13</sup> I have seen both Bāqer Ġandaqi and Ziā oz-Zākerin and especially made use of the latter's knowledge who for a year or two came to my house once a week and freely and patiently provided art-lovers and talented learners with his vast range of

<sup>11</sup> *Rowze* sponsors ordered the servants to serve tea and hookahs when *rowze* reciters were late or when they wanted to finish the ceremony. The last *rowze* reciters, who were often masterly aged men, usually finished the ceremonies with praying.

<sup>12</sup> pp. 355-356.

<sup>13</sup> One day, when Ziā oz-Zākerin was coming to the author's house, I came across Mirza Abdollāh Ḥan Davāmi [originally Davāči], who is now the only informed master of *radif* of *āvāzes*, rhythmical melodies and old *tasnifs*, and asked him to join us at home. When we arrived home, Ziā od-Din and his talented son, Mohammad Rathā'i [originally Rasā'i] were there. We talked about past music, melodies and *tasnifs*. Mirza Abdollah Ḥan asked Ziā to correct his mistakes in performing old songs and melodies, and he immediately performed the right melodies. I mean to refer here to Ziā's good command and vast knowledge of *tasnifs'* melodies.

information.<sup>14</sup> Today, we may understand the vast range of their knowledge, especially of singing *radif*, through their artistically talented sons, Messrs. Mirfahṛā'ie and Rathā'i (originally Rasā'i).

There were many masterly musicians among the preachers and reciters of whom we will name some of the most famous ones here. One of the skillful singers who also enjoyed the privilege of musical learning and a nice loud voice was Hajji Mirzā Habibollāh, also called Shams Kašāni, who was very well informed and could produce almost unmatched *tahrir-e halqi* (yodeling). He was a student of Hossain Hajji Ğaffār, a famous singer of *Kāšān*. Ziā oz-Zākerin, himself an expert singer and a well-known musician, spoke very well of Shams's great musical knowledge and singing skills and lauded them, saying, "a special feature of Shams's singing skills was his ability to create *tahrir-e halqi* which could not be produced equally well by others."

Sayf oz-Zākerin Tabrizi was another highly skillful and famous singer who was also endowed with a pleasant and passionate voice. His sons, Mağd oz-Zākerin and Nāser Sayf, were good and renowned singers of religious and nonreligious ceremonies, respectively, and were both religious and respected people. I saw Mağd when he was around 70 years old and still singing passionately and attractively. When I was a teacher in Mashhad, Nāser Sayf sang at the holy shrine of Imam Reza, and I often attended his sermons. At that time, he had lost the earlier young loud voice of his and sang in lower notes, but he was well-versed in singing Iranian *radif* and was distinguished for his knowledge of Iranian national tunes.

Another good religious singer was Shaikh Abdolhossain Sardādvar, who had a strong clear voice and had been educated by Eqbāl Āzar. He used to sing in religious ceremonies during the mourning days and worked as a dealer in Tehran's bazaar on other days. He was an informed musician, especially adept at singing in the *dastgāh* of *segāh* and was nicknamed "Bolbolak".<sup>\*9</sup>

One of the more recent masters of religious singing living in Tehran was Shaikh Abdollāh Tāğ (Kāzemayni) who passed away in May 1949. Tāğ, who was a student of Tāğ Nayšāburi and who came to be called Nim Tāğ,<sup>\*10</sup> was named Tāğ after the death of his teacher. He had also taken lessons from Azizollāh Malek and was a good religious singer. He had a powerful voice, produced proper trills and had enough knowledge of music. His voice remained powerful until the end of his life, but his lungs were not equally strong to support his voice. He sang in most of the respected *rowze* gatherings of the time and enjoyed a pleasant voice while his nasal trills gave pleasure to his audience.

I will finish this part by giving a brief biography of Abdolhossain Sadr Isfahāni, one of the best and most famous religious singers, orators and preachers, who died in Shiraz around the end of 1937.

<sup>14</sup> Abolhassan Sabā and Ğolām Hossain Banan have made much use of Zia's knowledge.

<sup>\*9</sup> [i.e., "Little nightingale." A. M.]

<sup>\*10</sup> [i.e., "Half Tāğ." A. M.]

Sadr was a knowledgeable man and had made efforts in learning music. He had started singing in religious ceremonies in his youth, and his taste in singing and choosing songs extremely added to the effect of his pleasing and passionate voice which hypnotized the listeners. His vast knowledge, his great speaking skills and his pleasant voice increasingly helped promote his fans, and thus, he had a large audience. As soon as he stepped down the *menbar* and left the ceremony, the lovers of his divine voice would follow him to the next gathering to make the most of his pleasing voice and the melodies he sang. I was one of them.

Sadr was still a young man when he migrated from Isfahān to Tehran. Soon he became famous and attended grand religious ceremonies. Having received both old and modern education, he spoke in a sweet and effective way, presented epigrammatic words and sang the selected Farsi mournful lyrics with such suitable melodies and special tunes and in such an attractive and pleasing way that it left nothing to be desired. His oratory was appealing, and his voice was so emotionally powerful that, as mentioned above, as soon as he came down the *menbar*, the audience got up to follow him to his next speech in another gathering and to satisfy their hearts with more of his pleasing songs.

With his passionate and charming voice, Sadr sang such *gušes* that were new even to the musicians of Tehran. One of these tunes is now called "Sadri," and because it was also sung by Seyyed Sādeq Šahāb Isfahāni and he was a friend of the late Abolhassan Sabā, he (Sabā) taught and called this *guše*—which was sung and played in the *āvāz* of *tork*—as Šahābi tune.

There were many excellent religious singers in the centers of provinces, but we only referred here to a few who lived in the capital. In fact, during the mourning months, in Ramadan, on the anniversaries of the death of Fatima,<sup>\*11</sup> on Friday nights, on the first, fifteenth, twentieth or last night of each month and on other days, *rowze* gatherings of which we don't know much were—and still are—held in which respected singers performed.

In the past, morning rituals were operated more passionately. There were many religious singers who made up a prestigious community and taught and learned the art of singing, with the novices improving their voices and enhancing their art through masterly teachers. Each teacher patiently and honestly taught a few learners for free, no matter which social class the learners belonged to. There were also expert singers, such as Āqā Seyyed Abbās Mo'āven—of Āqā Seyyed Aziz Malek's family—who would correct the singers' mistakes.

The Aryan tribes who worshiped God using religious songs and carols retained this characteristic even after converting to Islam when they prayed to God on top of minarets and on the rooftops of dervishes' hermitages and people's houses, especially during the month of Ramadan. This was the way in which good-voiced singers presented their art in Muslim countries.

During the Safavid and especially Qāğār times, singers sang prayers and supplications to God on the rooftops of mosques and houses on Ramadan nights. The sultans and authorities of the country employed good-voiced singers with a

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<sup>\*11</sup> [Imam Ali's wife. A. M.]

good knowledge of music to sing the call to prayer<sup>\*12</sup> and to perform other prayers. Perhaps, this is the reason why some of these great singers of the Qāḡār period such as Ali Ḥan Nāyeb os-Saltane and other well-known singers became famous. During the reign of Nāser od-Din Shah, good-voiced masterly singers recited supplications and sang the calls to prayer from the rooftops of Šams ol-Emāre, the tallest building of the time.

Good-voiced Muslims and singers called people to pray a few times a day in various neighborhoods, thus practicing worship and rehearsing songs, as they did in melodious reciting of the Koran.

After the prophet's death, the four caliphs (Abu Bakr, Omar, Osmān and Ali) lived very simple lives and avoided luxury and were strict about Sharia laws. Some Islamic laws prohibited painting and provocative music. After the caliphs, however, these prohibitions were not observed, even in the capitals of Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, especially as it concerned the recitation of the Koran in a good voice and melodious tunes. The permission of such recitations come from prophet's words. For instance, as reported by Ali ibn Ahmad Ahvāzi, according to Anas ibn Mālek—who received the Prophet's words through a chain of six other people—"Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be upon Him) said, 'Everything is decorated with jewelry, and the jewel of the Koran is beautiful recitation.'" Also, it is reported that the Prophet said, "Beautify recitations of the Koran with your good voices."

All of this was enough reason for Iranians to further develop Iranian music in this way after converting to Islam. They developed and promoted their music through teaching and learning the art of singing as a preparation for the recitation of the Koran using pleasant melodies, thus preventing their music from extinction. This is the way Abdolqāder Ġaibi Marāḡe'i, the greatest musician of the 14th and 15th centuries writes, in *The Goals of Music*, about his reason for learning music:

And my father, Ġaybi, was highly informed in various disciplines, especially in the theory and practice of music.

He taught me music because I had memorized the Koran and he wanted me to gain the knowledge of these tunes as much as I could. He expected me to recite the Koran in pleasant tunes and to do this with the relevant knowledge.

During the Islamic period, calling people to prayer was a religious custom and prayer-callers (*mu'adhin*) were chosen from among good-voiced people, who announced noon time and called the Muslims to prayer from the minarets of mosques, rooftops or other parts of the neighborhoods and invited people to group prayer.

In the Qāḡār era, big mosques had good-voice prayer-callers who also sang the prayers and supplications of Ramadan nights. These were often knowledgeable singers who were also accompanied by renowned singers. Sometimes, a few great singers carried out the duty of singing supplications together on Ramadan nights and showed their command of singing and of musical subtleties to public and exposed their abilities to the judgment of other musicians. They also competed with one another, which helped encourage and educate singers who walked

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<sup>\*12</sup> [Azān. A. M.]

around the mosques and discussed the singers' performance. Sepahsālār School, next to the Parliament, was one of the mosques where people with artistic talents frequented. Here, Seyyed Hossain Andalib Isfahāni was employed as the prayer-caller and supplication singer. Seyyed Hossain Andalib was a good-voiced singer and a distinguished musician. Old musicians who have heard his voice praise his command of singing and musical *dastgāhs*.

Ali Ḥan Nāyeb os-Saltane sang the prayers and supplications and calls to prayer at Kamrān Mirzā Nāyeb os-Saltane's and Azed dol-Molk's houses. Qorbān Ḥan Qazvini, nicknamed "Šāhi," sang supplications and calls to prayer at the royal court. Seyyed Habibollāh Čāle Hesāri, called "Ziā Ḥalvat," was the prayer-caller of Anis od-Dowle, Nāser od-Din Shah's favorite wife. Mr. Damāvandi carried out this duty for Mirzā Ayn od-Dowle, Shah's chancellor. Also, there were other well-known singers who accomplished the same jobs at the courts and houses of state authorities and aristocrats.

Owing to the fact that the singers working at the court and courtiers' houses were paid for their work and led a comfortable life, some singers were encouraged to improve their musical skills, so that they could reach similar positions. They knew that only those singers would be employed to sing supplications and calls to prayer who, in addition to possessing a good voice, were well-informed in terms of music and its techniques.

In this way, these religious customs provided a chance to preserve and propagate music among the public, whose familiarity with this art and whose frequent exposure to musical songs and tunes through supplications and calls to prayer, wittingly or unwittingly, brought the melodies and songs of national music into the focus of their attention.

## Mourn-marching, dirge-singing and breast-beating

Mourn-marching (*daste gārdāni*), dirge-singing (*nohe ḥāni*) and breast-beating (*sine zani*) which had developed and become common during the Safavid era were run more elaborately and luxuriously in the Qāğār period.

Singing dirges and beating breast in mourn-marching and breast-beating at *tekyes* and mosques on Muharram and Safar days were the requirements of mourning ceremonies while breast-beating on pathways, in the market places and at mosques and *tekyes* on Friday nights throughout the year was the youth's amusement in the neighborhoods.

Mourn-marching was done with many formalities and very luxuriously during the Qāğār times, especially in Nāser od-Din Shah's reign. During the days, the mourn-marchers were accompanied by *nāqāres* (drums), modern music, fags, *alams* and horses while in the nights they were accompanied by lanterns on trays, small, decorated, portable cabins (*heğles*), and torches which went between the groups of breast-beaters singing in chorus to metrical lamentations.



Lamentation and breast-beating were also practiced within the harems of Qāğār kings by their wives. As Azed od-Dowle writes,<sup>15</sup> the *rowze* recitation sessions of the days were managed by Ḥayr on-Nesā, Heydar Qoli Mirzā's mother, who was also daughter of Morteżā Ḥan, nephew of the martyred king (Šāh-e Šahid),<sup>16</sup> who herself delivered sermons on Āšura days and sang dirges to the breast-beaters. All of the harem would breast-beat to her lamentations.

Mo'ayyer ol-Mamālek reports in his notes:

On the third day of Muharram, Shah's *alam*, which bore on its top a handmade of pure gold was carried into the harem. Anis od-Dowle, Shah's favorite wife, was in charge of decorating the *alam*, which was placed near the big pool after being adorned with precious jewels and fabrics. All Shah's wives and other harem residents and workers—more than three thousand together—would circle around the *alam* and were served with juice drinks by Anis od-Dowle. Then, one of Fath Ali Shah's daughters would sing dirges while the attendants beat their breasts. When this was finished, Shah's son, Nāyeb os-Saltane, would enter the harem and move the *alam*. Etemād ol-Haram, head of harem male workers, helped by the workers, would finally take the *alam* to the Royal *tekye* and put it in a special place reserved for it.

Group mourn-marching and breast-beating were common throughout the Qāğār period all over Iran but, around the end of Qāğār dynasty, the additions and formalities were more conspicuous than the true course of the ceremonies. Abdollāh Mostowfi describes breast-beating and group mourn-marching in the following way:

The breast-beaters of different neighborhoods made mourn-marching into a feature of their mourning events as a sign of their homage to the Prophet's household, and gradually, each neighborhood came to represent itself with a special *alam*. As soon as the *alam* was moved, the neighborhood residents would walk behind it, lamenting and beating their breasts. During the reign of Mozaffar od-Din Shah, the ceremony turned even more elaborate when they carried some people on horses to represent a number of the friends and enemies<sup>17</sup> of Imam Hossain in the battle of Karbalā. Also during the "constitutional revolution," they made use of such group mourn-marching as a means of propagating the names of ministers, parliament members and other authorities [...]. At this stage, [...] competition between neighborhoods started to appear.

<sup>15</sup> *Azodi History* (Tāriḥ-e Azodi), by Prince Ahmad Mirzā Azed od-Dowle, son of Fath Ali Shah and father of Ayn od-Dowle (Mozaffar od-Din Shah's chancellor), who gives an interesting account of his father's court and of the characteristics of Āqā Mohammad Ḥan. The book was written in 1886 and published in Mumbai in 1888 and again published in Tehran in 1949 by Hossain Kūhi Kermāni.

<sup>16</sup> Namely, Āqā Mohammad Ḥan, the Qāğār king.

<sup>17</sup> Usually, the Imam and his friends sang their lyrics in form of *āvāzes* while the enemies expressed their words, in verse or prose, in a harsh split but melodious way and put their words in long musical notes. In fact, they expressed themselves in a manner halfway between normal speaking and singing.



## Dirge (Nowhe)

Dirge lyrics which were composed to be sung in mourning ceremonies, including mourn-marching, were in close connection to music due to their metrical character and melodies. In fact, such dirges were simply songs with religious themes.

The lyrics of dirges were composed not only by unknown poets and ordinary people but also by well-known and skillful poets and were often melodiously metered. The rhythm and melody of these lyrics were normally derived from rhythmical *āvāzes* and *gušes*. Sometimes these lyrics were written by expert poets and musicians, while at other times the poets provided the lyrics and the musicians composed the rhythms and tunes. Apparently, dirges were mostly composed by poets who were also acquainted with music, and some of them might even have been created on the model of non-religious songs.<sup>18</sup> We have conversely seen that some of the recent musicians have created songs by imitating the meters, rhythms and tunes of old dirges. We may name Yağmā Ğandaqi and Vesāl Širāzi as two of the most famous poets of the Qāğār era who composed elegies and dirges, especially Vesāl, who was not only a highly talented poet but also acquainted with various fine arts and, in spite of being a clergyman, had a good voice and knew how to play some musical instruments. I will give some examples of dirge lyrics below.

Oh, my Hossain! Oh, my Hossain! Oh, my Hossain! Oh, my Hossain!

There comes the month of mourning. Oh, my God! Oh, my God!

The world will burn in sorrow. Oh, my God! Oh, my God!

Adam is also mourning. Oh, my God! Oh, my God!

Weeping a hundred tunes. Oh, my God!

Oh, Shah of Karbalā! Oh, my God!

In a fast tempo:

Oh, my Hossain! Oh, my Hossain! Oh, my Hossain! Oh, my Hossain!

And these lines are from a dirge sung on Āšura:

Oh, Fatima's dear! May I be sacrificed for you! Do not go!

I beseech you, for your children's sake, do not go!

And these are lines sung in Gerāyeli *guše*:

Oh, comrades! There is no water tonight.

For us kids, water is the rarest pearl.

The above lines might have derived their melody from the following song, or the other way round:

Her pleated hair is so replete with pleats,

Each fold and pleat is the envy of all peoples.

Or consider these lines of a dirge:

<sup>18</sup> As Abdollāh Mostowfi writes, "They had composed a dirge modeled on the *tasnif* in the *Kār Amal* of Čahārgāh, which started with the following words: "Sing, Oh, nightingale / The flower is in the garden." (*My Life*, Vol, 1, p. 297).

Oh, Abbās, my good-natured man!

You're gone, and I broken and sad.

There are so many of such lyrics recorded in notebooks all over Iran, and since these lyrics were sung in old melodies, they serve as valuable indicators of Iranian national music. The lyrics of dirges and generally the ceremonies of lamentation of breast-beating played an effective role in the dissemination and protection of national melodies and musical rhythms. Most Iranians learned, and still know, these melodies by heart due to their frequent exposure to them.

The composers of dirge lyrics, who were mostly poets and expert musicians, also trained students. Education in terms of lamentation was a very common practice in Iran until half a century ago, and there were many who volunteered to learn the art of singing dirges and to beat their breasts.

Moršed Čerāg Ali was a writer of mourning and lamentation lyrics in Tehran who would also sing his own dirges and trained many learners, some of whom are still practicing singing. He was very well-known to the community of composers and trained, among others, a person named Hajji Māšāllāh Ġalilvand, the famous dirge singer who died in 1969.

Another was Mirzā Mohammad, who sold herbs and spices in the Sanglaḡ neighborhood of Tehran for a living and had a powerful memory in terms of the minutiae of Iranian national music. He sang dirges himself and led the breast-beating ceremonies. He also helped singers correct their rhythms and melodies and quickly answered all questions regarding tunes and songs. Whenever asked, he simply sang the relevant *āvāz* and *guše* in the right rhythm and melody and guided the learners.<sup>19</sup>

There have been such people in all cities and villages of Iran, especially in the large cities like Tehran, Isfahān, Tabriz and Mashhad, where they effectively helped preserve and promote our national music. There was also a shopkeeper in Isfahān who was until recently well-known for his musical knowledge and skills.

In the Safavid era, not only writing poetry in praise of the Prophet and Imams and composing elegies about the Imams and the martyrs of the battle of Karbalā particularly, but also reciting and singing such lyrics in festive or mournful ceremonies, became increasingly common. In fact, the Safavid dynasty kings particularly encouraged the composition and recitation of such poems as a way of accomplishing their political goals against the will of the caliphs. As explained above, the customs and ceremonies that were commonly practiced in the Safavid period were also common in the Qāḡār period, though in a more elaborate style. There were dervishes who sang lyrics, including couplets in praise of Imam Ali and other Imams and infallibles, in the market places and allies with pleasant melodies. Also there were lamenters and religious lyrics singers<sup>20</sup> who made up a distinct class of their own which included distinguished singers and knowledgeable

<sup>19</sup> Hajji Sa'id Ḥan Hormozi, the virtuoso *tār* and *setār* player, who saw him, describes him as having a good memory in dealing with the *radif* of national music and its songs and *gušes* and praises his art.

<sup>20</sup> Such a singer was called a "moršed," and most people still call them by this title.

musicians some of whom still practice religious singing and are known as spiritual guides (*moršeds*).

Dervishes and other singers normally sang or recited religious lyrics all over Iran on various days of the year. This practice really helped familiarize the masses with the tunes and songs of Iranian national music. We may claim that from a historical perspective, singing supplications, prayers, calls to prayer and dirges as well as breast-beating, *rowze* recitations and elegies were effective agents in preserving and disseminating the melodies and songs of Iran's national music. Similarly, the *ta'ziye*, or *Šabih ḥāni*, which appeared after *rowze* recitation, as we shall see, had an undeniable role in safeguarding and prorogating Iranian national music. This was the way in which Iranians, who were actively engaged in protecting their traditions, customs and national art saved Iranian national music, as one of their most respectful arts, from the impacts of historical events and oblivion.

## ***Šabih ḥāni (ta'ziye)* and its role in preserving and disseminating Iranian national music: a short history**

Religious drama, or so-called *Šabih ḥāni* and the *ta'ziye*, was not practiced during the Safavid era, as neither Iranian historians' and authors' works nor foreign tourists' travelogues have ever mentioned it.<sup>21</sup> It appears that such religious drama began to be produced during the reign of Karim Ḥan Zand. As an author notes, "during Karim Ḥan's time, an English ambassador visited him and gave him an account of sorrowful plays, upon which the king ordered his men to reproduce the site of Karbalā battle and the events that occurred to Imam Hossain and his followers and family, 72 people in all. Based on those mournful events, they created religious plays which came to be called *ta'ziyes*."<sup>22</sup>

It is not clearly known as to when the *ta'ziye* was first practiced. This kind of mourning ceremony, which was more favored by the lower classes of people and was more common in villages and small towns than in large cities, seemingly began in its simple form of reproducing Karbalā events in the Safavid era and turned into religious drama afterwards.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Browne, who, after learning oriental languages, had become especially interested in Iranian literature, came to Iran in 1887 and wrote a few books on the country, including his most precious four-volume book *A Literary History of Persia*. Browne writes in the 4th volume (p. 40): "The reproduction of the exciting scenes and situations known as the *ta'zia*, was not common in the early Safavid era, but became fashionable later. This is evidenced by the fact that European historian Olearius, who had stayed in Ardabil near the shrine of Shaikh Safi od-Din during the reign of Shah Safi, does not mention *ta'ziye* plays although he gives a comprehensive account of his observations, including the forms of mourning, dirge singing and self-cutting, on Āšurā days or other martyrdom anniversaries.

<sup>22</sup> *History of the Revolution of Islam* [Tārīḫ-e Enḡelāb-e Eslām]. National Library manuscript, Tehran, p. 604. (Quoted from Vol. 3. *The Life of Shah Abbās*, p. 10).

Some believe that Iran started to develop its international relations, especially with Russia, during the reign of Fath Ali Shah, and Iranian envoys and authorities saw plays and operas there. When they returned to Iran, these historians argue, they decided to put on religious drama, and in this way, the people of Karbalā events, including the followers and enemies of Imam Hossain were reproduced to act in religious plays.<sup>23</sup>

In any case, religious drama became a common practice during the Qāğār era and is particularly important in terms of preserving and propagating Iranian national music. A feature of the *ta'ziye* was the fact that each actor sang their part of religious lyrics in a particular *dastgāh*, *āvāz* and *guše* and never deviated from them. Imam's friends and enemies took care of their meters and rhymes in their dialogues with friends and enemies. For instance, when Imam Hossain had a dialogue with one of his family members or followers, both parties produced the words in the same meter, *dastgāh* or *āvāz* and used the same rhymes. Also, there appearances were like those of original people. For example, the person who acted out the character of Ali Akbar was a young man of 18-20 years of age, good-looking and shapely, as was the actor playing the role of Qāsem, although a little younger. Likewise, the character of Abbās was a strong, shapely, good-looking man of medium size, like that of Imam Hossain, and with a suitable beard. In short, suitability was observed in all aspects of the *ta'ziye*, including the choice of actors, and they never deviated out of their right *dastgāh*, *āvāz* and *guše*. They rehearsed their parts so much that they could produce very well the tunes and songs that had become *markuz* in their minds.<sup>24</sup>

Nāser od-Din Shah, who usually fell asleep when listening to stories and music, made the *ta'ziye* into one of his best hobbies and showed much interest in it. For the same reason, he decreed that a Royal *tekye* should be built near his harem.

A relatively vast *tekye* was constructed in the shape of an amphitheater with a few floors and a big stone platform in the middle and an iron structure above it which was covered with an awning during the performance of the plays. The *tekye* was located behind what is now the bazaar branch of Iran's Melli Bank, (opposite Sabze Maydān in Buzarġmehri Street) in the alley across the big market place (known as Amir's and Draper's market). The building was demolished in 1948, and the present bank was built in its southern part.

When the *tekye* was constructed and religious plays were performed in it, the princes, aristocrats and state authorities had their own *tekyes* constructed, adding *ta'ziyes* to their *rowze* ceremonies. Other authorities and rich people followed suit by having their own *tekyes* constructed and having their own *ta'ziyes* performed in them. The places where such plays were performed were called *tekyes*. They made *tekyes* in various parts of Tehran, and *ta'ziyes* were run sponsored by the rich

<sup>23</sup> Old Greek drama similarly had its origin in songs that were sung in religious ceremonies (*Journal of Art and People* (Mağala-e Honar va Mardom), no. 64, January 1968).

<sup>24</sup> *Makuz*: firmly fitted in. The word comes from the root "rakz," which means "to push a spearhead or similar things into the ground." (*Ānandrāġ Dictionary*).

people of the neighborhood or passers-by who visited the *tekyes* on Muharram and Safar days.

In the intervals between the plays, *nāqāre* players (drummers) played and when modern music department was started at Dār ol-Fonun School, this type of music was added to the ceremony. A musical ensemble played at the *tekyes*. In large *tekyes*, there were both *nāqāre* ensembles and modern music players. At the great and splendid Royal *tekye*, which had been constructed by the Shah's order near his harem in the Ark neighborhood of Tehran, *ta'ziye* ceremonies were held with much splendor and luxury. The best singers of the time and the best musicians wearing luxurious garments, sometimes decorated with jewels, were invited to this *tekye* to run the ceremonies with many formalities before the king.

The director and manager of the *ta'ziyes* at the Royal *tekye* was titled Mo'in ol-Bokā (weeping helper) by the Kings and was called *ta'ziye gardān* (*ta'ziye* manager) by people. The director, who was experienced in his job, set the roles of actors and gave each of them a sheet of paper, called "*fard*" or "*nosḥe*" containing their lyrics.

The *ta'ziye* actors, known as *šabih ḥāns*, sang their parts based on contents of the sheets of paper they had been given. Each actor always sang the same *āvāz* in their role. For instance, the character of Abbās sang in the *dastgāh* of Čahārgāh, that of Horr in Araq (Iraq), that of Lady Zeynab in the *guše* of "Kobrā" or "Guri," that of Abdollāh ibn Hassan in a *guše* of the Rāk *āvāz*, and for this reason, the *guše* came to be called "Rāk Abdollāh" by *ta'ziye* singers and musicians. Whenever the performance of *ta'ziye* coincided with the times of daily prayers, they sang the call to prayer using the *āvāz* of "Bayāt Kord."<sup>25</sup>

The director of the Royal *tekye* usually possessed enough knowledge of music, was skillful in his art and always tried to find and bring good-voiced and talented youths from all over Iran to Tehran and train them for singing in the *ta'ziye* of the Royal *tekye*. Thus, the *ta'ziye* manager brought any good-voiced *ta'ziye* singers he heard of to Tehran by any means, employed them in his system, paid for their living until they were ready to start working and trained them for singing.

The governors and other state agents were ordered to send any young good-voiced man they met to the capital where they were educated both by the *ta'ziye* managers and other expert singers and musicians. After mastering all the *dastgāhs*, *āvāzes* and *gušes* of Iranian national music, the director had them sing the roles of Ali Akbar, Qāsem or any other roles he deemed appropriate at the Royal *tekye*.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Supplication singers, too, often performed in the *āvāz* of Bayāt Kord.

<sup>26</sup> One of the most important singers, Hossein Ali Nakisā, now 90 years old and, perhaps, the only living *ta'ziye* singer of the Royal *tekye*, says: "When I migrated from my hometown of Tafreš (near Arāk) to Tehran, I was trained by a great artist and singer named Mirza Bābā, who also trained some other young men. We would each sit on our knees facing the teacher while he put a few reed pens between our fingers and held our hands in his own and taught us *dastgāhs*, *āvāzes* and *gušes* of music. He sang the lessons and we repeated in imitation. Whenever we produced false notes or made inappropriate trills or did not sing the *āvāz* or recite the lyrics in the way he had presented in terms of

Princes, aristocrats and authorities who had big houses large enough for performing *ta'ziyes* and afforded to pay for muleteers, cameleers and state musicians, who were indispensable in the ceremony, personally played roles in their *ta'ziyes*. Some rich people built their houses in such a form as to allow them to turn their front yards into *tekyes* and provided as wide a piece of canvas as to cover all over the yards during the *ta'ziye* days. Bahā od-Dowle's house (in Sadr A'zam Nuri Alley, Pamenār Street), which used to be Entesāriye and Amir Atābak schools and in which the author studied as a primary student, was an example of such *tekyes*. This particular house had two big yards, one of which had false arches and could be quickly formed into a *tekye* using canvas.

Nāser od-Din Shah, especially interested in religious drama, ordered Mirzā Nasrollāh Isfahāni (nicknamed Tāg oš- Šo'arā and bearing the pen name "Sāheb"), an able and learned poet with apparently sufficient knowledge of music, to collect and complete all the extant lyrics of *ta'ziyes* and to compose musically appropriate lyrics for the new religious plays that were written by Mo'in ol-Bokā or other authors. Thus, the *ta'ziye* lyrics that had been composed on the basis of musical tunes, *maqāms* and meters were completed by him while drawing on experts' advice.

The *ta'ziye* lyrics written by musician-poets or by poets supervised by musicians and completed by Tāg oš- Šo'arā and other musicians had been created to completely suit the intended *maqāms*, *āvāzes* and *gušes*. The *ta'ziye* spectators could remember the melodies through association as soon as the actors started singing their parts. Since various classes of people, especially the lowers class, were eager to watch *ta'ziyes* performed all over Iran, even in villages, these religious plays were a very good means of familiarizing all people, especially the masses, with the tunes of Iran's national music.

As explained above, the lyrics of *ta'ziyes*, called "*fard*," some of which are extant,<sup>27</sup> made *ta'ziyes* into the best vehicle of preserving and prorogating Iranian national music, particularly because there were no musical notation and discipline except for musical instruments that, to a good extent, can lead us to the right melodies and songs if they are played in the right fashion. The various groups of people who had frequently attended and listened to *ta'ziyes* had also learned the melodies by heart. Such people can now reproduce the *ta'ziye* lyrics with their right melodies. This could be certainly confirmed by those who have played roles in *ta'ziyes*. Therefore, today, the best way to investigate and determine the authentic national melodies and songs of the country is through *ta'ziyes*, especially when the

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their stress, pause and other features, he squeezed our hands causing such dreadful pain that we took utmost care to make sure we did not repeat the mistake and receive the same punishment again. In this way, we learned the *dastgāhs*, *āvāzes* and *gušes* of national music in the right form, the way required by the art of singing."

<sup>27</sup> As Edward Browne writes in *A Year amongst the Persians* (485), "Iranian *ta'ziye* have been translated by Europeans, especially Sir Lewis Pelly, Britain's former Resident on the Persian Gulf and the *ta'ziye* of Qasem's Wedding was translated by French Gobineau (a group of orientalisks have done research on *ta'ziye* and have recorded their titles and other features. More than 50 *ta'ziye* have been translated into European languages and published)." (*Journal of Art and People*, no. 71, p. 17. Dr. Riyāhi).



knowledge is gained directly from the people involved in these plays. *Ta'ziye* plays were first restricted to such themes as Imam Hossain, Abbās, Moslem's two kids, Qasem's wedding, Horr, Yazid's palace and similar subjects, but as soon as these plays became a means of amusement, more themes were added. The *ta'ziye* was further developed by adding unrelated subjects such as the departure of Moḥtār Saqafi, the Damascus Bazaar, Bolqays, the monk's monastery, the Prophet's last haj, Shah Čerāg, Qoraysh girl's wedding, Dorra tos-Sadaf,<sup>28</sup> Amir Taymur, Prophet Joseph and the likes.

A group of orientalist have done research on *ta'ziyes* and have collected all their titles and features. To date, more than 50 *ta'ziye* plays have been translated into European languages and published.<sup>29</sup>

Edward Browne, the renowned British orientalist, writes in *A Year Amongst the Persians*:

During my thirteen-day stay in Iran, I attended the Royal *tekye* a few times, accompanied by some members of the English Embassy. All European travelers who have visited Iran have also given an account of *ta'ziyes*. Amin os-Soltān,<sup>30</sup> the prime minister, recited *rowze* and gave dinner to people. On the night when I was visiting him in Iranian garments (namely, *kolāh*<sup>\*13</sup> and *sardāri*<sup>\*14</sup>), I saw him distribute 400 portions of rice and stew to his guests. As I was dressed in an Iranian style Hajji Safar and I went to *rowze* sessions in the nights since my stay there coincided with the month of Muharram. On one of these nights, Hajji Safar<sup>31</sup> invited me over to his own house and gave me dinner. Europeans, especially Sir Lewis Pelly, Britain's former Resident on the Persian Gulf, has translated Iranian *ta'ziyes* and French Gobineau, in his book *Religious and Philosophies*,<sup>\*15</sup> has translated the *ta'ziye* of Qāsem.<sup>32</sup>

As Abdollāh Mostowfi writes about *ta'ziyes* in *My Life*, "as soon as luxury entered *ta'ziyes*, the old editions were modified to include things which were thoroughly irrelevant to the *ta'ziye*. For example, the *ta'ziyes* of 'Dorra tos-Sadaf,' 'Amir Taymur,' 'Prophet Joseph,' and 'Quraysh Girl's Wedding.'" Also, describing Mirzā Mohammad Taqi, the *ta'ziye* director, he explains:

This tragic opera had a director who also worked as an orchestra conductor. He set the actors' clothes for their roles, made the preliminary decorations, or what

<sup>28</sup> "Dorrat os-Sadaf" is the story of two sisters who set out from Medina to help Imam Hossain in Kufa and go through some events.

<sup>29</sup> *Journal of Art and People*, no. 71. Dr. Riyāhi.

<sup>30</sup> Mirzā Ali Asḡar Ḥan Amin os-Soltān, known as Atābak, chancellor to Nāser od-Din Shah and Mozaffar od-Din Shah.

<sup>\*13</sup> [Lambskin hat. A. M.]

<sup>\*14</sup> [Persian long coat. A. M.]

<sup>31</sup> Hajji Safar Shirāzi, who lived in Tehran and accompanied Edward Browne as his cook and servant.

<sup>\*15</sup> [Religions et Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale. As far as I could gather, Browne's account provided here is a summary of a few pages. Also, through exaggeration or by mistake, the number 100 has been changed into 400. A. M.]

<sup>32</sup> Translated by Zabihollāh Mansuri, p. 485. The book was written by Browne in 1887 and was translated in its third impression by Mansuri.



Europeans call *mise en scene*, as part of his job. At this time, these things were carried out by the drink server (*šarbat-dār-bāši*), who was a member of the kitchen staff and was honored by the title of *Mo'in ol-Bokā*. His predecessor apparently was his father, *Mirzā Mohammad Taqi*, who had prepared the plays and, by adding extra features to them, had changed the plays from vulgar forms to aristocratic productions. Training the *ta'ziye* singers and teaching them the right parts as well as to enable them to act in front of such a perspicacious king as *Nāser od-Din Shah* was another difficult duty of *Mirzā Mohammad Taqi*. He found and trained talented people from all over Iran, visited them and employed them by hook or by crook. For instance, *Hajji Mullah Hossain* of *Paik Zarand* (near *Sāve*) was expected to leave his farm every year in *Muharram* and to sing *ta'ziyes* at the Royal *tekye* because he played female roles very well. Or such and such man of the city of *Hamadān* was good for the roles of Imam's armed enemies such as *Šemr* or *Hāreth*,<sup>33</sup> or such and such youth of *Ĥorāsān* was fit for the role of *Ali Akbar*. The same was true of other roles which were played by people from different places all of whom came to *Tehran* in *Muharram* and stayed there for the two mourning months and then returned to their own living places. Some of them were known to the Shah and were paid a regular salary or pension or had their water and property taxes reduced. Since most residents of *Isfahān* and *Kāšān* enjoyed good voices, which is essential to singing, they were more favored by *Mirzā Mohammad Taqi* than others.

Also, when depicting the Royal *tekye* and luxury of its *ta'ziyes* as well as the manner and conditions of its actors and spectators, he writes:

The Royal *tekye* is the same one whose building and ceiling structure are still there.<sup>34</sup> During the ten days of *ta'ziye* plays, they covered the ceiling holes with canvas. Today, the *tekye* has one less floor than it used to. During the reign of *Mozaffar od-Din Shah*, when the wooden part weight had damaged the upper floor, they demolished that level to save the rest of the monument. The first floor belonged to ministers and governors of the provinces who were responsible for decorating one of the false arches and providing the necessary facilities in it. The city aristocrats, invited or not, came to these arches thanks to their acquaintance with the governors' chief of servants or ministers and were provided with luncheon.

The *menbar* steps, like the false arches' fronts, were decorated with *jars*,<sup>35</sup> *lalas*, mirrors and vases, and the false arches were adorned with *divarkoobs*<sup>36</sup> and chandeliers. The decoration of the two chambers of the second and third floors located above each false arch was carried out by the ministry or governorate which was responsible for the false arch below. The adornments of the chambers on each floor consisted of three chandeliers, with the middle one bigger than the other two, hung on the wooden structure of the arches' front tops.

<sup>33</sup> *Moḥālef Ḥan an* (enemy singer) or *ašqiā* (the evil men) were those who played the roles of *Šemr*, *Hāreth* and *Ibn Sa'd* and expressed their lines in a harsh commanding tone, as in melodious prose.

<sup>34</sup> In 1949, they demolished the *tekye* and built up the bazaar branch of *Melli Bank* (National Bank) in its southern part, opposite *Sabze Maydān* in *Buzarḡmehri Street*.

<sup>35</sup> Multi-branch chandeliers.

<sup>36</sup> Chandeliers nailed to the wall.

The fronts of the chambers were covered with *zanburi*<sup>37</sup> curtains. Each chamber belonged to one of the Shah's wives, who had their own aristocrat guests to invite for lunch. These guests ate lunch within the harem and went to these chambers to watch the plays.

The *ta'ziyes* were played twice a day, one from 3:30 in the afternoon to half an hour before the evening prayer, and the other one from 2 a.m. to 5 or 6 a.m.

The Shah's chamber was on the top floor with a black *gāz*<sup>38</sup> curtain hanging on the front. The Shah's room was kept dark during the night so that both the king and the people would simply focus on watching the plays. The spectators sitting in the room opposite the Shah's observed the code of etiquette and sat more politely than those in the other rooms. The first time I went to the Royal *tekye*, I was 6 or 7 years old. My Šemirani nanny came over to our house, made *baytute*<sup>39</sup> there and, with my mother's permission, took me early in the morning to the Royal *tekye*. Even though it was just a couple of hours after sunrise, the *tekye* was very crowded, and were it not for the nanny's acquaintance with one of the porters, we might not have made it into the place.

On that day, we had *nān komağ*,<sup>40</sup> cheese, fruits and some nuts the nanny had purchased on the way to the *tekye*. Due to the nanny's request, the porter came and took me out from time to time to prevent me from getting bored.

When I came back, I sat without complaining and waited for the play to begin. It was clear that the nanny had been attending *ta'ziyes* frequently, since she explained everything to me, making sure I got all the details and understood all the delicate points. Although I had attended the Ezzat od-Dowle<sup>41</sup> *tekye* in our own neighborhood quite a few times and was not unfamiliar with such plays, the nanny's explications were very useful and precious to me.

From morning to noon, there was nothing except the voices and noises of the women who sometimes also quarreled over seats and made louder noises. In the afternoon, the *rowze* reciters appeared. All the *rowze* singers of the city went up the marble steps of the *menbar* and sang a few words, but nobody listened to them. Not even one of the women cried although the same women would normally cry aloud as soon as they heard the name of the Prince of Martyrs (Seyyed oš- Šohadā).<sup>\*16</sup> At last a *Seyyed* (a descendent of the Prophet) went up the *menbar*, and the women stopped the noise as soon as they saw him. Although there was still no crying, because the clergymen was Seyyed Abu Taleb Shirāzi and people knew he would stop the *rowze* for the *ta'ziye* to begin, they calmed down and very unwillingly became silent. The preacher performed his *rowze* session for a little longer than the previous ones, and at the end, when it was praying time, everyone stretched out their hands repeating "Yā Allāh,"<sup>\*17</sup> and the preacher prayed for the king and Islam, and stepped down the *menbar*.

<sup>37</sup> A type of lace-like fabric.

<sup>38</sup> A kind of thin fabric.

<sup>39</sup> To sleep over at a place.

<sup>40</sup> A kind of bread mostly sold by salesmen at that time and a type of bread that is baked on charcoal fire.

<sup>41</sup> Ezzat od-Dowle, Nāser od-Din Shah's sister and Mirzā Taqī Ḥan Amir Kabir's wife.

<sup>\*16</sup> [That is, Imam Hossain. A. M.]

<sup>\*17</sup> [The phrase denotes "(Help) oh, God!" in prayers. A. M.]

The Royal *tekke* had two or three entrances and exits. As soon as the *Seyyed* left, there came the sound of martial music from one of the entrances. Šorkrollāh, head of royal musicians, entered followed by the full ensemble. The musicians were wearing sky blue garments with white ribbons on them and silver musical instruments, which were beautiful altogether. They walked half a circle around the central stage, where the play was to be performed, and sat silent in their own seats.<sup>42</sup>

Immediately after these came a group of *nāqāre* players with *kornas*, *dohols* and big drums beautifully adorned, and all in garments somewhat like that of the porters. Even the *dohols* they carried under their arms were decorated with *khatam*.<sup>\*18</sup> This group, too, made a half-circle march and sat in their own seats. Then came some breast-beating groups of people with *alams* and a dirge singer, who marched around, stopped in front of the Shah's false arch to beat their breasts and then left through an exit. Of these breast-beating groups, the Buruđerdi group looked simpler and yet graver. Imagine a group of 200 people wearing no more than blue fustian shirts and very loose-fitting trousers and felt caps, without any *alams* or flags, with their singer carrying nothing more than a loincloth in his hand. Imagine these strong people, mostly felt makers of the town, with their sleeves rolled all the way up to the arm holes, entering, repeating the dirge refrain in chorus, moving around, going onto the stage, sitting around their singer, starting the lamentation, vertically raising their both hands and beating their breasts to the beats signaled by the shakes of the singer's loincloth. Although Buruđerdi people of those days, like the Lors<sup>\*19</sup> of today, loved to grow beards and had generally densely haired bodies, this group of mourners were seemingly selected from the most bearded Buruđerdis whose bodies were heavily haired from breast to eye while their heads were completely shaved. The moment these felt makers beat their breasts so heavily with 400 hands, it made a sound similar to that of a cannon fire. Even though I was not a cowardly boy, I confess, I was frightened by the group and its breast-beating style.

Another group that drew my attention were the stone-beaters (*sang zans*) from Kāšān who entered in their uniforms. Their garment was an *arḥāleq alḡe*,<sup>43</sup> a Kermani sash and a cap like those of bakers, each carrying two octagon pieces of thick wood tied to their palms. When the singer sang the dirge, they beat the pieces together to the beats of the song. When they stopped in front of the king's chamber, as was usual, the dirge melody acquired a triple-beat meter.

The Kāšānis first hit the wooden pieces together in front of their breasts, then in front of their heads and finally, jumping up, above their heads, which created a very ear-splitting piercing sound. Even as a child, the ceremony seemed more like stupid dancing than mourning.

<sup>42</sup> Modern music, which was introduced during Nāser od-Din Shah's reign and was commonly played in *ta'ziye* was used as preludes and to fill up intervals between the plays, not to accompany them.

<sup>\*18</sup> [A kind of Iranian decorative inlaying art using tiny pieces of wood, metal, bone and similar stuff to cover and beautify the (usually outer) surfaces of objects. A. M.]

<sup>\*19</sup> [Lors are an ethnic group with a rich cultural heritage mostly living in west and southwest Iran. A. M.]

<sup>43</sup> A type of colorful silk cloth.

The last was the group of porters. The royal porters were about 1000 people. All of them were wearing long jackets made of black cotton fabric with Hassani necks<sup>44</sup> and trousers of the same color and fabric and egg-shaped hats which bore the word "porter" in the *sols*<sup>\*20</sup> style letters made of silver on their top right corners. The chief of porters (Hājeb od-Dowle), his deputies, the *yuzbāšis*,<sup>45</sup> *panğāhbāšis* and *dahbāšis* came in lines of 4-5 and went away. 200 porters stopped in front of the king's chamber to perform breast-beating and lamenting. Whenever this was performed during the night, half of them would each carry a spring-shaped chandelier in a crystal bowl which they put close together on the middle platform before leaving. These chandeliers, along with the arch lights, helped to light up the middle platform for the play that was soon to be started. The lyrics of the porters' dirge were the following: "I sacrifice my life to the martyrs today / I pray for the king helping the religion today." This group was the best in terms of number, garments and order. Their breast-beating ceremony was natural with no stupid dancing.

After the breast-beaters, it was the Jew's harpists' turn that were riding camels and holding their harps diagonally before them. There were a hundred of them who entered through an entrance and left through an exit. Then many mules entered, each carrying a pair of rolled reed-curtains inside of which there was a folded tent awning and a porter sitting on top of each. Many came with velvet-covered trunks and small rugs and went away. Then came the *ābdāri*<sup>46</sup> with gold-embroidered velvet saddle bags and silver harnesses which also carried silver things. They came and passed along with bejeweled saddles and harnesses as well as embroidered and gold-embroidered saddle covers. Then passed the Shah's horse (Ġahān Paymā) whose tail was colored purple, had a bejeweled saddle and saddle cover and a golden adorned harness and was the most beautiful of all. Also, there were some *nāqāre* players (drummers) in red clothes riding camels, their *dohols* and big drums fitted in front of them, playing *sornas* and *kornas*.

Finally the king's maroon carriage came, decorated with a line of gold around its top and dragged by eight very beautiful white horses, and it was followed and preceded by so many horse riders wearing golden belts and by the guards. While these royal luxuries were passing, the music ensemble kept playing martial melodies.

After a few minutes of silence and calm, the *ta'ziye* singers entered. The *ta'ziye* director entered with his reddish brown beard covering all his breast, wearing a black gown and holding a cherry-wood stick with silver points on both ends, and his deputy—his son (titled by the Shah as Nāzem ol-Bokā). These were followed by the *ta'ziye* actors playing male and female roles, all dressed according to their roles and walking in lines of four. The harmony of children's high-pitched voices with the low-pitched voices of the men and their slow tranquil pace of walking added to their grandeur and splendor.

<sup>44</sup> Seemingly, it refers to a kind of simple edgeless neck.

<sup>\*20</sup> [A style of Persian calligraphy. A. M.]

<sup>45</sup> Leader (commander) of 100 people; Panğāhbāši: leader of 50 people; Dahbāši: leader of ten people.

<sup>46</sup> Horses or mules that carried kitchen stuff.

At this time, a particular *tasnif* in the *kār amal*<sup>47</sup> of Čahārgāh was commonly sung based on which they had composed a dirge, with the following lyrics:

Sing, nightingale, oh, nightingale!  
 The rose has arrived in the garden.  
 Come on, hyacinth and curve your hair!  
 This is the season of the garden.  
 Cry, nightingale,  
 Of Akbar's death day and night!  
 Lament turtledove  
 Of Asgar's separation day and night!

The *ta'ziye* actors went around the platform and stepped up the staircase across the king's chamber and, led by their director, sat on the gold-covered chairs located around the stage in proper places. The children, however, sat on the ground in a disorderly fashion, and then the *ta'ziye* began.<sup>48</sup>

I don't remember the title of the play now. Whatever it was, in the middle of the play, the horses with the goods, the tent stuff and the trunk as well as the horse riders with gold belts, the guards, the bakers and the Jew's harpists entered the *tekye* at the appropriate times and left after going around the platform. The *ta'ziye* director kept all the lyrics on a bundle of sheets neatly put together and attached to the front of his sash. He carried them on himself to provide the actors with their lyrics in case they lost theirs. The director accomplished his job very well. All the one hundred actors and the musical ensemble carried out his orders without the least doubt or delay, and he was helped by his son, too. The manager's directions to the actors were signaled by moving his hand, and to the musicians by moving up his stick, all done without hurried clumsiness, but in a relaxed and grave manner. Even if there came some little noise from a corner of the *tekye* or false arches, he made the people keep silence with his grave looks.

It was half an hour to the evening prayer when the play finished and people dispersed, and the porters made sure that everyone left.

In the next three or four years, I attended two more *ta'ziyes*, and incidentally, both were night time plays and I sat in the false arches. The splendor of night *ta'ziyes*, due to the light of the *jars* and chandeliers in front of, and within, the false arches, was unique in that period. Five or six thousand candles in crystal bowls, the *jars*, *lāles*, chandeliers and *divārkubs* burned and were especially beautiful when, during the play of Joseph, the Egyptian merchant came to the well and when Joseph's brothers sold him to the merchant. Loads of fabrics and boxes of merchandise were carried on camels

<sup>47</sup> "Tasnifs composed by masters of music are arranged in a way as to not only fit a particular *āvāz* but also include all or most *guşes* of that *āvāz*. This kind of comprehensive *tasnif* was called a '*kār amal*' by old musicians." (*My Life*, Vol. 1, p. 297).

<sup>48</sup> Before a *ta'ziye* started, the actors (grownups and children) lined up against each other on the stone platform and sang lyrics called "pre-events," after which the *ta'ziye* proper commenced. The pre-events were not always and everywhere the same. They were different with various *ta'ziye* casts and cities. For instance, they started the pre-event with the following lines in Qazvin: "Behold, the world is full of spring / The nightingale sings and the garden moans."

on each of which was riding a black man in a white Arabic garment and a red woolen hat.

I guess 200 camels passed before the merchant and his workers and companions along with the horses, goods, kitchen stuff and the tents arrived and the merchant finally settled near the well.

The selling of Joseph was the right time to show off all the royal luxuries, putting on display the best and the most precious at their proper times.

On one of the nights, the *tekye* was restricted, and people who would normally sit on the ground were not allowed in. On that night, the representatives of the foreign governments who were resident in Tehran were led to the big false arches while the *ta'ziye* organizers made sure that the play did not have a vulgar or low theme. On the ninth night, no *ta'ziye* was performed. The king would go to the false arches where the relevant authorities presented him with such gifts as a hundred or more gold coins, a bolt of sash cloth or other presents in exchange for the king's kind attention.

Nāser od-Din Shah had also had a *tekye* constructed in Šemiran to host *ta'ziyes* during the Muharrams that fell in summer. This summer *tekye*, however, was not as elaborate and equipped as the one in Tehran, and because it was small, they performed the plays in it with fewer desiderata.

Abdollah Mostowfi similarly gives an account of the *tekyes* run by the aristocrats, authorities and princes whose houses were large enough for performing the plays and could afford to pay the expenses, including the wages of muleteers, cameleers and royal drummers and musicians. He particularly describes the splendor of the *tekye* of Ezzat od-Dowle, the king's sister and Amirkabir's wife, who was then married to Mošir od-Dowle (the foreign minister). He also depicts the Tehran neighborhoods' *tekyes* in this way:

Each neighborhood and even each street of Tehran had a *tekye* constructed by the neighborhood's generous people. Some of the *tekyes* were sponsored by one or two charity shops which were dedicated to the expenses of the mourning ceremonies, but most *tekyes* did not have such shops and were supported by the local communities only. Some of the *tekyes*, such as those of Reza Qoli Ḥan and Sartaḥt<sup>49</sup> were set up in the streets. Those of such *tekyes* which were not exposed to traffic were abandoned and served as trash dumps in other times of the year or were used by the local grocers to dry onions in its chambers or as ware-houses. A few days before the mourning month began, the local *dashes*,<sup>50</sup> directed by the *bābāšamal*,<sup>51</sup> repainted the *tekyes*, set up tents in them and performed the ceremonies there. The costs of the mourning sessions were covered by the local people whose houses were not big enough for *rowze* sessions on Friday nights but loved to join in for divine rewards. There were many people to sponsor the *tekyes*, and a remarkable amount of money was

<sup>49</sup> These *tekyes* were located in the Sarčešme neighborhood of Tehran, now turned into Sirus Street. The *tekyas* of Sanglaḡ and Dabbāḡ Ḥāne were also there.

<sup>50</sup> Youths and other people who showed the characteristic of sportsmanship.

<sup>51</sup> The elder of *dāšes* (brothers) who showed perfect sportsmanship or so called "luti gari" and was thus naturally superior to other youths of the group who fully obeyed him. "Bābā" means 'father,' which also refers to aged people. 'Šamal' denotes 'group' or 'community'" (Ānandrāḡ Dictionary) and "bābā šamal" could be taken to mean the superior of a group or community.



usually raised in this way. Some who could not afford, or did not want, to donate money, donated goods like lanterns, embroidered curtains, tables, samovars, tea sets and the likes, which were utilized in decorating the false arches.

Each false arch was managed by a half *bābāšamal*. He made every effort to collect the required stuff, and there was competition in the work, too. The *tekyes*, which were no more than *zabildāns*,<sup>52</sup> were turned into most beautiful places in a matter of 8-9 days just before Muharram. As soon as people entered the *tekye*, they were offered rosewater<sup>\*21</sup> and were served coffee in cups on crystal saucers carried on small nickel-silver trays along with ground sugar cubes followed by tea in winters. In summers, however, juice drinks replaced tea. Whether the attendants smoked hookahs or not, they were offered dripping hookahs<sup>53</sup> to complete the catering. The costs of each false arch were paid by the person in charge of it, and the funds raised through the local communities were spent on the *tekye*'s general needs. In some larger *tekyes*, the false arches were adorned with dervish things such as tanned sheep skins, bowls, horns, sticks, decorative rosaries, sometimes leopard, bear, fox or even other skins, which had nothing to do with dervishes. In such false arches, a person recited stanzas from Mohtašam (the Kāšāni poet of the Safavid era) who was second to none in composing elegies. Sometimes, in large *tekyes*, there were two such dervish false arches in each of which a Mohtašam poetry reciter frequently repeated lines from a stanza in a responsorial form.<sup>54</sup>

In the *tekye*'s central yard, apart from the space in front of the false arches where people were catered for on arrival, some people sat waiting for breast-beating to start and from time to time called out people to say a *salavāt*<sup>\*22</sup> in chorus. This ceremony continued during the day until 10 p.m.. Religious plays were performed at those *tekyes* and the *ta'ziyes* were scheduled in a way as to allow the six or seven groups of actors working in the city to perform in all *tekyes*.

Mo'in ol-Bokā (the *ta'ziye* director) and his royal cast, too, agreed to perform in the important *tekyes* of the city such as Seyyed Nāser od-Din's (now mostly replaced by Ḥayyām street) and the royal courtyard (north of Marvy market and south of Arabs' district), where *ta'ziyes* were performed in the name of the crown prince. The royal *ta'ziye* director and his colleagues took part in these

<sup>52</sup> A place to dump brushwood and similar stuff in (*Ānandrāḡ Dictionary*).

<sup>\*21</sup> [People are served rosewater to splash on their faces for its good smell. A. M.]

<sup>53</sup> Before preparing hookahs, they pushed their bases into water to make them completely wet.

<sup>54</sup> At this time, it was fashionable for young talented singers to join the community of dervishes, submit themselves to a wise old dervish (a *moršed*) and to bring life to dervish gatherings by singing sonnets in a good voice and singing mystical lyrics to tunes provided by musical instruments. The sonnet singers, some of whom still live today, were many at that time and competed in singing and learning the art. They mostly sang sonnets in the same form but in various *dastgahs* and *āvāzes*. The lowbrow version of the melody is now humorously called "Bayāt Tehran," which is sometimes sung by radio singers in a serious or humorous way, but not as well as in the past. Reza Shah Morādi and Reza Čerāḡ Ali were famous sonnet singers who are spending their old age now.

<sup>\*22</sup> [It is a common practice among Shiites to hail the Prophet and his family by saying aloud in chorus an Arabic short prayer which literally means "May God give peace to Mohammad and his family." A. M.]



latter ceremonies only if they had time after performing at the Royal *tekye* and those of the aristocrats and authorities.

During the first ten days of Muharram, 200-300 *ta'ziye* plays and *rowze* recitations were performed at all *tekyes* of Tehran altogether. There were a number of *rowze* recitations in the next 20 days of Muharram and the first ten days of Safar, but not as many as in the first ten days of Muharram. Also in the last ten days of Safar, on the day of Arba'in<sup>\*23</sup> and also Safar 28, commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hassan and on the 29th day, marking the death of the Prophet, *rowze* recitations and mourn-marching were resumed, but not as much as in the first ten days of Muharram.<sup>55</sup>

Not only in the capital but also in all the cities and most villages, *ta'ziyes* were commonly performed during the mourning months, and in some cities, they were more in vogue than in others. In cities such as Isfahān, Mashhad, Arāk, Qazvin and others, there were many singers and knowledgeable musicians. Singing lessons were very popular, especially among *rowze* reciters, due to the fact that *rowze* sessions were performed on most days of the year, and *rowze* recitation was often the permanent job of a the class of *rowze* reciters, with their good voices serving as their capital and the technical knowledge of music making for their success and popularity.

Nāser od-Din Shah's love of *ta'ziyes*, the performance of this religious ceremony at the Royal *tekye*, the encouragement of the singers by paying them salaries and other benefits, the fact that the princes, other members of the royal family, ministers, the nobility and aristocrats followed the king's conduct and the ordinary people followed those groups as well as their own religious beliefs, and people's hope for otherworldly bliss, all made for the popularity of *ta'ziye* plays during this king's reign. This type of religious drama, in turn, played a very effective role in the training of singers and encouragement of good-voiced people to learn music and singing in religious ceremonies.

The expert musicians took care that the young good-voiced singers reproduced the songs and tunes the right way. These masters of music trained singers to perform at the Royal *tekye* and other great places, and thus some of the trainees turned into such well-known experts themselves who were the best of their own days in terms of singing skills and knowledge and right performance of *radif*, *dastgāhs*, *āvāzes* and *gušes*.

Owing to the facts that the *ta'ziye* ceremonies were performed in all cities and villages of Iran during the mourning days and that some of the singers participating in the Royal *tekye ta'ziyes* came from other cities and provinces than Tehran, they returned to their birth places when the ceremonies at the Royal *tekye* came to an end. There, they trained other *ta'ziye* singers to perform in their own parts of the country and thus had an important role in training the singers of their own hometowns. This was also true of the villages and towns of other provinces and counties where, after returning from the large towns and provinces' centers,

<sup>\*23</sup> [Safar 20, which marks the 40th day of the martyrdom of Imam Hossain and his companions. A. M.]

<sup>55</sup> *My Life*, Vol. 1, p. 288. See the book for further details.

the singers engaged in training the good-voiced youths for *ta'ziyes*, believing that educating such people would bring them otherworldly rewards. Thus, after preparing the singers of *ta'ziyes* during the mourning days, they actually performed the religious plays, which were people's best amusement. In this way, the plays were put on almost all over Iran as a very popular form of mourning ceremonies. All of this led to the appearance of many famous singers, but we know of only a few of them and their artistic talents.

At this point, we will talk about some of the expert musicians of the capital and its surrounding towns and regions and about some of great musicians of the other cities and provinces of Iran who were famous for their art and of whose lives we are to some extent aware.

We know of Mullah Ali Hossain Qazvini, one of the oldest virtuoso *ta'ziye* musicians of the Safavid period, who was a well-known artist, a good-voiced singer and a pious man. His family were all good-voiced *ta'ziye* singers. The most famous artist of his family was Mirzā Hassan Qazvini, who was a master of the singing art in his own city and who trained a number of singers and *ta'ziye* performers of Nāser od-Din's and Mozaffar od-Din's periods, including Mullah Abdolkarim Ğenāb, Hajji Qorbān Ḥan Šāhi, Eqbāl Āzar, his fellow townsmen, and others.

The sons and ancestors of Mirzā Hassan, too, were skillful singers and *ta'ziye* performers, and Mirzā Hassan himself was a *ta'ziye* director (Mo'in ol-Bokā).

Abolqāsem Saqafi, (son of Mirzā Hossain and grandson of Mirzā Hassan), who played the role of Ali Akbar in his youth, is now about 60 years old but still sings powerfully and is well aware of the songs and melodies he performs.

After the death of Mirzā Hassan, his pupils joined the school of Ğenāb Qazvini, who was his best student and a well-known expert musician of the late years of Nāser od-Din shah's rein and of the reign of Mozaffar od-Din Shah.

### **Mullah Abdolkarim Ğenāb**

Ğenāb is considered as a student of Mirzā Hassan Qazvini and Āqā Ğān Sāve'i. As described by great musicians, Ğenāb's voice was not resonant but passionately attractive. He was informed enough in music and was considered a top musician in terms of the knowledge of melodies and *gušes* of Iranian music. In *ta'ziyes*, he played the role of the Imam. He also trained such singers as Qorbān Ḥan Qazvini, also known as Šāhi, the famous singer of the Royal *tekye*, and his fellow townsman, Eqbāl Āzar, the unmatched master of music who died last year. Ğenāb lived for almost 110 years and kept singing up to the last days of his life. Eqbāl Soltān Āzar has praised him as a wonder of his own days.

In addition to singing, Ğenāb was also skillful in playing the *kamānche*. A number of famed *ta'ziye* singers of the capital, Qazvin and Azerbaijan were followers of his artistic style in the same way that a number of Isfahān's best singers living in Nāser od-Din Shah's era had been trained in the style of Seyyed Abdorrahim Isfahāni: one of them was responsible for the orderly performance of *ta'ziyes* and his other son, Ibrahim, managed the *ta'ziye* music.

### **Hajji Qorbān Ḥan**

Qorbān Ḥan was from Qazvin. When he was young, he migrated to Tehran and became a *ta'ziye* singer of the Royal *tekye* thanks to his good loud voice. He also sang prayers and supplications at the royal court and was thus nicknamed "Shāhi" (related to the Shah).

Qorbān Ḥan, whose singing was watched live by the author when Qorbān was about 80 years old, had a charming high-pitched voice and was a knowledgeable singer of the Royal *tekye*. This polite and modest artist was a medium-sized man with long skinny cheeks and a rich man who led an isolated life. He lived for about 100 years and died in 1964. There is a gramophone disk containing the *āvāz* of Afšāri and a *tasnif* by him.

### **Abolhassan Eqbāl Āzar**

Eqbāl Āzar was born in the village of Alvand near Qazvin. His father, Mullah Musā, was a pious cleric who earned a living by farming. After his father's death when he was 7 years old, Abolhassan, he migrated to Qazvin along with his close relatives. Before long, his loud attractive voice took him to the classes of such great musicians as Mirzā Hassan and Mullah Abolkarim, where he learned enough of the *radif* of *dastgāhs*, *āvāzes* and *gušes* of Iranian national music and acquired singing skills. He married Mirzā Hassan's daughter and migrated to Tabriz in his youth and entered the establishment of Mozaffar od-Din Shah, the crown prince of the day. During those days, he became one of the prince's special singers and was titled Eqbāl Soltān. After the death of Mozaffar od-Din Shah, he accompanied the crown prince of the time to Tehran, stayed with him at the court and sang at the Royal *tekye*. When Mohammad Ali Shah was dethroned and Tehran was captured by freedom-seekers, Sattār Ḥan, known as Sardār Melli (National Commander), took Eqbāl back to Tabriz, where he was engaged in governmental jobs.

Eqbāl Āzar was an old singer who was almost unmatched in terms of his powerful voice and musical knowledge. Until recently, when he was still alive, he was apparently considered as one of the oldest knowledgeable musicians and singers, and his mastery was confirmed by the experts of the art. This famous singer once more migrated to Tehran during the reign of Ahmad Shah while his heir apparent, Mohammad Hossain Mirzā, went back to his favorite city of Tabriz.

While in Tehran, Eqbāl socialized with the great musicians of the capital. When Darviš Ḥan, accompanied by a number of singers and players such as Bāqer Ḥan Rāmešgar, Seyyed Hossain Tāherzāde and Mirzā Abdollāh Ḥan Davāmi, took a trip to Tbilisi to record some music, Eqbāl accompanied him there. The disks recorded there were sent to Berlin to be published, and some of them reached Tehran, but the rest of them were destroyed due to the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918).

Eqbāl Āzar has also recorded some music with the peerless musician of today, the tar player Hajji Ali Akbar Ḥan Šahnazi. Although he sang in events other than *ta'ziyes*, too, *ta'ziye* singing has affected his style, an effect which can be inferred from his singing form.

When in Tehran, Eqbāl sang supplications on Ramadan nights, and sometimes his perfect resonant voice could be heard from the minarets of Sepahsālār Mosque (near the National Parliament). His loud voice, along with his varied trills, overshadowed others' supplication singing styles.

This modest, simple artist was a humble, honest patriot. A few years before his death, the Ministry of Culture and Art held a party to celebrate his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. In June 1968, Iranian Radio organized a show to celebrate his achievements. Eqbāl sang there at the age of 107 and was presented with a big beautiful vase for a gift.

Eqbāl Āzar, who passionately loved national music, asked the Radio directors to request its singers not to mingle foreign songs with Iranian *āvāzes*. (It is hoped that the current new singers of the Radio fulfill the wish of an artist who has spent his long life preserving Iranian national music. It is hoped that these singers will not ever forget Eqbāl's wish because they owe him much.)

### **Qoli Ḥan Shāhi**

Qoli Ḥan was a famed singer of the reigns of Nāser od-Din Shah and Mozaffar od-Din Shah and a singer of Royal *tekye ta'ziyes*. He played the role of Lady Zaynab (Peace Be upon Her), and in the play of "Moslem's Two Kids," he took the role of the shepherd, playing the *nay*, and his melodies were so poignant that they really touched the audience. Since Mozaffar od-Din Shah was one of these who were so absorbed by his style of playing the instrument, the Shah took him to Europe with him, and he came to be called Qoli Ḥan Shah Pasand (king's favorite). He was also very good at playing *tasnifs* and rhythmical melodies, and there are albums of him singing the *gušes* of Qatār, Čupāni and rhythmical tunes. He was one of the well-known musicians of his own age.

### **Āqā Ġān Sāve'i**

He was a great singer and *ta'ziye* performer of Nāser od-Din Shah's period. He was an able singer with a masterly command of Iranian music and trained singers who were the good artists of their own age, among them such artists as Mullah Abdolkarim Ġenāb Qazvini and, according to some, Eqbāl Āzar.

A contemporary aged master of music relates an event in which Āqā Ġān Sāve'i, Seyyed Zain Ol-Ābedin Ġorāb Kāšāni and Rezā Qoli Taġriši (a famous singer of Nāser od-Din Shah's period) sang and Āqā Ġān proved better than them by singing correctly. Anyway, this artists was known among great musicians to be an expert singer and a skillful musician.

### **Hajji Mullah Rajab Ali**

Nicknamed Hajji Mo'azzen, Mullah Rajab Ali was from Tarkhorān, near Tafreš. He had a loud resonant voice and sang the role of the Imam. He lived in late Qāġār period and was an informed musician. Because he sang the calls to prayer at

sultans' courts during the late Qāğār period, he came to be called "Hajji Mo'azzen." He was a pious devout who was highly respected at the royal court and gave blessings to people. The contemporary aged singer, Hossain Ali Nakisā, is his Son.

Sāve, Qazvin, Zarand and Arāk<sup>56</sup> were among the cities and regions which had famous *ta'ziye* singers, among them was Mullah Hossain of Payk Zarand (near Sāve) who sang the roles of the Imam and Ladies. Mohammad Ḥan Sāve'i was a *ta'ziye* singer of the late Qāğār era who played the Imam's role. Sāve'i, Mirzā Ġolām Hossain, who played the role of Abbās, and Ġahāngir, who played the character of Moslem (Imam Hossain's cousin), were all trained musicians and good singers who also enjoyed resonant voices.

### **Seyyed Zayn ol-Ābedin Ġorāb<sup>57</sup> Kāšāni**

He was a famous royal court singer who sang at the Royal *tekye* and was deemed as an informed musician of his own age. Ġorāb seemingly had a loud high-pitched voice and was nicknamed "Ġorāb" by Nāser od-Din Shah.

In addition to singing at the Royal *tekye*, he sang prayers on Ramadan nights at the court (i.e., at Shams ol-Emāre palace). He also sang supplications at the houses of Chancellor Mirzā Ali Asğar Ḥan Atābak and Mozaffar od-Din Shah. All his sons had good voices, and Qāsem Ġorāb (Fāria), the contemporary singer, is his grandson.

### **Hossain Ali Nakisā**

Hossain Ali, Son of Hajji Mo'azzen, was born in Tarkhorān of Tafrašin 1921, and because he had a charming loud voice in his childhood, his father taught him to sing. Before the age of puberty, he was a respected singer performing the roles of children at the Royal *tekye* and then became a well-known singer and *ta'ziye* performer. Nakisā once said to the author, "my first teacher was my father. When I came to Tehran, I was chosen to sing at the Royal *tekye*. An aged man, named Mirzā Bābā taught and trained me to sing in *ta'ziyes* and taught me and others the way to sing *dastgāhs*, *āvāzes* and *gušes*. He composed dirges on the model of old songs he knew, with the same rhythms and tunes. After the heyday of *ta'ziyes*, I gave a concert along with Hajji Ali Akbar Ḥan Šahnāzi, which made me even more famous." When I asked him which singer's voice he liked best, he answered, "of *ta'ziye* singers, I liked Seyyed Ahmad Ḥan Sāve'i's and Qoli Ḥan Shāhi's voices, and of other singers, I preferred Ali Ḥan Nāyeb os-Saltane and Seyyed Hossain Tāherzāde.

Nakisā was a member of Oḡovvat (Brotherhood) Society and of the circle of Nematollāhi dervishes and especially respected Safi Ali Shah. Whenever the

<sup>56</sup> The village of Hātam Abād (near Aštīān) was a center of *ta'ziye* singing in that area.

<sup>57</sup> Ġorāb: the edge of something; the sharp edge of an ax or of anything else. Qerāb, however, means "sheath." Hayāti Gilāni writes: "Since there is no man to fight me in battle / I had better put the sword back in the sheath."

Society celebrated an occasion, Hossain Hang Āfarin played music while Nakisā sang along. Once when I was at Hang Āfarin's house, Nakisā came and started rehearsing the famous *tasnif* of Šaydā, which he had composed to celebrate the birthday of Imam Ali<sup>\*24</sup> and was played in the *dastgāh* of Čahārgāh and which started with the following lines: "It is the birthday of God's beloved prophet / for this auspicious birth, the poor are all happy." Nakisā continuously sang the *tasnif* which Hang Āfarin played to prepare for the celebration. Although he is more than 90 years old, he still takes part in most of the Brotherhood Society's festive events and sings to them.

Nakisā is an aged master of singing. He has been singing for a long time and is still performing with his resonant voice. The only problem is that he produces false notes when he goes high. Otherwise, we may claim that he has not yet lost his high-pitched voice and many trills which are the best in terms of their variety.

Hossain Ali Nakisā is a humble, simple, kind, good-natured dervish. He is by no means selfish or proud. He has worked hard as an artist and used to have enough knowledge of music and a good memory, but old age has now affected his memory. He sings various songs but cannot remember the titles. He spends his retirement in his birthplace, Tafresh, and takes a few trips a year to Tehran to please his friends.

### **Seyyed Ahman Ḥan**

Seyyed Ahman Ḥan, nicknamed "Sārang," was an excellent singer and famous *ta'ziye* performer of Tehran. He was originally from Sāve and played the role of Imam Hossain.

Abdollah Ḥan Davāmi, himself a master of music, praised him and his singing style. Seyyed Ahman Ḥan, who outlived the Qāğār dynasty, was a non-religious singer too. Hajji Āqa Mohammad Irāni quotes Mirzā Abdollah Ḥan Atābaki, the great tar player, in the following way:

Mirzā Hossain Qoli, Mirzā Asadollah Ḥan Atābaki, Seyyed Ahmad Ḥan Sārang and Bāqer Ḥan Rāmešgar, the *kamānche* player, along with Bāqer, the great *zarb* player, traveled to Europe to record music. Mirzā Asadollah Ḥan reports that Seyyed Ahmad Ḥan suddenly felt like singing and started singing aloud. The captain heard him and, terrified, asked what was up and what the sound was. They told him that an Iranian was singing. The captain ordered his men to ask him to be quiet. Seyyed Ahmad Ḥan was upset with this and began to sing louder. The captain, angry at the situation, ordered his men to take all Iranian passengers into the hold of the ship, which was a public place. Thus, all the Iranians were transferred to the hold below the deck, which was an improper place. After going to this unsuitable place, Mirzā Hossain Qoli started playing the tar and Bāqer Ḥan accompanied the song with his *kamānche*. The *zarb* also joined in and soon an orchestra was formed. The captain asked his servants where the orchestra belonged and where the men were located. They told him that they were

<sup>\*24</sup> [This could be a mistake by the author, Mr. Mašhun, because definitely the lines he quotes here refer to the birth of the Prophet, not Imam Ali. A. M.]



the same Iranian passengers he had ordered to be transferred to the hold. He personally came to the hold and after seeing the ensemble and hearing the music, he smiled happily and ordered that they should be given a chamber near his own and be fully catered for. He told his men that as long as the musicians were on board the ship, they were to be treated as his guests and that they should be served and received respectfully. The ensemble were the captain's guests, and he paid for their personal expenses as well as the transportation of their goods."

### **Hajji Ḥan**

Hajji Ḥan, also known as "Hajji Bārekallāh," was a famous *ta'ziye* performer and singer of Tehran, who was originally from Tāleqān (near Qazvin) and more often than not played the role of Abbās and Horr. His voice, which I had heard during my childhood in *ta'ziyes* and other events, was loud and full of trills. He also sang in happy festive events. He was first a hosier, but he left the job and became a singer for the rest of his life. In addition to singing, Hajji Ḥan played the *santur* and was a well-known singer in Tehran. Even before reaching the age of 60, due to his indulgence in drinking alcohol, he had a heart attack on the journey to Dāmḡān and died. This happened in the early years of Rezā Shah's reign.

### **Mirzā Rahim**

Mirzā Rahim was a *ta'ziye* singer at the Royal *tekye* and can be spotted in the pictures showing the *ta'ziye* singers of that age.<sup>58</sup> He played the role of Abbās. He also played the *kamānche* and, for a while, he was a member of the group of musicians working for Kāmrān Mirzā, Nāyeb os-Saltane (the crown prince). As the late Ḥāleqi notes in his book, Mirzā Rahim was his cousin's husband and his music teacher and trainer. He writes, "I had a cousin whose husband played *kamānche* well. He was an old man, fat and medium-sized with a beard dyed with henna. He would sit on his knees, hold his pretty *kamānche*, decorated with sea-shells and *ḥātām*, and would play it. They say he had been performing in royal *ta'ziyes* and had a good voice. He had acquired skills in playing the *kamānche* and had become a musician in the office of Nāyeb os-Saltane .... He was an old musician and played the *dastgāhs* in detail." In addition to Tehran, there were *ta'ziye* singers in other provinces and counties, especially those who played the roles of Imam Hossain and his company.<sup>59</sup> These were all good-voiced people, well aware of the songs and melodies of musical *radif*. Some of them were the best musicians of their own times and played an important role in training singers, one of whom we will introduce here, a master of *ta'ziyes* and trainer of Isfahān's *ta'ziye* singers.

<sup>58</sup> *History of Iranian Music*, part 1, p. 350.

<sup>59</sup> Those who played the roles of Imam's enemies (the so-called *ašqiā*) often did not enjoy good voices and expressed their words and lyrics in long notes.



### **Seyyed Abdolbāqi Baḥtiāri**

He was a famous singer and musician of the late Qāḡār era who trained *ta'ziye* singers of Isfahān and its surrounding areas. He played the character of Abbās and worked as the director of *ta'ziyes* too. Groups of *ta'ziye* singers were trained by him and he had a large *ta'ziye* group to direct and arranged for the group to perform plays in Isfahān and Shirāz.

According to Seyyed Hossain Tāherzāde, an excellent singing expert, Seyyed Abdolbāqi had an Isfahāni student (known as Seyyed Hossain Šabid) who had a passionate loud voice and made a variety of trills. In terms of memory and knowledge of the *radif* of *dastgāhs*, *āvāzes* and *gušes* of Iranian music, he was a moving book and a perfect musician.

We can gather from the late Tāherzāde's and others' words that the prominent *ta'ziye* singers had excellent skills at, and command of, Iranian national music and that they played an effective role in preserving the songs and tunes of Iranian national music.

In the age we have been describing here, the good-voiced singers were those who engaged in *rowze* occupations and *ta'ziyes*. If we wrote the biographies of these people, they would fill up many books and would help revive the names of many masters of the singing art. Unfortunately, however, we do not know much about their artistic features and lives, just as we do not know about other past musicians.

In short, the mourning ceremonies and other versions of religious customs, including *rowze* recitations and, especially, *ta'ziyes*, and, generally music, played through *āvāzes* a very significant role in preserving national tunes and training singers, thereby making many great artists. It is very unfortunate that *ta'ziyes* came into vogue only when Iranian old music was to a large extent lost. Yes, this type of religious drama provided a disciplined context for the revival of the remaining parts. With the establishment of the Music Department at Dār ol-Fonun School in 1851 and the ensuing widespread use of international musical notation by its teachers, the department's staff very effectively helped preserve and record the remaining Iranian musical heritage through the first few groups of the school's students. In this way, Iranian old music was saved from extinction.

Today, we can acquire the forgotten songs and melodies of national music through the lyrics of *ta'ziyes* which are known to all sorts of people. We may also gain help from the contemporary elderly *ta'ziye* singers of Tehran and other provinces.