

Negotiating a Position:

Women Musicians and Dancers in Post-Revolution Iran

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Abstract

This research examines the changes in conditions of music and dance after the 1979 revolution in Iran. My focus is the restrictions imposed on women instrumentalists, dancers and singers and the ways that have confronted them. I study the social, religious, and political factors that cause restrictive attitudes towards female performers. I pay particular attention to changes in some specific musical genres and the attitudes of the government officials towards them in pre and post-revolution Iran. I have tried to demonstrate the emotional and professional effects of post-revolution boundaries on female musicians and dancers.

Chapter one of this thesis is a historical overview of the position of female performers in pre-modern and contemporary Iran. The next chapter examines the socio-political changes in post-revolution Iran and the impacts of the event on musical atmosphere of the country. The focus of this chapter is on female instrumentalists. There are two other chapters with focus on female singers and female dancers. Each of these chapters is followed by a case study to examine the post-revolution changes more precisely.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: A Historical Overview of the Condition of Female Performers in Iran	45
Introduction	45
Music and Dance in Pre-Islamic Iran (4000 BCE – 650 AD)	48
Women Musicians after the Arrival of Islam.....	52
Women Musicians during the Pre-modern Era (1501-1906)	55
Pahlavi Era (1921-1979): Female Musicians and the Rise of Modern Institutions	61
1979 Revolution: Prohibitions in Power	67
Music through Post-revolution Political Changes	68
The first Era: 1979-1989	68
The Second Era: 1989-97	71
Reform Era: 1997- 2005	73
The Era of Populist Fundamentalism: 2005-2011	76
Chapter Two: Music and Instrumentalist through Political Changes	78
Musical Genres during the Twentieth Century: Types, Origins and Classifications	78
Iranian Classical Music: Challenges, Changes and Developments	86
(1) Music and the Contradictory Interpretations of Islam	86
(2) The Media and the Conservative Control	87
(3) The Pitfalls of Receiving Permits from MCIG	91
(4) Financial Issues, Copyright Problems, Music Halls and Sponsors	99
(5) Developments: Gender, Instrument and Power	106
(6) Women, Islamic cover, Performance, Resistance and Choice.....	112

Conclusion	116
 Chapter Three: Instrument, Gender and Restoration of Ghānoon/Qanoon: A Case Study on Maliheh Saeedi	 118
Introduction: Remembering an Achievement	118
Family and Music Background	120
Reconstruction and Restoration of <i>Ghānoon</i> as an Iranian Instrument	126
Changing the Sound Range and Tone of the Instrument	127
Saeedi and Her Work with <i>Ghānoon</i> after the Revolution	129
Helping to Transform the Post-Revolution Performance Boundaries for women	132
Saeedi's Role in Changing the Post-Revolution Educational Boundaries	134
Making <i>Ghānoon</i> Popular	136
Composition	138
Instrument and Gender: the Transformation of a Position	139
Publication of Books and Albums: Problems and Concerns.....	143
Books.....	143
Audio Material	144
Problems with censorship	145
Finances	150
Performances.....	151
Conclusion	153
 Chapter Four: Female Singers and the Transformation of Singing Genres	 154
Introduction	154
The Musical Life of a Culture: Past and Present Singing in Public	155
The Expansion of Singing Genres before the Revolution	159

The Contraction and Transformation of Music Genres after the Revolution	168
Classification of the Spaces and Styles (1980-2010)	172
Spaces	
(1) Female Singers in National Television and Radio Channels	173
Female Singing in Unofficial, Semi-Official or Liminal Performances	174
(2) Private Performances inside Houses	174
(3) Female-Only Performances in Music Halls	176
(4) Public Performances outside Iran	181
Forms	
(5) Performances with a second or third voice accompanying the solo singer	182
(6) Singing with a changed voice	183
(7) Solo Singing in Rare Occasions and Theatrical Performances	184
Singing Classes and the Prospect of Finding New Talents	185
Conclusion	186
Chapter Five: Tradition, Modernity, Mysticism and Continuity, A Case Study on Parissa's	
Singing Career	187
Introduction: Remembering a Presence and Recording It	187
Early Career: Learning, Practicing and Becoming Spiritual	190
CPPTMI and Parissa's State Sponsored Activities before the Revolution	196
Performance, Image and Identity: Parissa's Attitudes towards the Bans	205
The Post-Revolution Restrictions and Parissa's Position in Iranian Music	213
Performance Features	216
Performance Spaces and Audiences	216
Physical Positions and Body Movements	217
Musical Features of Parissa's Post-Revolutionary Works	219

Improvisation	221
Conclusion	223
Chapter Six: Female Dancer and the Transformation of Dance in Contemporary Iran	225
Introduction	225
Dance and the Limits of Popular Approval	225
Dance in the Course of the Contemporary History of Iran	227
Dance after the 1979 Revolution: Restriction and Transformation	237
The divide between the public and private lives of people in Iran	239
Dance as an Illegal Leisure activity	240
1. Public-in-private spheres	241
2. Public spheres outside the country	242
3. Private-in-public spheres inside the country	242
Dance as an art form	244
1. Dance in films and as part of theatrical performances	245
2. Dance per se in semi-public and public spheres	248
Teaching/Learning Dance	250
Conclusion	253
Chapter Seven: Standardization of Dance, Post-Revolution Bans, Transformation and Continuity: A Case Study on Farzaneh Kaboli's Career	255
Introduction: Catching up with the Memories of Childhood	255
Early Life, Learning and Practicing /Social and Religious Contexts	257
The End of an Era: Revolution, Dance and Kaboli's Career	265
Confronting the bans through theatre	266

Confronting the Bans through Teaching	270
First Performance and Conflicts	271
Dance Authorization and the Red Lines in Performances	275
Choreography	279
Décor, Dressing and Make Up in Performances	281
Ideals, Identity, Personality and Family Support	283
Conclusion	284
Conclusion: Music, Dance and Post-revolution Iran	285
Bibliography	288
Discography and Filmography	298

Introduction

'You are going to have a music tutor but you should not tell your friends about it,' said my mother on a hot summer day in 1981. I was filled with expectations and excitement, and soon learning music was added to the list of publically forbidden activities that I used to do. Although as an eleven-year-old girl I had little understanding of 'why' I was supposed to hide specific things from the public, I had already become an expert in 'how'. With the advent of the Islamic government in 1979, the gap between what Iranians could practice indoors and outdoors widened so that for the people of my generation the necessity to keep most of one's hobbies and practices to oneself became the first rule of survival. One simply had to hide one's true identity and real thoughts.

The wide gap between what the government wanted people to be and what people themselves wanted to be, and the consequent self-censorship that one had to go through in various stages of life were then and still are two simple rules of life in Iran. As to music-related activities of the people, they included listening to all forms of 'illegal/unauthorized/illegitimate' (*gheir-e mojāz*) music from the cassettes of prominent Iranian classical singers to Michael Jackson and ABBA. They watched the TV channels of neighboring countries for music and films, danced in indoor parties to the latest cassettes and music videos of Iranian pre-revolution singers based in Los Angeles, and followed the latest hair and dress fashions found in these visual resources. Yet all these needed to be kept to the family and close friends.

The clash of ideals and ideologies in the Iran of the early 1980s led to cultural conflicts and social shocks. Yet what intensified these conflicts and offered the greatest unexpected shock came from the measures that the government implemented to stop the so-called non-Islamic behaviors of Iranian people. These included numerous restrictions on the everyday activities of people specifically on anything related to happiness. Although for me this social change

marked the start of my involvement with music in an educational way, the clear change was from happy, colorful memories of togetherness filled with indoor and outdoor activities to gloomy outdoor memories punctuated by indoor activities that mixed anxiety with merriment.

Before the revolution my earliest memories of exposure to music were the songs of Marziyeh (1924-2010) and Delkash (1924-2004) whom my father admired and I knew most of their hits by heart.¹ Apart from the tapes which my parents regularly played at home or in our car while we were travelling, my father often sang them while shaving or gardening. I remember watching the opera of Arshin Mal Alan on national television and imitating the moves of professional male and female dancers, dancing in colorful costumes to the cheerful melodies of folk/regional music for the New Year celebrations of 1357, (20th march 1978).² I remember the centrality of music and dance in my aunt's wedding party in a big beautiful hotel in Tehran just a few months before the establishment of the new system. The celebration included a performance by the famous belly dancer, Tavoos (Peacock) and a woman performer singing the lewd folk song, '*Dandoon Dandoonam Kon*' (Teeth, teeth, bite me with your teeth).³

During the winter of 1979, in one moment my cousins and I were singing along and dancing to Googoosh (b.1951) singing in Persian or Ayse Ajda Pekkan (b.1946) of Turkey singing a French pop song on Iranian television; and in another, we were painting horns and blood-covered fangs on the pictures of Mohammad Reza shah Pahlavi on bank notes or the first pages of our school books, shouting the revolutionary slogans and songs. I remember how,

¹ Marziyeh and Delkash were the most prominent female singers of the 1950s onwards. Though they are publically known as the singers of Iranian classical music, some masters describe their work as popularized classical music and some as *Melli* music. For more, please see chapter 4.

² Before the revolution any music or dance which was performed in rural areas was called folk. After the revolution it changed name to regional music or dance. The borrowed term 'folk' was often used to reinforce the idea of Iran as a nation in which regions represented folk traditions. However, the Persian term, *Mahalli*, then as after the revolution, reflected the regional aspects.

³ I still want to find out what was special about the melody, rhythm, the words and the way the woman sang it that carved it in my mind with just one performance!

upon the victory of the revolution, I, at the age of seven, distributed sweets from our car, cheering with people for overthrowing the ‘corrupted, westernized monarchy of Pahlavi’.⁴



Celebration of the victory of the Revolution, winter 1979⁵

On the 20th of September, 1980, Iraq invaded Iran with bombarding some southern cities. The war lasted for eight years. Whereas the southern and western parts of the country were under great pressures, in the northern parts where I lived, the impact was not as intense; the news of the war, the arrival and settling of refugees from the war zones, the regular calls for human and financial backups, the drafting of soldiers and volunteers to the front.

⁴ Ayatollah Khomeini was often described as the ‘saviour’, the angelic figure facing the satanic figure of the Shah. Rural rhymes praised him in very simple language and revolutionary songs with high poetic qualities did the same. The climax, however, came when on an autumn night our neighbor’s teenage girl excitedly called us to see ‘Imam Khomeini’s shadow on the moon’, which I did not buy just because my mum’s reaction told me that it was a stupid idea. However, it was not long after when the street conflicts which were like a civil war in some cities began and shattered the euphoria of a new beginning and a utopia.

⁵ Picture from ‘Iranian Historical Photographs Gallery’ in *Fouman.com* at http://www.fouman.com/history/Iran_Historical_Photos_Gallery.htm

In 1980 I was studying in a mixed school, the last one still surviving in our city. It was segregated the following year while there were rumors about the compulsory *hejāb*. 1980 was the year I began to learn about the forbidden things and how to handle the masking, the dual life. I learned that segregation, *hejāb*, revolutionary songs, Koran recitations, singing in praise of the leader, etc. belonged to the world outside; and listening to music and dancing, having fun in mixed parties without *hejāb*, noisy laughter, jokes and playing cards belonged to an indoor life that one should not talk about outside. Determined to implement the still unknown values of the revolution, the revolutionary forces were changing the world outside in a process that attempted to redefine its limits and change its structures to make them Islamic. To confront the non-Islamic practices that were supposed to originate in the influence of the 'corrupted west', for a time, even the language institutes were shut down let alone the dance and music ones. For some years music was restricted to revolutionary songs or the ones associated with martyrs or the annual celebrations of the 'victory of the revolution' at school, television and radio.

When I began to have my music lessons with a tutor, I had no choice for the musical instrument. The choice had to be made on the basis of finding a tutor who could be trusted, which in my case was a *Santoor* (hammered dulcimer) player. In Tehran the choices were wider but in other cities, this was more problematic. My cousin and I had our music lessons at our house every Tuesday evening. Since I lived in the North of Iran, we could watch the Soviet television channels with the help of boosters. As a result, apart from my music lessons and my parents' fairly good collection of Iranian/Persian classical music tapes, I could watch television recordings of ballet and classical European music performances though sometimes with poor quality.⁶

⁶ The term 'Persian' has often been used by music scholars to refer to classical music of Iran. This may originate in that Iran was called Persia by western countries up to the 1930s. However, since the term refers only to one of the major ethnicities in Iran, I personally prefer to use 'Iranian'.

Having music lessons would not have been such a big issue for me if the revolution and the changes in the country's musical atmosphere had not occurred. Its importance for me is basically because it kept me in contact with live music, something that the majority of Iranians were deprived of and regularly admonished against in those days. Like many other school students I was also exposed to educational warnings against music. For instance, one day, a year after I had started my music lessons, our head teacher came to our classroom to talk about the negative impacts of music, emphasizing that it shortens one's life.⁷ After initial explanations, she gave us the examples of Mozart who died at 35, Abolhassan Saba who died at 54 and some other leading musicians and then enumerated the names of several clergymen who had lived into their 80s and 90s. Since I was working with Saba's books as my main sources of learning Santoor, for a time I was concerned I was going to die in an early age. She also recited religious sayings about the disadvantages of listening to or practising music.

I think my exposure to the cultural changes in my home country and watching what was happening in a neighboring country at the same time, subconsciously led me towards what I am doing now. I always thought about the transformation of our lives and our musical landscape, but never found the opportunity to write about my experience. I researched the problems young female musicians, like myself, faced, but since writing about such matters was problematic, I cancelled the idea of writing about the subject during my BA and MA years.

In 2004, a year after I left Iran for the UK, I read the recently published *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), a memoir by Azar Nafisi, a professor of English literature, who used to have group discussions of the forbidden literary works with some of her students in her house.⁸ The

⁷ The head teacher was a 19-year-old girl residing over university educated teachers with more than twenty years of experience. As my mum told me, she was her student a couple of years earlier. She had joined the paramilitary Basij forces and become the head teacher just after she finished her high school. Such things were quite customary during the early days of the revolution when belief was considered more important than education. The situation is still somewhat similar with the difference that they now have fake MAs and PhDs.

⁸ After the 'Cultural Revolution' of the early 1980s, the content of the primary and secondary school materials

idea of writing a memoir of my own experiences in music related activities occurred to me. For me the main reason for writing a memoir was to document what had happened to female musicians and performers after the revolution. As a result, soon the idea transformed itself into one proper idea for a PhD study. Iranian female musicians and performers who had enjoyed a high degree of popularity and career options in pre-revolution Iran suddenly found themselves treated like suspicious strangers in post-revolution Iran. For them it was a matter of survival to transcend their bitter feelings, transform their work and find new ways to practise their profession. To avoid being ridiculed, fined or imprisoned, they had to become detached from their emotions and perform in the sober atmosphere prescribed by the government.

The official policy during the Pahlavi period (1921/25-79) was to encourage women to get involved in music related activities. With that gone, they found themselves on a new planet whose rules were quite different from what they used to know. Keeping their emotions to themselves and remaining objective to negotiate new spaces for their music was the best they could do. For my proposal, therefore, I narrowed the subject down to 'The Role of Women in Iran's Musical Culture after the 1979 Revolution'. Thus my enthusiasm for documenting the experience of Iranian female musicians plus my own memories and experiences about the post-revolution state of music in Iran formed the major incentives for the present thesis.

The Project

The 1979 Revolution in Iran resulted in the establishment of an Islamic government that made Iran 'the only country in today's world with the so-called caesaropapist embrace of throne and altar...' (Kazemipur and Rezaei 2003: 348). This totalitarian formation proposed the Islamization of Iranian culture as one of its primary goals. Iran had been a Muslim country for

changed. In higher education, especially in the art and humanities, many books and references were forbidden. The nude pictures of statues and paintings in reference books, for instance, were ripped off or blackened.

fourteen centuries, but the intention was to 'cleanse' society by removing the so-called 'corrupting vestiges of western culture' imported to Iran during 'the British and US backed Pahlavi government'. (Ibid. 349) Central to this self-assigned governmental mission was a strong patriarchal attitude that led to the establishment of several revolutionary forces to act as vice squads, going around in the streets arresting or admonishing people in order to inculcate what they defined as 'Islamic behaviour' into the minds and lives of Iranians.

The early popular and intellectual support for this corrective attitude came from three major sources. The first was rooted in the patriarchal cores of Iranian society which was specifically concerned with controlling women and the youth, who were, according to this discourse, in danger of being corrupted by 'western misconceptions' about life and freedom.

The second was the revolutionary zeitgeist of the early 1980s which intended to break down everything and build it up again. This revolutionary zeitgeist included the contribution of Marxist, materialist or even semi-liberal groups, who emphasized a form of revolutionary commitment that required seriousness and perseverance against colonial intrusions and thus left some space for top-down, corrective attitudes towards people. Other groups supporting this revolutionary zeitgeist were more religious. Rooted in the anti-colonial discourses of the 1960s and 1970s, these more religious groups emphasized a movement 'back to the roots' and tried to confront the cultural and economic influence of the West by advertising Islamic ideas. The major intellectual proponents of this call for retuning to the roots, the philosopher Ahmad Fardid (1909-94), the novelist and cultural activist Jalal Al-e Ahamd (1923-69), the public intellectual Dr. Ali Shariati (1933-77) and their followers were not necessarily more devout or religious than the rest of the population. Some were even completely secular in their approach

to life. However, the ideologies that they promoted set Islam as the only force that could decolonize Iranian minds and eliminate what they named 'westoxication'.⁹

This intellectual movement also coincided with the third source of influence, a wave of feminist ideas with Marxist or religious roots that promoted simple living among educated women and offered support for changing Iranian women and men. Serious women were to avoid copying what they referred to as 'over-feminine' or 'doll-like' images of womanhood projected into their minds through Hollywood films and western fashions.

These historical and cultural forces provided the initial support that triggered the process of changing people's appearances and attitudes to life, but in the hands of radicals the process became a nightmare that still, though less severely, afflicts Iranians. The dominant discourse was that of cutting and trimming to re-grow from the roots and destroying what was wrongly built to reconstruct a new world. It was as if all Iranians were to be thrown into one mould to create an Islamic utopia. The process of Islamization therefore affected all the society regardless of gender, religion, educational and economic backgrounds. Its impact, however, was stronger on those in the arts or humanities in general, and on women in particular. The process deprived them of some of the rights they had enjoyed for several decades during the Pahlavi era (1921/25-79), particularly during Mohammad Reza Shah's rein (1941-79). It added social and religious restrictions to the political ones imposed by the two Pahlavis.¹⁰

The new system required the arts and literature to be committed to the ideals of Islamic revolution and encourage sacrifice and martyrdom in the war against 'global imperialism' and 'its puppet', the term Iranian government used for Saddam Hussein who was waging a war

⁹ For more on the intellectual roots of Iranian revolutions and the ideas of these intellectual figures, please see Mehrzad Broujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), which traces the development of religious nativism in Iran.

¹⁰ For the historical forces that led to the formation of an Islamic government in Iran, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

against Iran. Among the arts, music was the most controversial. It was for a long time suppressed, publicly heard only in religious chants and revolutionary hymns. Yet the complex demands of a culture in transition, controversies among Islamic scholars themselves and the inevitable pressures of rapid modernization and globalisation, gradually forced the Islamic government to revise some of its cultural policies. Gradually, for instance, the classical Iranian music which had been rechristened as mystic music (*Musiqi-e erfāni*) found a place in Iran's official radio and an imageless presence in Iran's national television.

At its more political level, this tacit process of negotiation, which had began in response to the resistance of more educated, secular layers of society against compulsory Islamization, resulted in the gradual transformation of legal and social prohibitions. The 1988 *fatwa* of Ayatollah Khomeini, for instance, legalized music within certain contexts, trading of musical instruments, and public training of musicians. It also re-established music departments at several universities after eight years of closure. This also allowed the gradual formation of various music groups from the mid 1990s which in turn transformed the soundscape of Iranian life. The re-emerging of pop and rock bands that pressed the government for concert permits and attracted huge crowds created a multi-voiced environment that could no longer be reversed.

When it comes to women, however, the process of cultural negotiation remains problematic. There are basically two important aspects that one needs to think about when considering this process in relation to women. Firstly, though Islamic scholars have, for many centuries, disagreed over the methods of government and the proper position of women in the social and private lives of Islamic societies, the intensity of the arguments of the more radical groups makes the process of negotiation more difficult. For some of these scholars women's presence in the public life is by itself considered devious and dangerous to society:

The Islamic idea that women have a pernicious seductive power which endangers the Muslim social order, when translated into laws and legal practices, affects the believer and non believer, Muslims and non Muslims alike. Thus, Islamists ... have taken upon themselves the guardianship of the moral purity of women in the societies. (Moghissi 2000: 27).

For these religious scholars and their cohorts, the more something represents femininity, the more it should be restricted: 'female sexuality has to be confined, tamed, and controlled for the good of the community.' (Moghissi 2000: 28) Whenever such ideas prevail and form the dominant political discourse, female artists are to conceal their sexuality behind metaphoric and actual veils or go through artistic self distortion to avoid crossing the red lines.¹¹

The second aspect, however, as Moghissi also states, is more socio-cultural than religious: 'Islam varies in the restrictions it imposes on women' and 'the level of rigidity implicated by the Islamic *shari'a* depends on the level of society's socio-economic development and local cultural traditions'. (Moghissi 2000: 7) Thus, in contemporary Iran, while some of the religious groups affiliated with the centres of power try to keep their privileges and delay or distort the process of socio-cultural expansion by demonizing the secular layers of society as decadent or westernized, others address the challenges of modernity with greater flexibility and engage in a strategic process of negotiation with the secular sections of society.

During the presidency of the reformist politician, Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), for instance, some restrictions were removed. Though some more religiously rooted restrictions, like the ones imposed on female solo singing, remained in place, music began to emerge 'from its liminal position...assuming a more central and active role in Iranian society' (Nooshin, 2005 [A]: 254). Popular music was legalized, female-only music festivals were established to provide performance opportunities for female solo singers, and some forms of dance

¹¹ "Red Lines" are the cultural, religious and political boundaries of freedom in Iran. They are dangerous to be crossed, but can be approached and, if subtly handled, gradually redefined.

re-emerged through theatrical performances. Yet with the presidency of the populist radical, Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad in 2005, the state tried to reinforce some of these restrictions, and thus many of the activities that had begun to emerge went back to basements.

Research Objectives

Although the rapid process of transformation during and after the revolution in Iran greatly affected the conditions of women performers (musicians and dancers), their lives and careers have never been subjected to a comprehensive study to examine the multifaceted impacts of this process on their lives and works. In my thesis I have tried to fill this gap by exploring different aspects of this transformation. As an ethnomusicological study, my research examines the professional lives of female performers in the social, cultural, religious and political context of post-revolution Iran. I have tried neither to present nor to prove any hypothesis but just to create a critical framework that allows me to examine the multiplicity of reactions performers have demonstrated in confronting and challenging the different boundaries on their field of expertise. Working on the premises of ethnomusicology, I have explored women's roles in music-related activities as researchers, teachers, instrumentalists, composers, singers and dancers. I have studied the factors involved in shaping, maintaining and transforming these roles; the women's professional expectations; and the challenges they face as they try to enhance their roles or fulfil their expectations. I have attempted to find answers to some fundamental questions about the impacts of the 1979 revolution, as an historic event that radically transformed the socio-political and cultural boundaries of life in Iran.

The long history of religious and political censorship and the dominance of political systems representing small sections of the population have left Iran in a crisis of documentation. From a global perspective, therefore, this study is an original contribution to ethnomusicology in its documentation of some of the least studied phenomena in Iranian music. It documents the

issues of gender and music in an Islamic context, and reclaims a presence neglected due to religiously imposed patriarchal hegemonies. At a local level, besides documentation, it has the potential to open new horizons for and thus empower Iranian female musicians whose resolve and professionalism have often remained undocumented and unacknowledged.

Since any documentation needs clear examples, I have organized my findings so that each chapter on a specific music-related practice will be followed by an in-depth case study on the life of an individual practitioner in the field before and after the revolution. Although my case studies deal with highly trained professional individuals, who stand above common social relations, since their cultural functions is defined in terms of performance, I have examined their musical life in the context of the forces that define their society. For my fieldwork, therefore, I have tried to construct a model of intermingling social, religious, political, and economic spheres that have drastic but unequal impacts on the lives of my subjects. Music is at the centre of the model, where all these spheres meet.

Research Questions, Concerns and Limitations

Throughout my research I have been concerned with some basic issues/themes that have modified the approaches that I have used to examine my subjects. The first one has had to do with the issues of change and challenge, tradition and modernity in a country which has been entangled in rapid transition. The second one has been my concern with the issue of gender in relation with music and Islam as a religion which has had full political power in post-revolution Iran. The last one has been my commitment to ethnography, to finding the roots of current attitudes towards music and documenting the contemporary history of music in Iran.

1- To fulfill the requirement of my concern with the issue of change and transition, I researched the historical backgrounds to music prohibition, particularly in relation to women. I also

examined the origins, the emergence and consequences of the official bans and boundaries imposed on music and dance in post-revolution Iran — after they had been supported and/or refashioned in modern forms during the reign of two Pahlavi kings (1925-79). I also explored the types of challenges that musicians and dancers faced/still face as they are trying to remove the bans or modify them. My focus in this regard was on the public aspects of music because one of the major social changes after the revolution was the gradual widening of the gap between the public and private lives of people. For instance, although dance and female solo singing was banned, they continued to be performed in private, even though the people involved could face house raids by the revolutionary guards, fines or imprisonment. So although I have examined the nature of private performances, the focus of my dissertation is public aspects of music, and performance as it occurs in the public spheres.

In this regard I have benefited from articles that have used case studies to map the public attitude towards gender and music in the Islamic countries. Though not directly to my work, Martin Stokes' 'The Tearful Public Sphere: Turkey's "Sun of Art," Zeki Müren' (2003), for instance, has created a theoretical framework that contemplates gender and sentimentality in Turkish public music. The references to Zeki Müren's ability to balance his public performances on the borders of gender relations and extending them without radically violating them provided me with parallel examples of the type of attitudes that have helped Iranian female performers to perform after the revolution despite the new codes of behaviour.

Building on the examples of these I tried to find answers to the following questions:

- What were the basic socio-cultural changes that impacted the lives and careers of Iranian female musicians?
- How did different female performers adapt to or challenge the changes?
- How long did it take for different musicians — considering their different expertises — to cope with new regulations/find themselves in this new world?

- How different was their attitudes towards these changes? How did they confront the new rules that went against their expectations?

The theme of change and challenge was specifically important in choosing my case studies I chose them because of their different attitudes. The first kind of response is the one associated with those who stopped working but then began to insist on what is right according to their experience without being overtly concerned about challenging anything. The second one is associated with the ones who believed in openly challenging the rules and arguing for their rights in a constant process of fighting and negotiating. The third type is the one associated with reducing or modifying and modestly challenging the regulations with a readiness to compromise. There have been huge changes in the society I am conducting my fieldwork on and the process reveals a multiplicity of approaches that deserve attention.

2- My second major concern addresses the issue of gender and religion within the boundaries that Islam, as a religion and a source of political power can impose on music and women. In my research I have examined gender issues in relation to social and religious matters and not just music itself. This is because in post-revolution Iran women were made to conceal their sexuality to be able to perform. For a time, this concealment functioned as an unwritten rule that was to some extent accepted by women as a necessary revolutionary act, but they gradually began to confront it when it lasted for more than they expected it. In this regard, I raised the following questions during my research and tried to respond to them.

- What are the religious, cultural and familial obstacles that female musicians face?
- What are the red lines of negotiating more space for them?
- What are the limitations imposed from within the musical culture itself?
- How can these obstacles and red lines be more effectively challenged?
- What have been the positive and negative aspects of the revolution and Islamization on the careers of female performers?

The title of my thesis and the fact that I am concerned with gender issues suggest that my research is likely to use tools and concepts from gender studies in order to analyze my subjects. However, though gender is a constant concern and I discuss it in relation to different aspects of my work, my tools and concepts are primarily ethnographic rather than gender based. I explore different music related issues to reveal the socio-political, religious and cultural processes that have impacted the process of change, the challenges that individuals face in their musical careers and the methods they use to overcome these obstacles.

Most Iranian female musicians have been trying to overcome the segregation policies imposed by the government by proving that their music is not different from the music produced by men. This phenomenon can be studied from a gender study perspective, but for my study which is concerned with culture and music; it would be much more fruitful if I focus on the ethnographic causes and impacts of the process. Most female musicians have willingly contributed to this aspiration towards achieving a genderless status for several reasons. One is that in classical forms of music in general, there are not major differences between male and female music making. The second is that to avoid being deprived of performance or being forced to perform only in women-only performances women have been forced to conceal their femininity to such an extent that it has now become a part of the tradition. The practices associated with this form of concealing could even be seen in the works of some leading pre-revolution women performers (musician and singers) who approached their performance in ways that were quite similar to men. While referring to the significance of these practices from a gender perspective, I have preferred to examine the multi-faceted roots and results rather than confront or theorize the process.

3- My third concern has been historical and cultural documentation. My study is historical in that it reviews the position of female performers in Iranian history and explores their condition

and their roles in specific musical practices in a framework that compares the past and the present. I examined a wide range of historical texts to understand the precedents of the attitudes that made the post-revolution suppressions and boundaries possible. This was partly because I knew that most of the restrictions that female performers faced in post-revolution Iran reflected long standing cultural and religious practices that have in different historical periods beleaguered the lives of Iranians with different degrees of intensity.

Since the concern with documentation has been central in my case studies, I have attempted to explore what has happened to female performers professionally as well as emotionally. I was concerned with and tried to reflect on the emotional impacts and the consequences of feeling marginal in one's homeland, of being alienated from society and of being 'the less privileged other' of your own profession. I have therefore, at times analyzed the content of my interviews to discuss the emotional impacts and reactions of my subjects. To avoid becoming too subjective, however, I have constantly tried to qualify my own position by questioning some of the assumptions that may be rooted in my own subjectivity as a female musician who has worked in Iran for more than a decade.

Thus to summarize, my research is more than anything ethnographical in that it explores the roles of women in specific musical practices in Iran, analyzes the cultural factors involved in shaping these practices, and uses field research to document these factors and their impacts and offer theoretical conclusions on music-related gender issues in an Islamic context.

Research Methodology

Theoretical Framework: For constructing my theoretical framework I have primarily used the theoretical works of Iranian scholars and my own thoughts on my experience as a

practitioner. This was because the Euro-American theories were in most cases of little help in accounting for some aspects of life, culture and politics in Iran. As Homa Katouzian puts it,

The simple reason for such anomalies is that the basic features of Iranian society, and the history to which they have given rise, are in many ways fundamentally different from their European counterparts. Such basic differences may be observed in the meaning and social implications of property ownership, social stratification and social mobility, the nature of the power of the state, and the questions of law, legitimacy, succession, rebellion and the like.' (Katouzian 1997: 50)

These fundamental differences reflect 'the need for a new interpretation of Iranian history and society' (Katouzian 1997, 50), which can account for some of the major issues that have remained unexplained in Iranian cultural history.

Throughout my research, therefore, whenever they have been relevant I have used the works of non-Iranian scholars and theorists, but I have avoided limiting my vision by adhering to a set of given ideas. To be able to construct my theoretical framework, I used a diachronic method to study origins and emergence of certain practices and beliefs and then complemented it with a synchronic method to explain their forms and functions. The study is, therefore, diachronic in its exploration of the historical evolution of women's roles in music and its contexts and synchronic in its analysis of these roles in their present forms. The diachronic aspect of my work is shaped by library research and the synchronic one is based on my experience, library and field work and interviews.

To increase the focus of my work I have also limited my research to what is known as classical or traditional music in Iran. The historical roots of this type of music are associated with Iranian urban and court life in their ancient and pre-modern forms. During the late Pahlavi period, however, it came more and more into the public sphere and became associated with being 'authentically' Iranian and worthy of scholarly attention and glorification. Despite some initial limitations, the same process continued after the revolution when it remained marginally

and then centrally active in the public life and was glorified as being spiritual, mystic and authentic. I have discussed some of the research studies that provide the background for understanding the cultural and musical functions and qualities of this kind of music in my literature review, where I also examine other musicological studies on Iranian music to situate my own work.

My Position: As an Iranian woman who has studied, taught and performed music under the Islamic ruling system, I have been equipped with the tools and the experience required for conducting my research as an interdisciplinary study. I know most leading musicians and scholars currently active in the field and have direct experience of the challenges female musicians face. This has, of course, facilitated and enriched my fieldwork by giving me the perspective of the cultural informant and practitioner as well as a researcher. The greatest advantage of my position was in that I had a deeper understanding of how the system works and how the process of negotiation for overcoming the bans has worked. Rather than just spending a few months in Iran for research, I was there until I was thirty-two and was active professionally in the field for more than ten years. Since I have come to the UK, I have also regularly visited Iran and remained in touch with the scholar and practitioners within the country.

Despite the clear advantage of such a position, throughout my research, one of my concerns was to maintain my distance for sound judgment. My concern was that I may become too subjective in my approach to the subjects I was handling and allow my emotions to interfere with my objectivity. Thus as I was studying the works of such scholars as Bruno Nettl, Hormoz Farhat, Mohammad Taqi Masoudieh, Ella Zonis, Margaret Caton and others, I was conscious of the need to check and balance my own assumptions by engaging with what was being discussed in the texts rather than just interpreting them from my own perspective. Objectivity,

of course, is an illusion; one is inescapably entangled in the web of relationships that have formed her character, but I have made my outmost attempt to avoid undue generalizations, and hasty judgments.

My work differs from the works of the ethnomusicologists that I have discussed in my literature review in that it examines the challenges of female musicians within Iran with due attention to performing variations. It is similar to theirs in that it is conducted in the same context and deals with the same musical practices that continue their existence under the dictates of gender inequality and Islamic censorship within a postmodern Islamic milieu.

Preparation for Fieldwork: In order to prepare myself for the fieldwork, I set up models for myself by studying the works of such ethnomusicologists as Bruno Nettl, John Baily, Wendy DeBano, Ameneh Youssefzadeh, Laudan Nooshin, and Veronica Doubleday for their valuable fieldworks on Iran and its neighbouring countries. DeBano's work is on gender roles in Iranian music outside Iran and performance in women's music festivals within Iran. Nooshin's main research is more extensive in its focus and deals with contemporary popular music and its location within the evolving paradigms of the country's artistic, cultural and political discourse. Though DeBano's is limited to women-only performances, both of these scholars follow a research model that moves from context to examples and use theory to describe the overall significance of their experience. They describe the cultural and political contexts of their subjects and then analyze their fieldwork — observations of sample works and interviews — to offer specific examples that reveal the mechanism of control and how musicians challenge or follow them. Youssefzadeh's method slightly differs from them in that in addition to interviewing musicians and observing their works, she has also interviewed the officials in charge of controlling music-related activities. She has thus chronicled the works of official organizations engaged in music censorship after the revolution. Nettl's approach has been

similar to Nooshin and DeBano with the difference that since his fieldwork has been on the musical life of pre-revolution Iran he is less engaged with politics.

Though not directly engaged with Iran, I have also benefited from John Baily and Veronica Doubleday's writings on music-related activities in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Using a model similar to DeBano's, Doubleday's work is focused on music and gender issues in the Middle East, particularly in Afghanistan. Her work is, nevertheless, more concerned with popular and folk traditions than with the urban music reorganized on the basis of the traditional models of female-only performances. John Baily's work is more concerned with the condition of music in Afghanistan. He has offered a model which reflects on the process of survival and how musicians have managed to survive suppression.

One of the major problems in doing ethnomusicological works on Iranian music is dealing with the fact that after the revolution most studies have been on the overall situation of music in Iran rather than individual performers and their works. In my research and fieldwork, I tried to set up a model that encompasses both. While I have worked and written on the general aspects of the lives and careers of the female performers, I have also offered specific case studies on three performers. While I have avoided generalizing their cases and suggesting that all female performers are similar, I have used my personal experience and my research to focus on those problems that most female performers encounter in Iran, and then show the different attitudes that individuals or groups have shown in facing these problems.

Conducting Fieldwork: To achieve this, I did interviews with my specific cases and other women performers, while making use of published materials on them in journals, newspapers, online governmental and non-governmental websites and academic research studies (if any) inside Iran to get a detailed picture of their lives. The library research included studying published books and articles on music, women and Islam, socio-political and cultural changes

in modern Iran, etc, published inside and outside Iran. My material can thus be classified as follows. (A) Primary sources: interviews with my three cases; and books, articles and other research materials on their fields, their activities, and the socio-political atmosphere of Iran. (B) Secondary sources: informal interviews, online reports on the activities of female performers, books and journals containing materials on Iran. Thus to use the terms usually used to describe published or online materials, besides the 'academic' literature, my work also includes some 'non-academic' literature, which has helped me find my way into the lives of my subjects in the absence of academic material. (Rapley 2004: 26)

To arrange my interviews, I directly contacted the people I had targeted as my subject, arranged a tentative period during which I can have the interviews, went to Iran and then called them and arranged the exact time and date. After I conducted my first series of interviews, I tried to keep my contact for the following year. My position as an 'out-insider', the term I use for a scholar who is native to a region but lives in another country, made it relatively easy for me to conduct my interviews.¹² Since I knew the language, had previous experience in the field and had met them before or knew people who were close to them I could easily put them at ease about my research, clarify my intentions and start the interview in a way that makes mutual trust possible. Since the writings of external researchers are regularly monitored to see what the famous art and cultural activists have said about their work in Iran, it is important for the interviewees to know that their comments are not distorted or exaggerated. So the assurance that the researcher is aware of these limitations and is not likely to put them at risk with undue comments makes the subjects less reserved. I believe that establishing such a relationship and going through such a process would be much more complicated if the researcher is not familiar with the cultural codes or does not have personal links or experience in the target context.

¹² I may also refer to the term in-outsider as a foreign scholar whose knowledge of the field is comprehensive.

During the fieldwork, I concentrated on gathering qualitative data through formal and informal interviews. I interviewed three scholars, five instrumentalists, three singers, two dancers and six students during the two summers I spent in Iran in 2007 and 2008. I also compared and contrasted the information that I gathered during these four months with the previous data that I had gathered during my BA and MA studies in Iran and my memories and experiences of formally and informally learning, studying, teaching and practising music in Iran between 1981 and 2003. My interviews with the students were informal. I asked them about their family and music backgrounds, the reasons they had chosen to study music, the problems they had faced for convincing their parents when they decided to study music, their aspirations, and their assumptions about future changes in music-related regulations.

These interviews gave me a general overview of how the country had changed in relation to the academic music-related activities. The general ambiance was much more relaxed and defiant than the early 1990s when I began to study music at university level. The same conclusion was corroborated in my informal interviews with four of the instrumentalists who were my close friends. Though they had their reservations, they seemed less nervous about the future than the time we were studying together. However, my other friend, a singer, had no hope for being able to perform individually in near future. She confirmed that she was very active as a trainer and that she had been able to perform as a solo singer in several women only performances and as a co-singer in mixed performances. Yet she emphasized that her main source of income was teaching singing as a private tutor and in music institutes. I also had two informal interviews with my former classmates who teach and do research on music at university levels. Both seemed happy with their positions and had hopes for expanding their research and publishing on their subjects. They also showed great interest in what I was doing and expressed their readiness to help.

These informal interviews and observing my friends' performances, concerts and classes brushed my memory about the relationships that determine one's careers in music-related activities in Iran and understand what had happened in academic, educational and performance levels related music activities during the last seven years. They also helped me determine who I wished to interview for my more formal interviews.

My formal interviews were mainly with those who were my seniors in music activities. These included a scholar, two dancers, two singers and an instrumentalist who has also been active as a composer, researcher and university teacher. Though each of these interviews offered me fresh insights about how the system works in the case of more famous people, I finally decided to narrow my work by excluding the scholar and focusing on those performers who had begun their career before the revolution. This, I thought, would allow me to have a comparative perspective that clarifies the process of change in their careers. Thus, in my thesis, I have focused my case studies on three of my subjects that have been active in their fields before and after the revolution. I have tried to establish links between the socio-political and cultural change and the formal and technical features of the works and performances of my subjects. I have also tried to determine how each of these practitioners have resisted the restrictions and how the challenges they have faced and the resistance they have put forward against the regulations have changed the musical atmosphere of their field — by shifting, evading or removing the boundaries.

As described above, my case studies are based on the formal interviews I conducted with a singer, a dancer and an instrumentalist who has also worked as a composer, researcher and teacher. However, I have also used the material from the other formal or informal interviews that I have conducted with female performers during 2007 and 2008 and in my previous research on the subject. Although the focus of my case studies has been those women who

began their professional career before the revolution, in the descriptive chapters I have also referred to those who started their career after the revolution. I have also discussed the perspectives and opinions of male colleagues in each part to demonstrate and assess the intensity of the problems they have had with similar regulations after the revolution. My descriptive chapters, therefore, offer the theoretical and cultural background for the case study chapters on individual musicians. They use my expertise on the subject and the results of my library research and interviews to offer overviews of the general conditions of the three fields in which my main interviewees work.

To produce these sections I have also used, where possible, audio and video materials to describe women's performing styles and music forms, focusing in particular on aspects of performance such as spaces, audiences and the physical positions and movements of the musicians, as well as the features of the music including genres and styles, instrumentation and improvisation. In my case studies, I have modified this descriptive aspect to focus on the overall structure and arrangements of the performances of the performer under study.

The Setting of the Research: Time, Place and Forms of the Interviews: The research was conducted in Tehran. Although there are women musicians in other cities, the most prominent groups and individuals live and perform in Tehran. I prearranged the dates and locations with the interviewees, giving them the choice, so that they had enough time and were in good moods and conditions for the interviews. I met two of my major interviewees in their houses and one of them in the music institute that she is running. I used structured questions that gave the interviewees the opportunity to reply in length. I did this intentionally because my experience during my BA and MA in Iran as a researcher and a performer had shown me that female musicians are very open and willing to answer the questions and share their experiences with other people. This method was very effective. Through the interviews, they spoke freely and

said what they wanted to say rather than just answering the questions. Although I had structured my questions, I also encouraged them to focus on their feelings and experience. They were very kind in offering me enough time so we were not in a hurry. In two cases the interviews took place in their houses — which were also their working place— in another one in her private music institute. In all three I felt welcome and relaxed. Each interview took approximately two hours and a half. I used a voice recorder to record the interviews, and a cam recorder for some interesting sections that I liked for their visual qualities. This was basically because my interviewees felt more comfortable with just the recorder. I did not use any cam recording with the interviewee who was a dancer, but used it for the singer and the instrumentalist. I also took notes during the interviews to be able to concentrate and ask questions if I found something unclear. All the interviews were conducted in Persian and translated into English by myself.

Literature Review

To provide the background to my study, in this section I examine the material that I have read or reread to provide the background to my study. I will only refer to those previous studies that I found relevant to different aspects of my work, reflecting as I discuss them on how they differ from my work and what has been missing in them that I have studied in my research. I examine the subjects from the more general to the more particular ones while explaining some of the key concepts of my thesis as I discuss the literature. The section thus situates my work in the context of ethnomusicological, cultural and gender studies on Iran and beyond.

1. Pre-revolution Ethnomusicology in Iran. Musicological studies on Iranian music, similar to the academic studies currently conducted on music, go back to the early twentieth century, when scholars began to describe the features of Iranian music. According to Azin Movahed,

These studies were formed under the influence of European thought when during the first half of the twentieth century a group of Iranian musicians traveled to Europe for further study and upon their return promoted the principles of Western music that were then considered to be the universal principles at the heart of every musical system. (2003-4: 87)

These studies were primarily concerned with theorizing and classifying the forms of Iranian music on the basis of elements and categories that failed to reflect the organic complexities and the cultural aspects of the music. The second surge of musicological studies, however, was more concerned with cultural qualities and approached the subject from another perspective. This second period, which began during the late 1960s, formed the first phase of 'ethnomusicological' studies in Iran. The researchers' main aim during this phase was to gather, transcribe and analyse information. Among the most prominent non-Iranian ethnomusicologists who conducted original research on Iranian classical music during this period, one can name Bruno Nettl, Ella Zonis, Jean Durning, and Margaret Caton, some of whose works were published before and some after the revolution.

In the material published before the revolution; the social, political, and religious issues, which are my major focus in the present research were either ignored or discussed briefly. Among the few exceptions are Nettl's articles 'Attitudes towards Persian Music in Tehran, 1969' published in 1970 and 'Musical Values and Social Values: Symbols in Iran' published in 1980. One of these articles was published after the revolution, but it is based on data gathered before the revolution. In comparison to other materials published before the revolution, these articles reveal a greater concern with social issues. Nettl's 'Introduction' and his 'Persian Classical Music in Tehran: the Processes of Change' in his edited book, *Eight Urban Musical Cultures, Tradition and Change* (1978) also provide indispensable perspectives about the process of change in Iran's musical culture. Though the only of its kind among the writer's published research, William O. Beeman's 'You Can Take Music out of the Country, but ...: The

Dynamics of Change in Iranian Musical Tradition' (1976) is also similar in its reflections on cultural change in pre-revolution Iran.

Ella Zonis's *Classical Persian Music: An Introduction* (1973) is more concerned with offering an overview of Iranian classical music, instruments, performance forms and repertoires. Jean During's earliest works are also similar, but he later expanded his work. He also conducted extensive research on regional/folk music including Iran's mystic music and the music of dervishes. His *La Musique Iranienne: Tradition et Evolution* (1983) [Iranian Music: Tradition and Evolution] offers a general historical and technical overview of Iranian classical music forms, repertoires and instruments. The book is very helpful in its highly organized approach to the subject and its analytical reviewing of the traditional approaches to music performance in Iran, but since the data in the book has been gathered before the revolution, its engagement with cultural aspects remains limited to performance contexts.

Margaret Caton's research was more focused on specific aspects of performance in Iran. She spent more than three years in Iran, studying Persian language and music. She has written one article, 'The Classical Tasnif: A Genre of Persian Vocal Music' and co-authored another one, 'Performer-Audience Relationships in the Bazm' with Morteza Varzi (1986). Yet though both of these were published after the revolution, the first is concerned with pre-revolution musical culture. The second explores performance and its reception and function before the revolution in Iran and after the revolution among the Iranian diaspora in the USA.

Robert De Warren lived in Iran for eleven years, collecting, classifying and analyzing many Iranian *mahalli* (regional) dance forms. He was also the head of *Anjaoman-e Bāle-ye Iran* (Iran's Ballet Association) and choreographed a great number of performances using regional forms. His relevant publications include *Destiny's Waltz: In Step with Giants* (2009) which

though published quite recently recounts his experience and memories of the time he spent in Iran. I have benefited from his work in my chapter on dance in Iran.

Among the Iranian ethnomusicologists, working during this period, Mohammad Taghi Massoudieh and Fuzieh Majd also conducted extensive research on regional and classical music in Iran. Massoudieh is considered 'the father of ethnomusicology in Iran'. His publications extend from theoretical works on the history and methodologies of ethnomusicology to analytical books on regional and classical forms and repertoires. Due to their analytical approach and annotations of unstudied forms, his books are among the best published on the subject and have inspired many Iranian ethnomusicologists. I have made extensive use of his *Ethnomusicology* (1978) for developing my approach to my subjects and getting engaged with the basic requirements of ethnomusicological research. Fooziyeh Majd, on the other hand, has been more concerned with documenting Iranian regional music and dance through recordings. Yet the disruption of her activities after the revolution has left most of her work inaccessible. Despite the value of the works published by these two figures, their publications have basically consisted of collecting, classifying and analyzing data about the forms. The contemporary concern with socio-political and cultural elements was, therefore, either absent from their works or of marginal importance.

Although among the leading Iranian and non-Iranian scholars mentioned above there are three women, none of the publications suggest a specific concern with women and their status in music-related activities. As Nettl explains, 'ethnomusicologists before around 1975 had not frequently tried to contrast what women do musically with the activities of men.' Instead they seemed to be 'happy to get what they could from any musician ... regardless of gender.' (Nettl 2003: 410). The difficulty of access and at times the lack of research funds made it difficult to approach their subjects from a variety of perspectives. Furthermore, prior to the rise of cultural

theory, scholars were less preoccupied with the current intense interest in politics, history, anthropology, psychology, and gender and ethnic issues. Since their training was more likely of a synchronic, structuralist and analytical type, they were less concerned with the multiplicity of cultural or political factors involved in shaping music related activities. The occasionally unpleasant attitudes towards women musicians and internalized Islamic prohibitions, on the other hand, made women reluctant to use their musical skills in front of strangers or in public. As a result of these elements, the published literature of the ethnomusicological studies conducted on Iranian classical music before the revolution is quite limited in its reference to cultural, gender, social and political elements.

During the first phase, therefore, gathering information and recording music samples and analyzing them were of primary importance and describing and analyzing social and religious matters of secondary. However, during the second phase, which began in the second decade after the revolution (1990s onwards), there was a marked rise in studying social, religious, and political matters to make sense of contemporary practices. This increase, of course, suggests the interest of the scholars to account for the drastic change in the musical culture of the country. However, since the Iranian government during this second phase was a religious one, for which cultural and social issues were also political, the studies published abroad were concerned with society, politics and culture while describing cultural and formal aspects of Iranian music.

2. Post-revolution Ethnomusicology in Iran. By the late 1970, Iran's cultural richness as a land of different regions, religions, rituals and ceremonies had attracted some prominent ethnomusicologists to Iran. However due to the revolution and its cultural aftermaths — restrictions on music and musicians in urban and rural areas — for about fifteen years no

significant ethnomusicological research was conducted in Iran. The closure of the music departments of Iranian universities played an important role in this process.

Some of the ethnomusicologists who had begun their works during the 1970s continued working after the revolution whenever the situation allowed it. There were also some works on Iranian diaspora or articles based on previous fieldworks. Anthony Shay, for instance, had started writing about Iranian regional and urban dance forms before the revolution. However, his major publications appeared after the revolution. His work before the revolution was mostly concerned with gathering data about Iranian dance forms, but in his post-revolution works he began to write on dance practices of the Iranian diaspora in the USA and on the cultural and political aspects of dance in Iran. His *Choreophobia* (1999), which I have benefited from in my chapter on dance, offers a comprehensive overview of the cultural aspects of the love-hate relationship of Iranians with dance within and outside Iran.

Jean During, on the other hand, returned to the subject with 'La Musique Traditionnelle Iranienne en 1983' (1984) and 'Third Millennium Tehran: Music!' (2005). The first article deals with the condition of music during the first years of official restrictions on music. The second article recounts his experience of revisiting Iran after twenty years. Equipped with theoretical and historical awareness, he manages to provide striking images of change in Iran's musical culture and question the possibility of remaining faithful to the ideals of Iranian classical music in the confusing life of contemporary Iran. During, who was educated in Iranian music under some of the greatest masters of Iranian classical music, reveals some of the major changes seen through the insightful gaze of an educated outsider.

As to Iranian publications, for a long time there were no incentives or budgets for academic research on various areas of music. The books published in Iran were mostly by Iranians and were bound to a few subjects: histories of music, re-readings of old treatises, analyses and

explanations of *radif* and reformulating the major theories of Persian/Iranian classical music. During the last two decades, however, there has been a surge in music related studies that began in the mid 1990s. There are, however, numerous areas that remain untouched. In this regard Iran can function as an invaluable field of research for those interested in knowing about the varieties of music making activities in the world. Its geographical location as a place that connects South Asia and Central Asia to Western Asia and Eastern Europe offers a diversity that is significant. Furthermore, considering the changes in the political situation in Iran during the last thirty years, one can claim that Iranian music remains understudied by outsiders. The activities of insiders have also been limited because there have been no state sponsorship in post-revolution era. *Mahour Music Quarterly*, the most important and longlasting post-revolution Persian journal on music scholarship, for instance, commenced publication in 1998, but has faced recurrent financial difficulties since then.

3. History of Music. On the history of Iranian music and historical aspects of the lives and works of women performers, I used books and articles written by insiders to the tradition, including Rouhollah Khaleghi, Taghi Binesh, Sasan Sepanta, Hasan Mashhoon, Fereidoon Joneidi and Tuka Maleki and outsiders such as Henry George Farmer, Mary Boyce and Rudi Mathee. Tuka Maleki's *Zanān-e Musiqi-e Iran* (The Women of Iranian Music) (2002) was of great importance as a reference book in that its focus was on female performers in the history of Iran. The book does not contain any socio-cultural analysis but is a good one as a reference for general accounts of careers, names and dates, which due to the lack of academic studies may still offer a challenge for those who wish to research the careers of Iranian musicians.

My main aim for reviewing the literature related to the history of music in Iran was documentation. Women have so far been unable to achieve the status they deserve — except in short historical periods — and I wanted to find out about the cultural, social and political

specification of these periods. This diachronic study would allow me to contextualize my case studies and analyze the achievements of my subjects within the larger historical context.

4. Documentaries & Memoirs about Women in Iran. These kinds of publications were instrumental in refreshing and reshaping my own memories about the type of problems women or music practitioners faced in Iran. Some of the people working in the reconstructed/semi-fictional documentary forms of this type of works include Haleh Esfandiyari, Azar Nafici and Marjane Satrapi. Haleh Esfandiyari's *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran's Islamic Revolution* (1997), records the experiences of women from different social and career background in the post-revolution Islamic government. The book enriched my own memories and knowledge about life in different classes. Nafici's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, was significant in reminding me of the details of life and dreams during my undergraduate years in Iran and how the urge for learning among Iranian youth created a culture of silent defiance in the late 1980s. Marjane Satrapi's book and animation, *Persepolis* (2007) was also important in refreshing my experience as a young girl especially because the main character is the same age as I was and the style preserves the emotional impact of feeling alienated from the absurdities of the dominant discourse in one's country.¹³ It was, in fact, through studying these works that I finally found myself and my position as a researcher and began to identify myself with my case studies or in relationship to them. As Satrapi puts it, I now 'use myself to talk about other things.' (2008, The Independent).

5. Ethnomusicological Studies on Women in Islamic Societies. These kinds of studies gave me new perspectives on working in Islamic contexts. Veronica Doubleday's *Three Women of Heart* (1990)— a documentary narrative about the (musical) lives of women in Afghanistan— mainly reminded me of the attitudes of religious hardliners towards women and music in

¹³ The film which was selected as the best foreign language film in 2008 academy awards, 2007 festival de Cannes jury Awards, and 2008 French Cesar awards.

Iranian history. Her 'The Frame Drum in the Middle East' (1999) was also relevant to my work as its focus is on female music practices in an Islamic context and studies female only performances.

At another level, the same was true of some of the articles appearing in Tullia Magrini's *Music and Gender: Perspectives from the Mediterranean* (2003) which offer profound perspectives on gender and music practices in Islamic societies and beyond. Karin Van Nieuwkerk's "A Trade Like Any Other": *Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (1995/2006) was also in the same line. However, though some of the cultural attitudes towards female performers are similar to those in Iran, since none of the nations studied in these books have undergone an Islamic revolution and governed by strictly Islamic rules; their theoretical frameworks cannot be used for my study. There are also a number of other differences that distinguishes my works from them.

Being about street singers and dancers, Nieuwkerk's book, for instance, provided me with some analytical perspectives about the entertaining aspects of female performances in Islamic societies. Nieuwkerk's and Doubleday's books also shows how these performers are demonized and degraded although they are thoroughly indispensable to people's lives and have high quality entertaining skills. However, Doubleday's and Nieuwkerk's writings are rather different from mine in their subject matters and their scopes. Nieuwkerk's research depicts a society that is very similar to the pre-revolution Iran in which street singer-dancers and cabaret performers were ever-present for entertaining people but were mostly associated with promiscuity or prostitution. My research, however, deals with the vicissitudes of the careers of educated female musicians who were respected before and after the revolution in a country in which lower class street entertainment has been either eliminated or become exclusive

private.¹⁴ Doubleday's, on the other hand, differs from mine in that its subjects are uneducated performers working in rural or semi-rural contexts.

The performers studied in my case studies have been brought up in educated secular families or families whose understanding of religion was spiritual and mystic. They have received formal training in professional institutions or universities in their respective fields. They are based in Tehran, are professional practitioners in their fields, earn their living expenses from their professions, and live a 'modern' life. In that regard, despite its obvious differences in terms of the impacts of religious government on defining gender limits in Iran and my relative lack of concern with transvestite performance, my study has similarities with Martin Stokes 'The Tearful Public Sphere: Turkey's "Sun of Art," Zeki Müren', (Magrini 2003, 307-28). Both of us focus on highly educated performers who regularly extended the limits of gender and performance in their countries.

However, my intention has been to conduct case studies on female singers, instrumentalists and dancers to find out the changes that have occurred in their professional careers after a radical social and political transformation. I have researched and reflected on the process of change, the emotional responses of my subjects to this process and the methods they have used to challenge, evade or cope with the new regulations. From another perspective, my research is thus more like Virginia Danielson's *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (1997) in which the subject is a leading performer studied in the context of modern cultural transformations. Yet once more mine is different from Danielson's in that Umm Kulthum did not have a formal education and her career began and came to a fruitful end under a secular government.

¹⁴ The terms that signify class structure in Iran often carry double meanings that signifies cultural and financial differences among the various layers of the society. In this categorization the financial situation is more important than the cultural background, the average government employees, however, are often classified as middle class although their financial resources may be much more limited than the traditional middle class.

6. Socio-political History. The reason I included these kind of material in my study was to familiarize myself with the issues related to tradition and modernity: the process of transition, recurrence and change in public and private lives of people; the traditional segregation of genders and its impact on contemporary life; and the contradictory attitudes towards music and gender issues in various layers of Iranian society. The Iranian revolution made big changes in the political, social, and cultural lives of Iranians. As Haleh Esfandiari states, ‘The Islamic revolution had a marked and transforming impact on all areas of Iranian life. But for women, its consequences were especially profound — legally, socially, professionally, psychologically, both in the home and in society.’ (1997: 1) Janet Afari, Nicki Keddie, Abbas Milani, Houshng Mahrooyan, Ali Rezagholi, Ramin Jahanbegloo among other have been some of the cultural critics and historians of modern Iran whose works I have examined to clarify and enhance my personal knowledge about the issue of change and transition in Iran.

Iran was the scene of radical changes during the late 1970s and early 1980s. These extended from changes in the names of streets, squares, shops, cities, and even the country to changes in what was considered legal in dress code, public behaviour, and semiotics of political, cultural and artistic communication.¹⁵ Since these changes had drastic consequences for women, I have discussed them in some detail in my chapters.

Reflecting a relentless patriarchal perspective, Morteza Motahari’s questions about the quality of work and its links with the presence of women in society reveal the enormity of the problem and the seriousness of the project for the proponents of the Islamist ideology:

Where would a man be more productive, where he is studying in all-male institutions or where he is sitting next to a girl whose skirt reveals her thighs? Which man can do more work, he who is constantly exposed to arousing and exciting faces of made-up women

¹⁵ Any name that had a link with the previous regime was changed to the name of an Islamic figure or character. During the eight years of war with Iraq, the names of the martyrs of the war were put on streets and allies. The name of the country also changed from Iran to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

in the street, bazaar, office, or factory, or he who does not have to face such sights?
(Moghadam 1989: 54)

Within the framework of their ideal society, women had to change or remain at home. However, since the drastic rise in the public presence of women during the Pahlavi dynasty and the process of the revolution in which women played a major part had made it impossible for women to return home, enforcing change became inevitable. As Patricia Higgins writes:

Fatima and Zeinab — women of the Prophet's family — provide images of the ideal woman. Both displayed qualities of courage, learning, and understanding, as well as sensitivity, compassion, and modesty, and both played a public political role in the defence of Islam when extreme circumstances demanded that they shift their normal focus of attention from the domestic scene. (Higgins, 1985: 491)

However, the discourse of change for women was multilayered and for radicals within the Iranian establishment, these figures embodied the modesty (*mazlumiāt*) and silence of women, and their political involvement was when they had to defend Islam in the absence of their fathers, brothers and husbands. The ideal women for these groups, therefore, were those that returned to their homes now that as they claimed 'the revolution had achieved its goals.'

7. Politically Charged Ethnomusicological Studies. These changes have been reflected in the works of the new generation of ethnomusicologists who began working on Iran from outside during the late 1990s. Among these Ameneh Youssefzadeh has been prominent in handling the political aspects of music in contemporary Iran. Her works examine the process of decision making about music and music-related practices and the obstacles that musicians may face. She has also addressed issues related to the process of change. The literature on the relationship between the politics and music can basically be found in articles published outside Iran because insiders try not to infuriate the government by making politically charged comments on music in Iran. This does not mean that musicians inside Iran are not political.

They show their ideas in action or express them in interviews but the academic works on such more political issues is almost entirely done outside Iran.

8. Gender Issues in Relationship with Islam as a Religion with Full Political Power in Post-revolution Iran. Gender, Islam and music are inseparable from each other in the context of my research. This is basically because Islam became the most important forming principle of the government that was established in Iran after the revolution and the interpretations of those in power became the rules of the country. Therefore, whether one is a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew, a Zoroastrian, a secular individual from any of these religious backgrounds, or of any other cultural background one is subject to the Islamic rules of the country, which are extracted from religious texts by those in power and changed and distorted in the process to reinforce their power and legitimize their large scale decisions about cultural practices.

I first started with the literature on gender and Islam in Iran and on social, political, and religious debates on women in Muslim countries, particularly in Iran. I studied the works of cultural critics such as Haleh Afshar, Haideh Moghissi and Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mehrangiz Kar, Afsaneh Najmabadi and Shirin Ebadi which were focused on the social conditions of women in Muslim countries and the effects of the *shari'a* law and state rules on women's lives. This was important for my research because it could help me understand the reasons behind large scale bans and restrictions on women's activities in specific fields.

Afshar's work is focused on the legal positioning of women in Islam and the emerging challenges to the traditional forms. Her *Islam and Feminisms: an Iranian Case-study* (1998) was particularly relevant to my work because it handled a contemporary case. It also helped me reconstruct my own perspectives for developing my own theoretical framework and using western theory as a supplementary point of reference. Moghissi's work is more interested in feminism in the context of political struggle for freedom, but it also reveals some of the

misconceptions of western post-modern feminism. I found her *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Post-modern Analysis* (2000) particularly relevant to my work. Its analysis of the position of women under Islamic fundamentalism helped me reconstruct my own experience about the position of women in Iran. The same was true of Mir-Hosseini's *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (1999), which brings some of the late twentieth century's debates about gender relations into an Iranian context.

As I mentioned earlier, many of the written and unwritten rules and regulations related to music and women are the direct products of the Islamic *shari'a* law and its interpretations which have much stricter rules for the public presence of women than men. Within this context the post-revolution changes in music-related activities and everyday life affected women more than men. The process of indoctrination, however, impacted all people. Thus in the process of negating or challenging the ideas and the rules imposed on women, new identities were negotiated which internalized some of the basic tenets of this Islamic outlook. Thus even me as a secular researcher or my interviewees may carry certain beliefs or ideas that could not have been produced or existed if we had not been exposed to these rules.

The process also changed people's and the religious scholars' understanding of religion. Islam, therefore, went through a process of expansion that stretched its forms to make it a forceful presence capable of handling a variety of issues, including those related to gender and music, in the modern world. The movement was unprecedented in Iran and other Islamic countries, and created a multiplicity of forces in contemporary Iran. One of the good studies that reflect on this aspect of change in Iran is 'Religious Life under Theocracy: The Case of Iran' (2003). In an overall evaluation of the change of religion in Iran, they write,

... Iranians do not seem to treat religion as an integrated package; instead, they have broken the package into smaller pieces and have expressed differential levels of loyalty toward those pieces. People of various ages, gender, and other social background

characteristics value different aspects of religiosity quite differently, depending on whether that aspect is more belief-centred or practice-oriented, and also whether it is directed toward individual existence or social/communal life. (Kazempur and Rezaei 2003: 356)

This more pragmatic attitude towards religion has become particularly central to Iranian life because the leaders of religion are in power, and they can no longer blame the shortcomings and distortions to a royal other who prevents them from establishing their utopia. One central aspect of this change in the concepts associated with religion is the result of ancient, pre-modern, and modern secular cultural practices, including musical ones, which have persisted in Iran and resisted the more restrictive interpretations of Islam, proving that they cannot be uprooted. The tug of power between these different social, religious and cultural forces have determined the day to day transformation of relationships and positions of women.

9. Music and Islam. Another set of ideas and concepts that I followed in my library research was concerned with the impact of Islamic regulations on music and gender. Since the early days of the 1979 revolution, there has been an intense attempt on the part of radical forces within the establishment to rewrite all social, political and cultural rules and regulations on the basis of the enormous body of concepts and rules known as the *shari'a* law. In other words with the advent of the Islamic government, Islamic texts began to become the major point of reference for setting the codes of behaviour and punishment and running the day to day activities of the country. For anyone who is conducting research on contemporary Iran and wishes to understand Iran and learn what is allowed and what is forbidden, it is necessary to know about Islamic rules that have transformed Iran during the last thirty years. This is particularly so in the case of regulations about music and women, which have always created great reactions among the radicals. Since these regulations and the ongoing debates about them are likely to have great impacts on the lives and careers of women engaged in music-related

activities in Iran, the researcher must know about them regardless of whether he or she or his or her interviewees are religious or irreligious.

10. Gender/ Female Music Studies in Iran. The literature on female performers is not by any means extensive. The most important pre-revolution book on the history of music in Iran, Rouhollah Khaleghi's *The History of Music in Iran* (1956) only has a small chapter on female performers. The books on famous women are also limited in their scope. Ozra Dojham's *The First Women* (2005), for instance, contains some entries on women musicians, but remains limited in its details and theoretic perspective.

In fact, there are only two Persian language books directly related to this aspect of my project. The first one, Zohreh Khaleghi's book on the first publicly renowned female singer, Qamar-ol Molook Vaziri (1905-59), *The Song of Kindness: In Memorial of Qamar* (Persian, 1994) celebrates Qamar's rise to fame and her career in the context of early twentieth century. It is very useful in reflecting the processes that gradually brought women into the public space as entertainers and musicians during the Pahlavi period. The second book, written by Tuka Maleki, the daughter of the singer Pari Maleki, is entitled *Iranian Women Musicians* (2002). It is important in gathering the names, dates, and biographies of all women musicians ever mentioned in Iranian history and offering a list of references that one may consult for further inquiry. Though the book is mainly a reference book and does not include any critical reviews or cultural studies, it was banned about two months after its publication.

The literature published outside Iran is more critical and numerous. Rudi Matthi's 'Courtesans, Prostitutes and Dancing Girls: Women Entertainers in Safavid Iran' (2000) and Sasan Fatemi's 'Music, Festivity, and Gender in Iran from the Qajar to the Early Pahlavi Period' (2005) both refer to the links between musical activities and prostitution in the Safavid (1501-1736) and the Qajars (1794-1925) eras. I also benefited from Kaveh Safa-Isfahani's 'Female-Centred World

Views in Iranian Culture: Symbolic Representations of Sexuality in Dramatic Games' (1980). Though these are both focused on pre-modern Iran, they helped me develop my theoretical framework in relation to gender and music in Iran. More relevant to this aspect of my work, however, were those few works focused on gender and music in Iran, such as Ameneh Youssefzadeh's 'Singing in a Theocracy: Female Musicians in Iran' (2004), Houchang Chehabi's 'Voices Unveiled: Women Singers in Iran' (2000) on female singing in post-revolution Iran and Wendy DeBano's 'Enveloping Music in Gender, Nation, and Islam: Women's Music Festivals in Post-Revolution Iran' (2005) on gender roles in Iranian music and performance in women's music festivals.

The overview of the literature on the issue of gender and female musicians in Iran brings my literature review to its end. In my literature review, I attempted to organize and classify the relevant subjects in a way that makes it easier for the reader to understand the central themes and subjects of this thesis. I enumerated the material from the more general to the more particular to reveal the different materials that I have used to construct my approach. The section can also be useful in clarifying some of the concepts that I have used in my thesis.

To continue with this process of clarification, in the following section, I will offer a general overview of my chapters, describing the overall focus of the thesis and how each chapter contributes to this overall focus.

Chapter Synopsis

This research is focused on the changing conditions of music and dance in post-revolution Iran. It reflects on aspects of music and dance in Iran. It examines the limitations and pressures imposed on women and the ways they have confronted them by a diachronic overview of the lives of female performers in Iran and then synchronic studies of the challenges that

instrumentalists, dancers and singers have faced after the 1979 revolution. Each general chapter is followed by a case study that documents some of my findings in relation to one performer.

The thesis begins with a comprehensive 'Introduction' that clarifies the context, the research objectives and the methods I have used for studying the subjects. It also refers to my concerns, research questions, research methodology and the limitations of the study. This is followed by the literature review which goes through relevant literature on various aspects of my research. I pay attention to gender issues and the historical and theoretical issues related to the different aspects of my study, discussing, besides other things, materials on historical and religious issues as well as works of prominent ethnomusicologists and cultural critics on the subject. The chapter clearly sets the main aims and concepts of my thesis.

'Chapter One: Historical Overview' offers a historical overview of the conditions of female performers in Iran. It studies the socio-religious factors that cause the recurrence of restrictive attitudes towards music, dance and female performers. It also demonstrates the political, social and religious elements that help change or preserve the status quo. The overview links the past to the present by examining the role of the same patterns and elements in changing the status of women in post-revolution Iran, which is the focus of the main body of the thesis.

'Chapter Two: Music, Music Scholars, Composers and Instrumentalist through Political Changes' offers an overview of the modern genres that developed in Iran during the twentieth century and then focuses on music-related activities and how they have changed after the revolution. The chapter pays particular attention to changes in teaching and publishing on music and working as instrumentalists and composers. It then discusses the challenges that female instrumentalists have faced during the last thirty years and how they changed and broadened their profession. It also offers an overview of what happened to different genres and

how some male dominated areas of music began to accommodate women. My main concern in this chapter is classical Iranian music.

‘Chapter Three: Instrument, Gender and Restoration of *Ghānoon/Qanoon*: A Case Study on Maliheh Saeedi’ studies the career of a prominent Ghānoon player and composer who has also been active in teaching, doing research and publishing on music. It describes the methods Maliheh Saeedi (b. 1948) has used to remain active in the field and continue working despite the restrictions.

‘Chapter Four: Female Singers and the Transformation of Singing Genres’ concentrates on different genres of singing in contemporary Iran and how women active in each of these genres were affected emotionally and professionally by the revolution. It also reflects on the attitudes of the government officials towards different genres and how they have changed during the last thirty years. It is particularly focused on classical singers and examines the problems that female singers faced and the methods they used to transform these restrictive regulations.

‘Chapter Five: Tradition, Modernity, Mysticism and Continuity, A Case Study on Parissa’s Singing Career before and after the Revolution’ concentrates on the career of Fatemeh Vaezi, also known as Parissa (b. 1950), who is one of the most prominent singers in classical Iranian music. The chapter follows her career as a professional singer, reflecting on her disappointments, challenges, feelings, etc. It also analyzes the differences and similarities in her pre and post-revolution performances. The chapter is, therefore, analytical in that it includes discussions of her performances and reflects on the theoretical implications of the data discussed vis-à-vis the issues raised in the literature review.

‘Chapter Six: Female Dancers and the Transformation of Dance in Contemporary Iran’ concentrates on the most demonized art form in post-revolution Iran. It examines the process of

the standardization of the main forms of regional and national dances during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, reflects on the multiplicity of forms through which dance continued to be practiced after the revolution and how it remerged in theatrical performances during the second decade after the revolution.

‘Chapter Seven: Standardization of Dance, Bans, Transformation and Continuity: A Case Study on Farzaneh Kaboli’s Career’ complements the previous chapter by studying the life of the prominent dancer, Farzaneh Kaboli (b. 1949), whose ceaseless attempts to legalize dance made the government accept some forms of dance. In a way she is a person who attempted to change the unchangeable.

The final section of my thesis, ‘Conclusion’ offers a general overview of my chapters and draws theoretical conclusion about my findings.

Chapter One

A Historical Overview of the Condition of Female Performers in Iran

One window is all I need,
One window to the moment of awareness,
Of seeing and silence.
By now, the sapling walnut tree,
Has grown tall enough,
To explain the wall to its young leaves. (Farrokhzad, 1974)

Introduction

The 1979 Revolution in Iran resulted in the establishment of an Islamic government that had the Islamization of culture as one of its primary goals. Women and performing arts were among the first targets of this Islamic restructuring. The process particularly affected women involved in music and dance. The government aimed to narrow music production and consumption to religiously functional and revolutionary forms that were intended to edify the moral status of people or mobilize them to confront the enemies of the revolution. It also attempted to return women to what it considered their traditional roles, as sacrificial mothers, sisters and wives, which involved limiting the forms and frequency of their appearance in public spaces. The process involved transforming the public roles of women by forcing them to wear Islamic cover and to modify their behaviours in the public to conform to the limits set by the Islamic government. Music itself was for a long time suppressed. For a long time, music instruments disappeared from the public spaces, and one had to have permits to be able to carry any instruments. Even the religious chants and revolutionary hymns, the only types of music heard in the public spaces, seemed to have been disengaged from the instruments that produced them. If broadcast from the national television, this music was matched with the pictures of flowers or revolutionary scenes. If broadcast from radio, it was accompanied with revolutionary and religious comments. The arguments for such an approach to music was often claimed to have

been rooted in the Islamic belief that certain forms of music may provide incentives for immorality and sensuality. Yet as Jonas Otterbeck also explains, the intensity of the bans also suggested a political incentive:

The modern hardliners have identified music as serious rival to Islam.... To combat this, their strategy is to ban music and musicians if they have the power to do so.... The logic behind this attitude is their fear of music as a rival source of passion and pleasure. (2004:16)

Defined in religious terms, these political incentives transformed the zeal of the revolutionary paramilitary forces into an enormous force which used terror tactics to impose the bans. However, the mere fact that the government managed to enforce such a large scale ban on popular practices suggested the existence of some cultural roots that triggered temporary support among a great number of people. The large scale suppression of music-related activities after the revolution was, in fact, the reformulation of certain diehard tendencies, beliefs and practices that have for long beleaguered life Iran.

To understand the nature of some of these cultural tendencies and practices, I will offer a diachronic study of the conditions of music and women musicians in Iran while reflecting on the roots and results of these beliefs and the recurrent paradigms created by them. The purpose of the chapter is to reveal the historical roots of the bans imposed on music-related activities in general and Iranian female performers in particular. The chapter will also set the stage for the chapters which clarify the process through which these prohibitions were redefined and re-established during the last few decades and how they were resisted by the people and performers.

As such the chapter goes through the scant evidence of the presence of women musicians to assess the quality of their presence and the processes that have stopped women from making this presence more constant and fruitful. These cultural tendencies and beliefs and their

consequent paradigms of demonization and suppression have inevitably changed in the course of history, but their return in various junctions of history demands attention, particularly because their reinforcement after the 1979 revolution and their confrontation with the modern standards of life determined the process of the socio-political and cultural negotiations of the past thirty years.

Prominent among these cultural tendencies or beliefs is the society's reliance on the patriarch, rather than general consensus as the ultimate source of law.¹⁶ Second is the association of performing arts, particularly music and dance, with loose morals, promiscuity and even prostitution. The third is the gradual attachment of cultural habits and practices to religion so that any form of criticism or attempt at revising them brings the critic face to face with religion. The fourth is the wide gap between the public and private lives of people, particularly intensified after the advent of Islam (651 AD) when foreign domination outlawed certain cultural practices.¹⁷ The fifth, which may be explained as another instance of dependence on the patriarch, is the openness of the religious texts to the interpretations of religious or political patriarchs so that no one would ever know the exact cultural policies that are to be followed. Finally, there is the relatively constant domination of the channels of mass communication by conservative forces, which they usually achieved by the manipulation of the political forces within the country. If in the past these channels were limited to public squares, coffee-houses, mosques and preaching spaces provided by women within houses, nowadays they have been extended to include newspapers and national radio and television networks, controlled, particularly after the revolution, by the more conservative groups within the government.

¹⁶ It is but natural that under such circumstances the supporters of the patriarch become the actual policy makers. Thus even when the patriarch wishes to respond to the demands of other sections of the society, the fear of losing his supporters prevents him from doing so. As John Baily explains in the case of Afghanistan, the ruler may change, but if he does so, he will not be the same person that his followers brought to power. (Baily 2001, 41-2)

¹⁷ Among these practices one can mention *shadnooshi* (moderate wine drinking as a celebration of life) and *paikoobi* (collective dancing) ceremonies held at the beginning of each Zoroastrian month and in various festivals. See Mary Boyce (1999).

These beliefs and practices have recurrently resulted in similar patterns of control and suppression, which, for instance, encourage us to compare the conditions of the arts and society before and after the 1979 revolution with their conditions before and after the advent of Islam or see similarities between the cultural renaissance following the constitutional revolution and the Persian renaissance of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The process reveals patterns of prohibition and change, beginning with the prohibition of music and resulting in the development of religious and sacred *erfāni* music to justify the practice of music as a form of worship, or the emigration of musicians to the courts of the music loving rulers in China and India, or as it happened after the 1979 revolution to the USA and Europe where music is not restricted.

Thus in the aftermath of every major invasion or reconfiguration of power, and whenever religious fanatics approached the position of power, music and women have been the first to suffer. Arguing on the basis of the abstract nature of music, which makes it hard to change, William Beeman once explained that 'Music has long been recognized by anthropologists as one of the most conservative elements of culture, maintaining its character and form long after other elements in society have undergone change'. (1976: 16) However, as historical records testify and Ibn-e Khaldun argues, music is also one of the first things to disappear in bad conditions. With each massacre and invasion, music was the first art form to die out and it would return only after a ruler with some interest in music came to power. (Joneidi, 1993: 39) As dance was intrinsically linked with music at that time, the statement can also be true about dance.

Music and Dance in Pre-Islamic Iran (4000 BCE – 650)

Music and dance seem to have been inseparable in ancient Iran as most performers were entertainers, trained to dance, play and sing. The earliest evidence of dance and music in

pre-Islamic Iran dates back to the fourth millennium BC. (Binesh 2003:12-13) The evidence includes decorative paintings and carvings on walls, plates and jars; rock reliefs in sites of ancient palaces; and literary and historical texts, extending from the reports of Greek historians about the Achaemenid courts (570-330 BC) to poetic narratives about famous Iranian kings and queens. According to these visual, literary and historical documents, most kings had selected groups of female performers (musicians/dancers/entertainers) who worked inside the courts and also accompanied the royal entourage during the hunting expeditions. As Mary Boyce also argues, these documents clearly indicate that in pre-Islamic Iran, minstrels, musicians and dancers have been inseparable parts of court life. (Boyce, 1957: 18)

Taghi Binesh (2003), Abdorrazi Haqiqat (1980), Fereydoun Joneidi (1993) and some other scholars insist that the evidence proving the constant presence of a high number of entertainers in the courts signifies that women musicians enjoyed prosperity and had good lives, but a close reading of the historical accounts reflects their precarious conditions:

The third group of harem women were concubines, beautiful girls (Plutarch, *Artaxerxes*, 27; Diodorus, 17.77.6; *Esther* 2.3) bought in slave markets (Herodotus 8.105; Plutarch, *Themistocles*, 26.4), or received as a gift (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 4.6, 11; 5.1, 1; 5, 2, 9, 39) and tribute (Herodotus 3. 97), or collected from different parts of the empire (*Esther* 2.2-3;), and even captured from rebellious subjects (Herodotus 4.19, 32; Cf. Grayson, 1975, p. 114). While still virgins, they were kept and groomed in the harem's 'first house of women' (*Esther* 2.9), and trained as musicians, dancers and singers in order that they might entertain their king or the magnate lord at banquets or throughout the night (Aelian, *Varia Historia*, 12.1). Any child born to such concubine was regarded as inferior to the 'rightful' offspring (Shahbazi and Friend 1990)

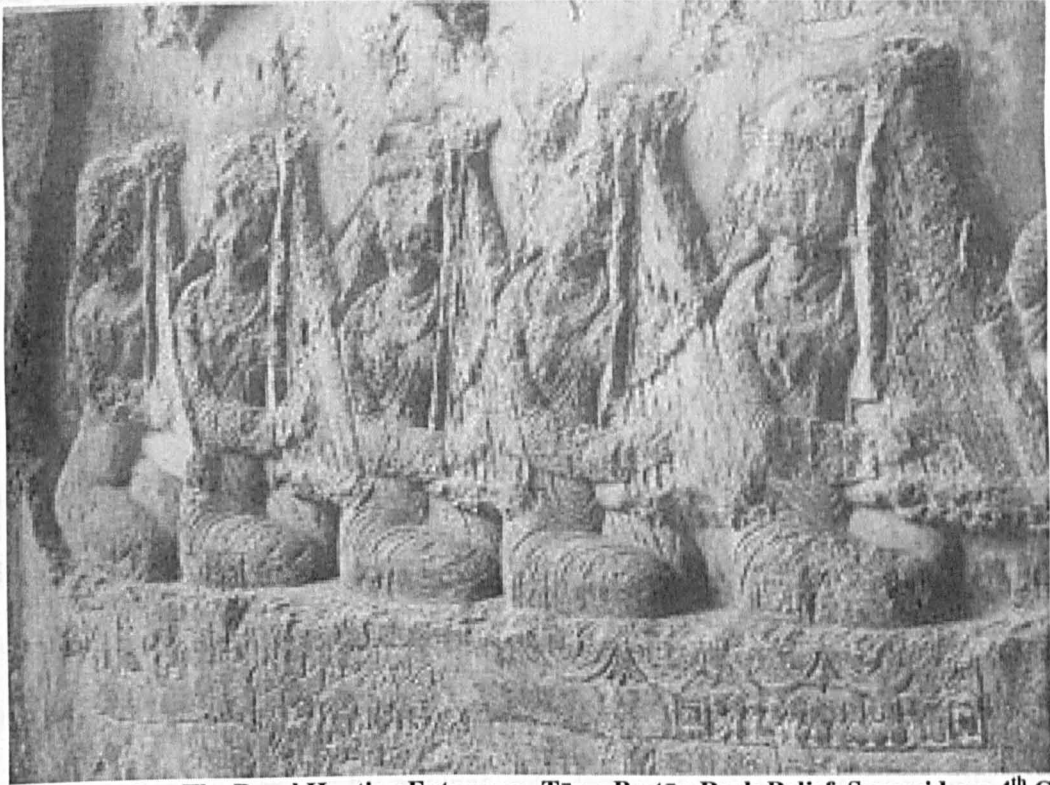
To avoid judging ancient practices with a modern sensibility, I should explain that these forms of treatment persisted due to unquestioned patriarchal traditions, which had their roots in the social conditions of the time that I do not intend to study here. Yet these conditions also reflect the existence of precedents for similar later treatments. Thus even though some music historians attempt to prove that women musicians had exceptionally good conditions in courts

and were highly reputed (Binesh 2003, Joneidi 1993 and Maleki 2002), the fact that they could be easily discarded or given to others without their consent and the sexual exploitation of most female entertainers demonstrate their precarious positions. Thus though there might have been some prosperous and respected female or male performers, the absence of historical evidence proving the durability of any high status for male or female musicians cautions us against undue glorification.

The historical evidence, therefore, suggests that the association of women musicians/entertainers with promiscuity and prostitution, which I introduced as my first problematic cultural tendency or issue, may well go back to the Achaemenid period (Ca. 550-330BC). The same can be demonstrated about the second issue, the position of the patriarch, with the king as the god father who is entitled to have control over all people's lives, including the lives of court performers (musicians, dancers and entertainers). In this regard the story of Āzādeh and the Sassanid king, Bahrām V (421-438) reveals the essential problematic of this situation. Though Bahrām was an ardent supporter of music and Āzādeh was his most beloved entertainer, he instantly killed her when she talked rudely to him about his cruelty to animals. He simply had her trampled under his horse or camel's hooves. Such acts of arbitrary ruthlessness may at first be attributed to the cruelty of an individual king. However, history speaks otherwise. Bahrām was not a particularly cruel king, and it is quite likely that he killed Āzādeh to maintain an image imposed on him by the system in which he had gained his power. In fact, the frequency of such arbitrary rulings, as theorized and discussed by Homa Katouzain suggests the primacy of an obsession with patriarch as the symbolic god-given force that maintains the wellbeing of society and is thus to be respected and followed in everything without any question.¹⁸ Thus though courtiers or even advisors were free to comment on the king's behaviour or words, the consequences of their comments could not be predicted. This

¹⁸ See Homa Katouzian (2003).

dependency on the arbitrary ruling of the patriarch and the occasional unpredictability of such rulings has been a regular pattern in Iran, where, as people ironically say, ‘one may have the freedom of speech but not the freedom after speech’.



Female Harpists, The Royal Hunting Entourage, Tāq-e Bostān Rock Relief, Sassanid era 4th C.¹⁹

Thus the taste of the rulers in the pre-Islamic Iran, as it may have been to some degrees in many other parts of the world, was the decisive factor in determining the condition of music and its performers. This becomes more significant if one notes that music and musicians could have different positions/ranks according to the king's taste. According to Joneidi the king could overrule the rigid class system and, as the history of the Sassanid era reflects, the conditions and ranks of the musicians could change from one king to another (Joneidi 1993: 116-126). This is a pattern, widely accepted and practiced even today when, in the absence of other financing bodies, the tastes of rulers determine the course of cultural practices. For instance the present head of Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance says that they intend to support only

¹⁹ The picture is from my personal previously collected photograph archive.

the 'Sublime Music' *Musiqi-e Fākher*, which given the tentative and subjective nature of the term, becomes equivalent to a particular type of music that the incumbent official considers 'Sublime'. This may have, as Hooshang Mahrooyan argues, an economic as well as a religious basis. The blind acceptance was, in the past, rooted in the religious glorification of the ruler as the shade of god and maintained by the people's reliance on governments for large scale irrigation systems in a relatively dry plateau. (Mahrooyan, 2004: 237) Yet through ages the fundamental concepts of this religious-economic condition have been absorbed in the roots of Iranian cultural memory.

Women Musicians after the Arrival of Islam

The early Islamic era (650-1502) in Iran was a period of conflicts and invasions, during which all cultural practices gradually changed. The impact of the Arab invasion was so intense that some cultural critics have called the first two centuries 'the age of silence' (Zarinkoob, 1951, Binesh, 2003:63).²⁰ From the seventh to the ninth century Iran was at the mercy of Arab caliphs who either by force or by gradual indoctrination or economic pressures converted Iranians into Islam. The country was thus not ruled by central Iranian governments, but by local rulers who paid tribute to the caliphs, and were not allowed to extend their sources of income and power beyond certain limits. The internal rulers thus lacked the funds or the courage to support Iranian cultural practices and art forms and Persian poetry. This resulted in a shortage of Persian texts from these first two centuries and the absence of any Persian centred reports about the dance or music activities in Iran.

²⁰ The proponents of this belief choose to neglect popular cultural practices, the massive contributions of Iranians to the cultural rise of Islam, the reproduction of Zoroastrian, historical and advisory pre-Islamic literature in the period, and many other cultural activities with long-term impacts, but they are, in some regards, justified in their evaluation of the period.

As a number of scholars argue, the Koran does not contain any words against music (Otterbeck 2004 & Martin 1999), yet there are a number of *hadith*²¹ against and/or in favour of music that any ruler or religious faction can use to make their own regulations and develop their own account of the history of Islam in relationship to music. As the rules of Islam are interpretable, the caliphs were also able to create their own versions of Islam. Farmer reports that in the birth place of Islam during the first two caliphs ‘The singing girls (*qainat*, *qian*), who were slaves in the households of the noble and wealthy families, were possibly not interfered with, but it is fairly certain that those of the taverns, as well as public musicians in general were suppressed, or at least, dared not follow their vocation’. (Farmer 1929: 40-41) However, when the third caliph, Othman came to power and the money and human resources that came from the conquered countries enriched the newly built Arab courts, these singing/dancing girls appeared in the courts. Abolfaraj-e Esfehāni (d. 967), the Iranian writer of *Al-Aghāni*, the most important reference book on the music of the early Islamic period, states that during the Umayyad and Abbāsīd era, one of the most profitable and popular trades was to train beautiful girls as entertainers and sell them to the caliphs and provincial rulers. (Mashayekh 1989: 343)

Once more, the taste of rulers was prominent in making large scale decisions about cultural practices, a situation that in turn intensified Islamic regulations against music. As in the case of many other things, the preachers who could see that musicians had the ability to distract their followers began to produce interpretations in which music was degraded as strictly forbidden. Another aggravating change was that cultural practices and prejudices were gradually defined in terms of the new religion. Thus more than ever, musicians and artists became dependent on courts and sympathetic rulers to be able to continue their work or even life.

²¹ Apart from the Koran; *Sonna* and *Hadith* are the most important sources of information about the proper Islamic practices. *Sonna* refers to reports about the habits and deeds of the prophet — and in the case of the Shi’a, the 12 Imams — in terms of managing the affairs of the soul, state and household and *Hadith* refers to the prophet’s — or the Imam’s — sayings reported by trustworthy followers.

From the ninth century onwards the Iranian regional rulers began to fight against their Arab overlords and gradually achieved relative autonomy for some regions. Yet since by then most people had become Muslims, getting political support for the independence of the whole Iranian plateau was nearly impossible. As a result, most Iranian rulers of the ninth to eleventh centuries, who ruled Iran before the rise of the Turkic dynasties, sought to create a non-Arab sense of being Muslim by promoting Persian language and culture or supporting different forms of Shiism.

This relative independence allowed the establishment of powerful courts and a marked increase in the number of performing spaces for Iranian music. Yet with the rise of Turkic rulers and the Mongolian invasions and governments, another form of music, quite distinct from the courtly ones and the popular forms — which are only scantily referred to in historical texts — gradually found its way into Iranian cultural life. Based on cultural and music practices that were most probably pre-Islamic in their roots, some mystic *Sufi* thinkers developed new interpretations of Islamic law which contained music and dance as forms of worship. This form of *Erfān* (mystic epistemology) also began to *bast* (expand), *qabz* (contract/ narrow), and *tafsir* (interpret) the Islamic laws according to the necessities of time and place, which resulted in the glorification of music as a means of ecstatic prayer.²² While some *Sufi* sects never allow women to their circles, some include them. According to Haghghat, some *Khānqāhs* (the gathering place of mystic *Sufis*) had women singers who recited song-like prayers and mystic poetry. (1990: 325-26)

The dance movements performed in *Khānqāhs* are not included for the beauty of the movements or the artistic joy that dancing may give to the dancer and the viewer, but to

²² Music was and still is a crucial part of *sufi* gatherings in which the practitioners experience ecstasy through listening to the sound of *Daf* (frame drum), *Ney* (end blown flute) and *Tambur* (three-stringed lute) while singing and conducting various forms of rhythmic movements, like whirling or moving the head and hands.

relinquish the will and the interior monologue through rapturous movements.²³ Judging on the basis of its complex arguments on behalf of music and its historical background, one can argue that despite the marked religiosity of the practices associated with this mystic music, the spiritualization of music and dance was most probably a clever move on the part of the elite musicians and thinkers to maintain certain forms of music and dance despite religious pressures and military conflicts.²⁴

Women Musicians during the Pre-modern Era (1501-1906)²⁵

Imposing the Twelve Imamid Shiism as the main religion of the territory under their control, the Safavids (1501-1722/36) established a powerful central dynasty in Iran in which religion acted as a controlling border against the Sunni Turks of central Asia and the Ottomans of the newly evolving Ottoman Empire. With the new system defining a religious cultural identity for the Iranian people, the activities of women musicians from Muslim backgrounds were limited to household entertainments. Thus most female public and court entertainers were of non-Muslim background, with the Iranian-Armenians and Jewish women and girls providing the members of the leading groups. Though some of the Safavid kings were religious, the courts of some of the later Safavid kings, particularly the court of Shah Abbās (r. 1587-1629) became a haven for many female and male musicians and entertainers. Once more as soon as an art-loving ruler established a powerful court, the formal activities of musician/entertainers

²³ The difference is also reflected in that unlike other dance forms after Islam, it has always been referred to as *Sama'* (the act of hearing) or *Dast Afshāni* (hand-spreading) rather than *raqs* (dance). See Leonard Lewisohn (1997).

²⁴ This is also true of the more religious forms of music that later developed in relationship with *ta'ziyeh*, the mourning ceremonies of the martyrdom of the third Imam of *shi'a* Muslims. Yet the spiritual significance of *Khānqāh* and *ta'ziyeh* music practised today is completely beyond any doubt, and there is no sign of conscious intellectualism in its practice. A similar pattern occurred after the revolution, when people used the same process of mystification and spiritualization to find ways to continue practising music under the new ruling system.

²⁵ In Iranian cultural studies the term 'modern' is used to describe the history of Iran after the constitutional revolution (1906) when modern institutions such as schools began to be established in different parts of the country. Since it is more relevant to the rise of public music activities in Iran, I have chosen this date as the point of reference. Nevertheless, it is also possible to trace the rise of some modern institutions to the 19th century.

increased. The taste of the ruler and the reactions of supreme clerics became the determining factors in shaping the forms and standards of music in the *Safavid* and *Qajar* eras.

With the establishment of *shi'a* Islam as the official religion of the country, *shi'a* clerics became a parallel source of power. Some of the clerics of the period produced huge bodies of works containing the accounts of the sayings (*hadiths*) and the deeds (*sonnah*) of the *shi'a* saints, which functioned as prescriptions for all areas of life. Once more, after the chaotic years of Mongolian and Tatar invasions everything had to be rejected, explained or justified in Islamic terms.

In his accounts of the rein of Karim Khān-e Zand (r. 1750-79), Mohammad Hesham Asef, known as Rostamolhokama, a historian of the early Qajar period (1794-1925) writes that despite the overwhelming religious pressures, Karim Khān-e Zand constructed a district for common musicians and entertainers in Shiraz and managed to control and legalize their affairs. He indicates that around five or six thousand pretty female singers, dancers, instrumentalists, and actors had all been gathered there. (Rostamolhokama, 2001: 340-341) This was not unprecedented; as Shah Abbās had already, in the 1610s, set the precedent by settling thousands of itinerant performers in a district in Isfahan and regulating their work, which permanently changed their conditions. The precedents of these two rulers encouraged the following kings to do the same. However, this new order, which became customary in most major cities of pre-modern Iran, did not improve their reputation. The female performers were still associated with promiscuity and the male ones with loose morals and sinful activities.

In his 'Music, Festivity, and Gender in Iran from the Qajar to the Early Pahlavi Period', Sasan Fatemi argues that 'in the Safavid and Zand periods, groups that included dancer/prostitutes were held in high regard, to the extent that some European travelogues' report the existence of 'dancer-prostitutes who were quite wealthy.' (Fatemi 2005: 400) There are also a number of

other documents that indicate the importance of dance during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In his history of Iranian music, for instance, Rouhollah Khaleghi refers to a book on dance movements and dance styles compiled and used in the court during the Safavid era. (1956:477) But as evidence, one can mention the paintings and murals of the period and the detailed descriptions of the court performances by European travellers which regularly depict or refer to dancers and musicians performing in front of the king. The European travelogues also tell us of the female dancers of Shah Abbās's court performing in the streets of Isfahan (Mashhoon, 1994: 295), a development that was unprecedented and reflects Shah Abbās's determination to expand the cultural arena of his capital so that foreign merchants find themselves welcome in the city. Yet it is doubtful that what Fatemi refers to as 'high regard' was real. The support these entertainers received from the king helped them prosper by performing in various occasions for wealthy people and for the court, but it never helped them be accepted or treated as normal citizens. They could easily be forced out of their homes, punished or even killed if their interests conflicted with those of the more religious people.²⁶

Later during the Qajar era (1794-1925), some women musicians achieved fame for the quality of their work. Yet it was the work of female entertaining troupes in courts that reached its peak during the period. They performed in all the court parties including weddings, circumcision celebrations, and New Year festivities. (Mashhoon 1994: 374-376) Many of these girls resided in the king's harem as his concubines bound in temporary marriages and, as in the case of the pre-Islamic harems, were counted among his properties.²⁷ The queen and the other important

²⁶ For Safavid entertainers see Rudi Matthee's relevant publications (1999, 2000 and 2005) on the subject.

²⁷ Two famous instrumentalists, Shah Verdi Khan and Shah Pasand, and a famous singer, Moshtari Khaoom were all Fat-h Ali Shah's wives. There was also Mah-leqa, the famous poet, songwriter and instrumentalist who later moved to India. Yet they could be easily discarded or given to others whenever the king saw appropriate. Azdodowleh in his diary which contains valuable information about the inner life of Qajar court, writes that once when Fat-h Ali Shah discovered that one of his military commanders was alone in the capital, he immediately divorced four of these concubine-wives (who were in the entertainer's category) and sent them to his home (Azodi 1976:74).

wives and daughters of the king also had their own musical troupes. (Maleki 2001:597) Mashhoon's account of the way these groups developed and how they ranked in the court suggests that these were new practices, but if we compare it with Shahbazi's description of the Achamanid harems, it is easy to see that it is the continuation of an ancient practice:

Many of the king's wives set up their own musical troupes just to attract his attention. For example Mah Nesa Khanum took twelve girls and sponsored them for two years to learn music and dance. Then she made a *bazm* (party) for the king. The king compensated by giving her a precious ring and arranging for the girls that he liked to join his harem. (Mashhoon 1994: 387)²⁸

Apart from those involved in entertainment, women engaged in religious forms of performance with music components — *ta'ziyeh* plays, *moludi*²⁹ recitations and other home-based female-only religious ceremonies — also had no chance of performing in public.

The court entertainers had to stay in the court or, at most, go to the celebrations in the houses of the rich families. As music related activities also carried the stigma of promiscuity and immorality, even those women who were active in art music did not want to perform in public.³⁰ As a result, the gap between the public and private lives of certain sections of people, which since the advent of Islam was an integral part of Iranian life, was more than ever increased. *Andaruni* (inside) was a world of morally accepted but culturally suppressed festivities for women, in which music played an important role, and *biruni* (outside) was a world of respectability and work.

²⁸ All the translations from Persian references were done by the present author.

²⁹ *Ta'zieh* is a form of passion play which developed in Iran during the seventeenth century. The performances, which were rooted in the pre-Islamic mourning rituals for Siyavash involved music and most of the dialogue was in the form of songs. *Moloodi* is a form of joyful celebration for the birth day of Shi'a Saints. Depending on the mood of the people invited to the ceremony, it may contain music, singing, prayer and Koranic recitations.

³⁰ The diaries of musicians and courtiers and the travelogues of foreign visitors frequently describe the performances of court entertainers, but hardly ever refer to the work of women musicians who performed classical music in serious environments. Since in the judgement of the public the practice of music was considered beneath the honour of a respectable person and even the works of significant male musicians were considered trivial, women preferred not to be known. (Khaleghi 1956:127-128)



Female performers in Qajar royal courtyard during the early 1900s³¹

During the last decades of the Qajar era, some tried to improve the conditions of the country by encouraging the political establishment to install various reforms. Yet the slow-moving political establishment and the economic games of colonial powers brought these attempts to nothing until the country exploded into a series of conflicts that resulted in the events of the constitutional revolution (1906-1909) and the establishment of the Iranian parliament. The conflicts enhanced the people's patriotic feelings and the use of the new media to communicate new ideas led to the rise of the spirit of liberation, which in turn revolutionized the forms and contents of all art forms, particularly music, which came out of its hidden spaces and became public in all its various forms.³²

For the first time, art music began to be considered a reputed art form. Music found its way out of the courts and courtyards and entered the public spaces, particularly because some

³¹ Picture from <<http://old-pic.blogspot.com/>>

³² For the background and the conflicts of the constitutional revolution, see Janet Afari (1996).

musicians and songwriters were in the forefronts of the revolutionary conflicts. In the past, serious music outside the court was mostly associated with the religious forms of music heard in such public spaces as *tekiyehs* (open or enclosed spaces for the performance of *ta'ziyeh*), but now classical, art music could be heard in public spaces as well as in the houses and gardens of the elite where at times nationalistic and revolutionary plays were also performed. The arrival of the gramophone records of Iranian classical music recorded in the studios abroad made another major contribution to the socio-cultural revolution that improved the potential of music. The new industry could attract new practitioners, from among male and female musicians. It was as yet a long way from the first recording of female voice in 1925 and the public broadcasting of female singing, which occurred only after the establishment of radio in 1940.³³

The most important development, however, was that the tradition of female entertainers residing in the courts came to an end, and with the death of Mozaffaredin Shah, the long-held practice of maintaining royal harems came to an abrupt end. The female entertainers and their trainees now had to find their audience from among the people. Necessity forced them to enhance their work with their male colleagues and increase their economic potential by working with Merriment Associations (*Bongāh-e Shādmāni*) As Bahram Beyzaie describes them, these were shop-like spaces that organized the works of one, two or several music/acting troupes. People would consult these to invite music and comic theatre troupes to their celebrations for a fee. Some of these associations also had troupes of female players and entertainers. (2001: 198-203)

During the constitutional revolution, the process of modernization in Iran came to its pre-Pahlavi peak. After the constitutional revolution women began to take part in concerts and

³³ For the history of voice recording in Iran, see Sasan Sepanta (1998).

plays, and within two decades, went on trips outside the country to record their voices. (Sepanta 1998: 47) The first female performers who began to perform in the public were singers. Female instrumentalists of art music were still reluctant to perform in the public, and dance was still considered a lowly occupation belonging to immoral girls and drunken men.

Pahlavi Era (1925-1979): Female Musicians and the Rise of Modern Institutions

Coming from a military background, Reza Shah (R. 1921/25-1941) began to rule the country from 1921 as the premier and then from 1925 as the founder of a new dynasty. As a historical figure, he is also renowned as the most powerful ruler of modern Iran and credited for centralizing the Iranian government.³⁴ Yet his reign is also associated with extremes of top-down development, and his inevitable inability to attract the cooperation and consent of any of the traditionally respected institutions. The essential target of Reza Shah's attacks was the unrivalled and unregulated power of the Islamic institutions over the country's life. Backed by some of the leading intellectuals of the time, who saw in his crude approach to power a potential for rapid modernization, he initiated a number of reforms that, as Keddie explains, 'weakened the ulama [clergymen] and their ideological hegemony'. (2003: 103) He also managed to suppress the power of local lords, build roads and railroads, establish a ministry of justice, and launch modern schools, the first Iranian university and a radio station to facilitate the process of nation building. Since these new institutions challenged the position of the clergy as the teachers, moral guides and judges of the people, the result was a total break up with the clergy, a form of de-Islamization that became more transparent when he enforced the new dress codes for men and women.³⁵

³⁴ For the socio-political and cultural history of the period, see Nicki Keddie (2003).

³⁵ Men were required to wear the military-like Pahlavi caps instead of their traditional top hats. Women were required to shed their traditional top-toe *Hejābs*. As some Iranians used to say after the 1979 revolution, 'nice governments we have had: they forcefully removed the scarf from our mothers' head to put it on our daughters'. For more see Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (1982), pp.102-168.

This rapid process of dismantling and reconstructing totally changed the condition of music in Iran. In his attempts to confront the religious obsessions of the people, Reza Shah banned certain sacred ceremonies which involved violent demonstration of religious zeal. Yet he failed to notice that these ceremonies resulted in some form of catharsis for the religious people and carried unacknowledged entertaining and communal values for others. Thus though he supported all secular art forms, his banning of these popular religious practices stymied the development of the indigenous Iranian secular drama which had already begun to be performed along the *ta'ziyeh* passion plays. In the absence of more relevant models and consumed by a desire for rapid modernization, his plans, like the plans of other reformists, suffered from a general misconception that equalled modernization with westernization. Thus he and his advisors often failed to see the artistic qualities of those art forms formerly used for religious ceremonies.

His vision of the arts was particularly supportive of those individuals who had visions of reconstructing non-religious national forms and systematizing the education of art in Iran on the bases of European models. In the case of music, one of these individuals was Ali Naqi-e Vaziri (1887-1979), one of the first people who tried to 'modernize/westernize' Iranian music by composing pieces with Iranian melodies and classical western arrangements. Vaziri's work was important in initiating practical research on the nature and structural qualities of Iranian music. It was also valuable in terms of the opportunities it provided for women. Women who had already begun to appear as actors in musical plays began to appear in public as singers. To bring women into the musical life of the country, he established three centres in the second half of the 1920s, which, nevertheless, failed to achieve their aims. First he dedicated one of the classrooms within his Conservatory of Music to training girls from the families that he personally knew. Yet after two years of work, these female-only classes were stopped due to the pressures from religious groups. Then he established a women's club

where women could go once a week to see some concerts, but after a couple of months this one also failed due to social prohibitions and pressures. Finally he opened a small cinema for ladies, which was destroyed in a fire. (Khaleghi 1956: 235-236) These failed attempts, however, set the precedent for future initiatives and the growth of a small group of female musicians.

It was in the heat of these rapid changes and only a year after the establishment of the first radio station in 1940 that the country was invaded by the Allies. Reza Shah was dethroned, due to his pro-German sympathies, and the power was transferred to his eldest son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. For a time, it seemed as if the top-down development was going to be replaced by more negotiated forms of development. There were a number of free elections and the reformist intelligentsia who had greatly suffered from the political suppressions of the final years of Reza Shah's reign began to reassess and reform the basic concepts of Iranian modernity. However, the secessionist interventions of the Soviets in northern Iran and the colonial economic plans of the British for Iranian oil complicated the political problems of the country. Thus the conflicts over the nationalization of oil industry led to the British/American-backed coup of 1953 that gave the second Pahlavi the absolute power that the first one had enjoyed.³⁶

The rapid process of westernized modernization once more gathered pace during Mohammad Reza Shah's reign (1941-79). The official obsession with western forms was not, of course, a product of the second Pahlavi period; it was the direct result of the Pahlavis' desire to make the country, at least in appearance, like European countries. In its extreme forms, the trend created serious setbacks for Iranian classical music. Around 1934, for instance, the cultural policies of Reza Shah's government began to glorify pure western classical music at the expense of the

³⁶ For more on the subject, see Keddie(2003): 105-32.

Iranian forms. The policies were obviously consumerist and at the service of artistic pretension rather than actual development. The first chorus of classical music, for instance, was established in 1934, when Iranian classical music was only marginally supported. From 1939 till 1946 foreign musicians were regularly invited to Iran and paid big salaries to teach western styles of singing to Iranian students. Then the symphonic orchestra of Tehran officially commenced its activities in 1946, and a decade later, in 1955, the Iran National Institute of Ballet was established and continued its work until the revolution. (Maleki 2001:250-253) The problem was that though all these activities were sponsored by the government, as Darvishi reports, most of the instrumentalists of the symphonic orchestra and ballet dancers (but not opera singers) were non-Iranian. (Darvishi 1994: 186) According to Darvishi,

Rather than being a response to the cultural/artistic needs of the country, the establishment of facilities for operas, ballet groups, symphonic orchestras etc, was in line with the government's plan for making Iran similar to western countries and negating or at least neglecting the Iranian art forms. (175)

In fact, even far after the training schools of western classical music and ballet had been properly established, they could not provide enough qualified singers, instrumentalists and dancers to make the symphonic orchestra and similar organizations completely independent from foreign performers or trainers. (185)

This shortage, as Darvishi also indicates, was mostly due to the lack of public interest, which was partly rooted in the ill-advised approach to promoting these western forms and their hybrid reformulations in Iran. Thus although such activities were sponsored by the state, they always remained limited in their scope. Another factor that the process of development in relationship to music was that while during Pahlavi era, religious restrictions had little influence on large scale cultural policies, familial and social restrictions were strong, particularly because the clerical establishment prohibited the faithful from listening to radio, and since the late 1950s, from watching television. Moreover, the clerics still had full control over such important public spaces as mosques and *tekiyehs* which they used for political purposes. As a result of these

misguided policies and the indirect influence of the religious establishments, in addition to being considered immoral and promiscuous, women active in performing arts and music-related activities were thought of as being the embodiments of colonial interference and western-induced corruption.

The music life of the country was characterized by a medley of various elements and Tehran, as Nettl once described, was an embodiment of this confusing mixture: the 'musical experience reflects the character of this city, which is a mad mixture of traditional and recent, of old Middle Eastern and modern American, of conservative Islam and atheistic avant-garde'. (Nettl 1970: 183) Daryush Shayegan, the Iranian philosopher, believes that rather than being a reaction to modernity, the negative attitudes of large sections of the Iranian people was directed at the Pahlavi's style of modernization. Thus the insistence of various layers of society on upholding religiously significant traditional practices during the 1960s and 1970s was a direct consequence of this confusion which originated in the west-obsessed, top-down modernization plans that transformed Iran from a backward country with high potential to a confused modern nation-state. He also argues that it was this distorted form of development that led to the formation of various nativist movements in the 1950s and 1960s. (Shayegan 2006)

These nativist movements with their call for a return to the roots and their confrontational attitudes towards what Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923- 69), the Iranian novelist and cultural activist, called *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxication) encouraged many artists to embark on intensive studies of Iranian and other non-western art forms and try to revitalize and systematize indigenous art forms.³⁷ From the 1960s onwards the Empress Farah Diba, an arts graduate, who wished to familiarize Iranians with avant-garde visual and performing arts, while revitalizing traditional

³⁷ In their positive open-minded formations, these new tendencies resulted in a more balanced attitude towards western art forms. Yet in extreme cases, they were reactionary and at times extremely religious, forming a base for the growth of ideologies that created the more prejudiced and bigoted sections of the future Islamic government. For a detailed study of nativism in Iran see Mehrzad Broujerdi (1996).

Iranian forms, began to support this urge for refashioning Iranian forms and sponsored various research, training, performing and construction programmes for artistic activities. It was during the same years that women's participation in formal music activities expanded.

Established in 1961, for instance, Banovan orchestra (*Orkesr-e Bānovān*), literally women orchestra, was established and attracted a number of instrumentslists to function as one of the numerous orchestras run by the Ministry of Art and Culture for formal performance. Though its first conductor was a man, Mostafa Kamal Pourtorab (b.1924), from 1969 till 1979 the orchestra was headed by Ms Ofelia Partow (b.1938).



Banovan Orchestra³⁸

As to music and dance, the traditional and regional forms began to receive more attention from the early 1960s. It was thus under the unacknowledged banner of constructive return to roots that the National Organization of Iranian Folklore (*Sāzemān-e Melli-e Folklore-e Iran*) was established in 1967 and enhanced the activities of such centres as The Technical School of National and Regional Dance (*Honerstān-e Raqs-hāy-e Melli va Mahalli*) to collect regional dance forms. Soon other centres followed. The Centre for the Preservation and Propagation of Traditional Music (*Markaz-e Hefz va Eshā'e-ye Musiqi-e Sonnatī*), for instance, was

³⁸ Picture from <<http://old-pic.blogspot.com/>>

established in 1971, and the Centre for the Collection and Study of Regional Music (*Gerdāvāri va Shenākht-e Musiqi-e Mahali*) in 1972. A group of musicians and choreographers began to make research trips to various parts of Iran to collect and record the regional music forms.

The process also involved the establishment of a number of national and international festivals that channelled the performing and composing talents and research of some of the leading practitioners of the period and set the stage for future developments. With the advent of 1979 revolution, some of these activities were stopped and some went in unpredictable directions. However, the advent of the revolution, in turn, triggered a number of other processes in relationship with music, through which the underlying prohibitions and the long-standing negative beliefs and tendencies about music came into full practice

1979 Revolution: Prohibitions in Power

The 1979 revolution overthrew the secular and modernist but autocratic government of Mohammed Reza Shah and brought to power Ayatollah Khomeini whose call for an independent Islamic Iran, free from 'western corruption and immoralities', appealed to various layers of Iranian society. As Janet Afari explains, 'the new hybrid discourses of Khomeini brought millions of people to the streets of Iran'. Since this was something that 'the more secular and left opponents of the regime had not been able to do,' (Afari 2004) they had no way but to join in the street demonstrations and help topple the Shah. Some shi'a traditions were used politically as they could 'bring people together automatically without the need to argue about dates or locations' and 'utilize ritual emotions to identify opposition to the regime'. (Keddie 1981: 226)

The role of these secular groups in leading the conflicts is undeniable, but when the regime was toppled, rather than allowing for a free referendum, Ayatollah Khomeini used his influence and

power to limit people's choice to a yes/no vote for or against the 'Islamic Republic'. Later his purgation of western immoralities also turned out to be a nativist obsession with reducing individual liberties, particularly 'the liberties women had gained after World War Second'. (Ibid. 223) This new formation was 'unique to Iran — as the only state that has embodied clerical rule with populist republican elements'. Underestimating the 'leading role of clerics and their ability to rule', the intelligentsia was totally checkmated by the clerics' manipulation of the public opinion. (Keddie 1981: 226) A revolution that began with the slogan of people's right to self-determination and political freedom failed to even approach that target, and instead ended up depriving the people of the modest social freedoms that they had enjoyed for several decades.

Political change plays a major role in the transformation of the general ambiance of musical and artistic activities. Although it was a coalition of all the opposition groups, extending from the radical Islamists to radical communists, that overthrew the Pahlavi government, it was the Islamists who got the power after the political turmoil. The changes in the musical life of the country and the music activities of women were in direct relationship with the political changes that followed this change of power after the revolution. I have discussed these changes in four periods: 1979 to 1989, 1989 to 1997, 1997 to 2005, and 2005 till now.

Music through Post-Revolution Political Changes

The first Era: 1979-1989

With the merging of the political and religious establishments after the establishment of the Islamic republic, a gradual form of moral sobriety slowly overcame the cultural activities of the country. The mere involvement in artistic activities was enough to categorize the individual as being frivolous, involved in doing something useless or even corrupt, especially if the

individual was a woman. Women, in fact, were turning into the main target of the government's bid to control the public life of the people. However, the government's determination to use the arts, under the banner of 'committed art' (*honar-e mote'ahed*), for propaganda purposes, gradually moderated these attitudes. With this attitude, the idea of judging the artists or musicians on the basis of the media and genres they worked in gained dominance. As to performers involved in music, this approach meant that the performer was judged, even before s/he appeared in the public or her/his work was distributed. Although the social standing and education of the listeners were influential in their judgments, in general, traditional, slow tempo music attracted more respect – but not more audience—than popular, fast tempo music.

The first few years after the revolution were the most chaotic ones. While some Islamic groups were establishing their political domination, the positions of other groups, even some of the Islamic ones, changed one by one from allies to oppositions. The disagreement among different groups led to serious political and occasional armed conflicts in the streets. Yet the coalition of the dominant Islamic groups under the banner of Ayatollah Khomeini gradually finalized their power by widespread arrests and mass executions of the members of the opposition groups. The primary goal of this new government was the 'Islamization of the culture' according to their own understanding of Islam, and the implementation of the Islamic *shari'a* law in order to cleanse the country of the 'Western corruption and immoralities' of the previous regime.

The process got momentum in April 1980, the beginning of the so-called 'cultural revolution' which initiated the compulsory Islamization of cultural activities, the sacking of university teacher and researchers with liberal or Marxist tendencies, and the closure of all universities for two years. During these two years, the focus was on checking the content of textbooks and research studies for non-Islamic contents and preparing religious students or researchers to

assume university positions. In the case of music departments, however, the closure remained in place for more than eight years. Ayatollah Khomeini's statements against music complicated the position of music teachers and researchers. A few months after his arrival in Tehran in January 1979, while the country was full of revolutionary songs, he talked of music as 'the opium of the youth' and released a religious *fatwa* (decree) that made the trading and using of musical instruments illegal. In a speech he made for the employers of Iran's music channel, Radio Daryā (The Sea Radio), he declared:

Among the things that stupefy the brain of our youth is music. It causes stupor in the brain of the person who listens to it and gradually makes the brain inactive and unserious... It is one of those things that everyone likes by nature, yet it deprives people of seriousness and transforms them into frivolous and futile creatures. It can change people to such an extent that they may not be able to think about anything but the base passions or the activities associated with music. Radio and television should not broadcast ten hours of music, and deprive our powerful youth of their power. Music is not different from opium....If you want your country to be independent, change its radio and television so that it becomes edifying; remove music. Do not be afraid of being called 'old-fashioned'. Okay, we are 'old-fashioned'. These are all conspiracies to stop you from serious work.... Music is betrayal of one's country; betrayal of our youth. Remove it all together and broadcast something that is educational and edifying. (Khomeini 1986, 205)

Since as outlined in this speech music was sinful or, at its best a futile and potentially corruptive activity, dedicating ones time to studying and teaching it was a sign of corruption and thus music could not be allowed under the new regulations. Most music-related activities, therefore, came to a halt. With the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980, the conditions became more difficult. The war and the economic sanctions imposed by the United States sent the country into a high security status that heightened the political arrests and executions of members of opposition parties. The recurrent raids and conflicts, the official and private mourning ceremonies of the martyrs of the war, Saddam Hussein's recurrent bombardments of Iranian cities, state and party terrorism, and the government's calls for stoicism and sacrifice left little public space for happiness and entertainment. Music on the

state-run television and radio was restricted to revolutionary songs, songs in praise of martyrs, the sober music of television series and the simple music of children's cartoons which were at times censored to maintain the regulations. I remember that on some religious mourning occasions even the music of cartoons were cut off and replaced with some cymbal and drum playing. Other musical genres, like regional music, Iranian classical music and European classical music were reduced to a minimum on the media and the public spaces, heard only during the significant celebrations. Popular music could only be heard in the privacy of people's houses.

The hardliners within the establishment aspired to stop all musical activities, and, whenever they could, they used official resources to raid people's home and destroy musical instruments, music cassettes and music videos. If in Afghanistan, as John Baily reports, musical instruments or video and audio tapes were mockingly executed by the Taliban (2001, 36-8), in Iran the scene was that of smashing musical instruments or tapes in the streets or outside people's homes after governmental raids. The raids were associated with the parties that included music and dance, yet there were also vice squads patrolling the streets or stopping cars randomly to check for illegal stuff, including music tapes and videos. A musical instrument could put one in trouble with fines and detention being regular practices. For many years, therefore, carrying a musical instrument needed a permit, which, nevertheless, did not guarantee safe passage.³⁹

The Second Era: 1989-97

The second period began with the end of the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. It was an important time for music because a few months before his death Ayatollah Khomeini released a new religious decree, *fatwa*, in which he declared that music-related activities and

³⁹ For more see Youssefzadeh (2000); Persian readers can also check the report on Ziba Shirvani, the female singer and instrumentalist of regional music of southern Iran who used to play in wedding ceremonies during the 1980s. The report can be accessed at <<http://iranianfeministschool.net/spip.php?article2930>>.

the purchase of musical instruments is religiously permitted if they are to be used for 'licit purposes'. The *fatwa* was very significant because according to the specific readings of *shari'a* law making and trading any musical instruments is forbidden (*harām*). The belief has been so deeply rooted that in Iran the major makers and sellers of musical instruments have been Jews or Christians. As Khaleghi indicates, although, for instance, the best players of *tār* have been from the Muslim Farahani family, the best ever known *tār(s)* in Iran have been made by Yahya, a well known Jewish Iranian instrument maker.

Another major point of departure was the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988. With the end of the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the structure of power and control gradually changed, a more moderate president came to power, and some of pressures. In public spaces, revolutionary and war songs were gradually replaced by Iranian classical music, which enjoyed a high degree of success and popularity and was recurrently broadcasted from national radio and television channels on scenes of meadows, waterfalls and flowers. Musical instruments were still absent from the screen. The names of the singers, instrumentalists, composer, or any other details about the production of the song were also denied to the spectator. The greatest absence, however, was female presence. With the legalization of music, the number of women instrumentalist drastically increased, but since the instruments were never shown, and women were not allowed to sing as solo singers, women were absent from the images broadcast from television.

Popular music still had its active black market because according to the ruling system any music that could encourage dancing was forbidden. People attending or hosting wedding celebrations and other mixed gender private parties always faced the risk of raids by the revolutionary guards who were in hunt for parties in which popular music was played and uncovered women would dance. In such parties people used to fit thick blankets on the doors

and windows to keep the sound of music from going out. Some of the older members of the family also waited outside and told the participants to turn down the music in case the guards were near. At times, if substantial bribes were offered in a friendly way and in euphemistic terms, the guards would leave. But there were many cases in which the bride, the groom and guests had to spend a night in the police station and pay substantial fines to be released. These problems which were customary since the early 1980s gradually became less frequent during the mid 1990s, but for more than a decade they were the greatest markers of the serious gap between public and private lives of Iranian people, who had to pretend to be something else in order to be able to continue living.

The Reform Era: 1997- 2005

When in 1997 Mohammad Khatami reappeared in Iranian politics as a candidate for presidency, few people in the ruling system expected him to be elected. The cultural activists and artists remembered him as the moderate head of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance who had resigned in reaction to the expectations of the radical Islamists to impose more restrictions on cultural and artistic activities. People, on the other hand, were fascinated by genuine composure, his wise responses to questions raised by others during the presidential campaigns and his promises to expand the limits of political freedom and cultural activities. His first term in office was, indeed, an era of political expansion and reform, a flourishing time for journalists, book publishers, artists, writers, theatrical activities and filmmakers as well as musicians. Though some of the restrictions on female solo singing remained in place, Khatami and his team managed to provide unique opportunities for the expansion of classical Iranian music. Many successful works of the masters of Iranian classical music got regular performance permits during his presidency, and the female-only performances were expanded to provide performance spaces for female Iranian singers. In general, during his presidency the

process of giving permits for concerts, releasing CDs and many other music-related activities was simplified and the officials were much more open-minded in comparison to previous periods.

Most cultural activists and artists who appreciated his approach to reform and his commitment to creating political and cultural reform supported him in his first and second campaigns for presidency and continued to support him in different ways even after the end of his presidency in 2005. Though the pressures of the non-elected sections of Iranian political establishment increased during his second term of presidency and annulled many of his plans, he maintained aspects of this more open space up to the end of his presidency. His two terms in office are generally referred to as the best post-revolutionary era for journalistic, cultural, artistic and literary activities in the country. Though the list is not exhaustive, here, I have referred to some of the major music-related changes that occurred during his presidency.

a) Popular music of the calmer forms began to reappear in the public lives of Iranians. The legalizing process began by a few outdoor concerts in which slow-paced pop music was performed and gradually expanded to enter soundscape of national radio and television. The practice has continued and has not since changed that much. The singers were, and still are, men; and though women as instrumentalists, choral singers or accompanying singers actively perform in different performances, female solo singing remained banned. In live concerts the members of the audience are supposed to maintain their composure and sit still. If they make too much noise or try to dance in reaction to the music they are asked to leave the performance space. The borderline for the legitimacy of pop music is that it should not encourage dancing — or make you feel you want to move parts of your body. Clapping is allowed, but not any

dancing movements. Nevertheless, the performers may slightly increase the beat to make the music more appealing than the recorded version that has been authorized for performance.⁴⁰

During the presidency of Mohammad Khatami even some performers of Rock music groups, which had remained underground received permits to perform. The practice, however, did not continue in full except for a few performances, and, thus, nowadays these groups have returned to their basement performances. Some of these Rock music groups had women among their instrumentalists and co-singers.⁴¹

b) Another major development was the official establishment of female-only concerts to contain and channel the talents of women solo singers. In such concerts female solo singers sing for a female audience. All technicians are also women. Prior to their entrance to the performing space, the members of the audience are supposed to give their mobile phones or cameras to the female guards who search everyone before allowing them to enter the hall. Even the security cameras are off during these performances.

c) One more important change was that some forms of dance were legalized under the new name of 'rhythmic movement' and as part of theatrical performances. This development has been by far the most important achievement in the silent pushing of governmental boundaries. Dance was the most demonized art form after the revolution, and nobody even dared to mention its name in public. Surprisingly the activities of mainly two women who insisted that dance is an art form and can be presented as art led to the legalization of dance in theatre and dance per se.

⁴⁰ For more also see Nooshin's article 'Subversion and Countersubversion: Power, Control, and Meaning in the New Iranian Pop Music' (2005).

⁴¹ See also Nooshin's article 'Underground, Overground: Rock Music and Youth Discourses in Iran' In *Iranian Studies* 38, 3: 463-94, (2005) and the documentary *Sedāy-e dovom* (Back Vocal), 2004, by Mojtaba Mirtahmasb (b. 1971)

Since my focused chapters and my case studies will be referring to these developments in some details it suffices to mention that some of these developments have remained legal bringing more and more women into the centre of music-related activities. Even those which were discontinued after the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad returned to a very active underground space, which fuels some sections of the black market of Iranian music.

The Era of Populist Fundamentalism: 2005-2011⁴²

The controversial presidential election of 2005 resulted in the presidency of Mahomoud Ahmadi-Nejad, who brought to the centre of Iranian politics a mixture of populism and pretended or real fundamentalism. Since one of the major targets of his group has been to control the cultural activities that were legalized and expanded during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, the process of giving permits for concerts and other music-related activities has once more become complicated and tight. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in these years, rather than working on the basis of regulations and the guidelines that has been in place for more than a decade, has worked on the basis of the tastes of the individuals who make the decisions. Since as Hooshang Mahrooyan argues, the governmental system is 'tribal' (2004:15), anyone who is appointed as the head of a ministry or a major administrative department first embarks on 'making' jobs for his loyal family members and friends, who then become more concerned with following orders and keeping their jobs than with making sound decisions and facilitating the cultural activities that may trigger innovation in artistic activities. It is thus quite natural in Iran for a chairman to have a number of assistants and for a centre to have several unnecessary subdivisions.

The same process has continued after the controversial election of 2009, which kept Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad in office and resulted in wide-spread street conflicts. As one may expect,

⁴² In Iran Ahmadi Nejad's government is often associated with 'populist fundamentalism' by oppositions.

cultural activists, artists and musicians, particularly women involved in the arts actively denounced Ahamdi-Nejad and supported his rivals, yet he came back to office and continued to focus on controlling the activities of artists, filmmakers and musicians. Nevertheless, the tacit negotiation for the expansion of artistic and cultural activities has never stopped.

However, as in the case of the last thirty-two years, these prohibitions have led to other developments in art and music-related activities. The roots of the music-related activities of the last four decades, the prohibitions imposed on music activities and the creative responses that they have triggered since the early years of the revolution among female performers are the proper subjects of the main body of my thesis, which is arranged to study the conditions of female instrumentalists, singers and dancers by general overviews and case studies.

Chapter Two

Music and Instrumentalist through Political Changes

In the previous chapter I traced the role of female performers in pre-modern Iran. The chapter showed that apart from some exceptions, women's roles were mostly defined as entertainers performing in the privacy of courts, or if a powerful king required it, in public. I also briefly discussed the rapid process of change during the twentieth century, referred to some of the cultural practices and beliefs that made the large scale ban on Iranian music possible and then referred to the general condition of music during the last three decades. In this chapter I will introduce the main musical genres that developed and became prevalent in modern Iran during the twentieth century and then focus on the bans and restrictions imposed on the public presence of music after the 1979 revolution. Since the chapter is intended to contextualize my case study on a leading female instrumentalist, the sections on post-revolution music also concerns itself with the conditions of female musicians active in these fields. However, as the bans and restrictions were basically the same for the men and women active in these fields, I will also discuss the general conditions of music with reference to the socio-political challenges they have faced during the last three decades.

Musical Genres during the Twentieth Century: Types, Origins and Classifications

As the people of a country extending from South Asia to the Eastern borders of Europe and from Central Asia to the Arab world, with shared historical roots with many of its neighboring countries, Iranians have had cultural relations with many different peoples. These intense cultural relations have led to cultural cross-fertilization in music-related activities, creating similarities in music forms, performance styles, teaching methods and musical instruments. Nevertheless, Iranian classical music, like the classical musics of its neighboring countries has

kept its unique features. As far as the literature on the subject shows, this music system has been until very recently taught through oral transmission. But as occasional historical references and the notations of a music piece by Abdolqader Maraghehi (ca. 1350s-1435) show, in medieval and ancient Iran; musicians also used a system of notation which accounted for general rhythms and main notes. This notation system which used the *din dabireh* alphabets in pre-Islamic Iran and the Arabic alphabets in the medieval period was then complemented by meticulous master-pupil training sessions to transmit the complicated and subtle tremolos and decorative notes. It was also essentially tied to Persian poetry and voice accompaniment as a means to facilitate the training process. (Binesh 1997, 5-85)

This music system began to undergo some change in its training methods from the late nineteenth century, when the Iranian government enhanced its relationships with European countries to modernize the army and improve the condition of science education in Iran. In 1856, four years after the establishment of the Dārofonun Technical School, two French musicians were invited to the school to launch a music department to train instrumentalists for the army, where Iranian students learned western instruments to perform military music and join the Royal Music Group (*Goruh-e Muzic-e Saltanati*). The activities of the department did not remain limited to the royal parades or military activities. The graduates who had learned about western notation, orchestration, theory of music, harmony, sight singing, etc; began to use the concepts in their work and their tutorials with Iranian instruments. This transformation was reinforced during the following decades as Iranian musicians began to study music in Europe. Soon the arrival of the sound recording equipment and cinematography, the founding of the national radio, and the unprecedented political changes that enabled musicians to appear in the public transformed the way musicians understood and taught music. (Darvishi 1994, 27-79)

At the same time a new professional category was introduced into Iranian classical music. In classical Iranian music, there was no professional category as composer (*Āhangāsz*). All master instrumentalists were improvisers and performers and could create pieces that in rare occasions had their names on. The students kept practicing till they achieved that status. With the increasing demand for music, and the increase in the number of instrumentalists, the job became more specialized. In this regard two major groups can be recognized: One group was comprised of the great master performers trained with the traditional methods and particularly adept in improvisation or composing through performing and auditory memorization.⁴³ The other group went through similar processes, but recorded their music by using the western system of notation. The second group of musicians account for the bulk of Iranian classical music that was produced between the 1920s and 1970s and heard in Iranian national radio and later television.

However, though the major practitioners of the second group had also received training from the masters of Iranian classical music, they were criticized by some traditionalists for allowing non-Iranian elements into their performances, which, according to their critics, could lead to the disappearance of the subtleties of Iranian music. With the infiltration of the return-to-the-roots movements of the 1960s into various intellectual and artistic activities and the establishment of The Centre for the Preservation and Propagation of Traditional Iranian Music of Iran (Markaz-e Hefz va Eshā'eh-ye Musiqi-e Sonati-e Iran) in 1968, making distinctions between different genres of classical music became stronger. The academic community which had increased its interest in Iranian classical music since the 1960s also began to have its own classifications. However, judging on the basis of my experience with the masters of the previous generation and my studies of Binesh, Darvishi, Khaleghi, Kiani, and

⁴³ For more on the concept of composition and improvisation in classical music in Iran see Nooshin's article 'Improvisation as 'Other': Creativity, Knowledge and Power – The Case of Iranian Classical Music (2003) in the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*.

others' works on the history of Iranian music, none of these groups produced classifications that the masters, performers and scholars of other groups would accept. Another problem was that some of the practitioners who performed in a particular style preferred to consider themselves as performing in another. For instance, many performers who considered their works as classical performed in styles that many academic or independent scholars categorized as popularized classical. Moreover, the names used for each style or each genre differed from one scholar or master to another. For instance, for the rural music forms practiced across Iran, different groups may use folk, regional (*navāhi* or *mahalli*), or māqam based (*maqāmi*).

This problem became more pronounced after the 1979 revolution. With the closure of the music departments in 1980, the academic study of music stopped for a decade. Even the research activities that were privately funded confronted great obstacles. The extensive research on regional music forms, initiated by the female composer and musicologist, Fuzieh Majd, (b.1938) and her colleagues, for instance, was one of the biggest projects that were stopped because of the negative attitudes of the government and lack of funding. The group had organized a great number of recording expeditions and collected valuable audio-visual material. But most of their research materials, including more than 500 recordings, were blocked from access in the archives of Iranian television. (Youssefzadeh 2000: 37)

The same limitations created problems in researching Iranian classical music. Thus although the rapid changes in the ways musicians had to justify their work transformed their works and their classifications, most of these changes remained unstudied. When the music departments reopened in 1989, the situation improved, but since the governmental support for academic research is close to nothing, research activities have remained limited in their scope or dependent on the personal means of scholars. For instance, Mohammad Reza Darvishi's

significant contribution to Iranian music, *Encyclopedia of the Musical Instruments of Iran (Dāyeratolmaāref-e sāzhā-ye Iran)* was done with no governmental support.⁴⁴

As a result of these academic disagreements and shortcomings, which due to the nature of the artistic creation, have been to some extent inevitable, the classifications which I offer below, though based on the general lines accepted by or at least comprehensible to major practitioners within Iran, may not be as sharp as one likes them to be.⁴⁵ Thus, since there is no single set of definitions accepted by all, in some cases people may disagree with the below classification. Putting aside the European classical music performed by Tehran symphonic orchestra and some other groups; I have organized my categories on the basis of four general genres and their subdivisions. The general categories are classical, regional, religious and popular music, which stand clear from one another in their forms and functions. Their subdivisions and their fusion forms, however, are those that have gradually developed from combining elements from these general categories. Determining the subdivisions of this genre has been a matter of controversy for the last four decades. The categories, however, can be given as follows:

1. Iranian/Persian Classical Music: Any music based on the repertoire of Iranian classical music (*radif*). Classical music has its roots in the formal city and court music, but it has been restructured by different degrees by its practitioners in response to the economic, cultural and political requirements of the different eras of the last two centuries. This has given birth to a number of subgenres. Though the proponents of classical music, who are usually from the educated or, as it is said, 'the cultured' (*bā farhang*) layers of the society, often listen to all

⁴⁴ When the first volume of this encyclopaedia, *Chordophones in Regional Music*, was published by the Institute of Culture and Art in Tehran in 2001, the academic world outside Iran acknowledged his work by granting him Klaus P. Wachsmann Prize for the best research publication on musical instruments and organology. In 2002, the book also received the Society for Ethnomusicology award for the best publication of the year on musical instruments. There was, however, no major acknowledgment on the part of the Iranian government.

⁴⁵ I have used a number of sources including lectures, pamphlets, and books by Alizadeh, Kiani, Meshkatian, Darvishi, Talaei and Lotfi.

these subgenres, each subgenre has its own avid supporters who prioritize it over others. As I have discussed the elements giving birth to these subgenres elsewhere, I will only describe the basic qualities of the forms.

a) Traditional (*Sonnati*) style. The instrumentalists and singers working in this style aspire to perform Iranian music in its old(er) forms. This can be performed by one singer alone, one instrumentalist alone, or with one to three instrumentalists performing along a singer. While there are rhythmic pieces of *pishdarāmad*, *tasnif* and *reng*, the main body of performance is comprised of the free rhythm improvisations on the basis of specific versions of the *Radif*, particularly as taught and compiled by Mirza Abdollah, Mirza Hosseingholi and Davami. The composition of new pieces is infrequent, but improvisation is central in all performances. In its mystic conceptualization, the performers become part of the organic whole of music while performing. They are not, thus, supposed to extract and transform the elements of this whole to produce a music composition and call it their own. The transience of improvisation, however, allows them to create variations without claiming ownership. Most traditionalists categorize other styles as ‘changed’ (*taghir yāfteh*) and/or Hybrid (*talfighi*).

b) Authentic (*Asil*) style. The term is intended to separate those bound to all aspects of the traditions from those who compose new pieces of music within the given frameworks of the Iranian classical music. They use newly invented musical instruments; organize ensembles that are regularly bigger (between four and forty) than the traditional ensembles, and build on the virtuosity of the instrumentalists to produce pieces in which the music rather than the vocal pieces becomes central.

c) Popularized (*Mardomi/Amiyāneh*). The term is often used as a generative term to refer to those types of performances or specific pieces in a performance which use elements from traditional Iranian popular music of Tehran, Iranian regional music, Turkish, Indian, and/or

Arab music in Iranian classical music. In *The Seven Systems of Iran's Music (Haft Dastgāh Musiqi-e Iran)* (1992), Majid Kiani describes some performances as *shirin navāzi* which literally means sweet or sugar-coated playing.

d) National (*Melli*). The term is mainly used for pieces with classical Iranian or regional based melodies arranged for orchestral performances. In most arrangements of such performances one or a number of Iranian musical instruments are also used.

2. Regional (*Navāhi or Mahalli*). (a) In its original/Traditional (*Sonnati*) and/or Authentic (*Asil*) form is performed by local masters or by practitioners who preserve the major qualities of the regional forms and their original stylistic features. In its original forms, apart from catering to the taste of the people coming from the same region as that of the music, it is also often a subject of scholarly studies for research or for creative purposes. (b) The genre, however, is also performed in different Changed (*Taghir Yafteh*) and/or hybrid (*talfighi*) forms in a variety of city forms and forums, including classical and popular genres. As such it is often used to give variety to classical and popular forms and is appreciated by those who love the dominant form to which the regional music is attached.

3. Popular Music. (a) The Iranian Traditional Popular Music of Urban Areas or *ru-howzi* (on-the-house-pond) involves a combination of dancing, singing, and theatrical performances. This genre has been the most important non-formal indigenous form, and most of the early modern mixed or female-only performances of musical dramas in private houses were in this category.⁴⁶ During the last fifty years, due to the arrival of other forms of entertainment and

⁴⁶ This genre has different subdivisions which may have their origins in pre-Islamic musical plays that have been transformed during the medieval and pre-modern eras. There are usually known, by the names used for them during the Qajar period (1794-1925). They may be referred to according to their typical stage as on-the-house-pond (*ru-howzi*) or on the board covered-pond (*takhteh-howzi*) as they were often performed in private yards on the house ponds that were covered with wooden frames. If the music was not accompanied by comic plays, it may have been called garden-alley (*kuche baghi*) music which was often performed by men or by a single male singer in outdoor settings such as coffeeshouses.

after the revolution due to the restrictions, the number of its performances has drastically decreased. Though it is varied in the type of people it caters to, the form is often associated, with lower class and lower middle class entertainment. (b) *Musiqi-e pop* (popular music) refers to those forms of popular music that gradually developed since the early twentieth century in the context of the musical and artistic cross fertilization between India, Turkey, Egypt and Iran and under the influence of western popular music and musical films. This term can refer to a range of performances from the exact replica of a non Iranian popular music, with replacement of Persian words, to mixing melodies and performing styles of Iranian and non-Iranian ones and adjust them to the taste of Iranian audiences. The audience of this genre is the most varied in Iran.

4. Religious Music. Iranian urban religious music has common roots with Iranian classical music and usually uses special forms of it to recite religious poems about the sacred people. Vocal performance is central to this genre and music accompaniment, if any, is kept to a minimum. (a) Mourning ceremonies (*azā dāri*): This type of music is used in different mourning ceremonies. Preaching (*Rowzeh Khāni*) often involves unaccompanied (rhythmic or free rhythm) recitation of the good qualities of the Shi'a saints for moral edification. Dirge recitation (*Nowheh Khāni*) refers to the recitation of different kinds of requiem, often without any music accompaniment. There is also the music associated with the mourning ceremonies of the commemoration of the martyrdom of the third Shi'a Imam and the male members of his extended family. This music may include all types of classical or even popular Iranian music forms. The songs are often in the form of dirges or mystic love songs for the martyrs sung during passion plays or separately during the ceremonies or the processions. The rhythmic movements of the people in the mourning processions as they are performing hand or chain self-flagellation are also regularly punctuated and accompanied by music and song. The music accompaniment is varied, but is often limited to wind and percussion instruments used for

military parades. (b) Celebratory ceremonies (*moludi*): These ceremonies are often held to celebrate the birthdays of the Shi'a saints. Thus they are usually referred to as birthday celebrations (*moludi*) and include songs in praise of God and the good qualities of the saint. The rhythm is usually catching and the participant clap as a form of accompaniment. The songs are sometimes accompanied by a percussion instrument.

Apart from these major music genres, there are also revolutionary songs, music of children, music of war songs, music of sport-related events etc. In the following section, I refer to the major problems that women and at times men and women face in contemporary Iran, and discuss some of the methods they use to confront these problems.

Iranian Classical Music: Challenges, Changes and Developments

My discussion will be around several major issues and developments and their consequences. I have, therefore, organized my discussion on the basis of the followings: (1) music and the contradictory interpretations of Islam, (2) the total control of the mass media organizations by the conservatives, (3) the pitfalls of receiving permits from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG), (4) copyright issues, financial matters, music sponsorship and music halls, (5) developments — gender, instrument, performance, training, democracy and power, (6) women, Islamic cover, performance, resistance and choice.

(1) Music and the Contradictory Interpretations of Islam. During the last three decades, the overall desire of the Iranian political establishment for reshaping everything according to its conception of Islam and its understanding of political hegemony and control has led to the attempts of successive governments to try to impose their own understandings of culture on the nation. However, since the personal tastes of these temporary or long term leaders and their

interpretations of Islamic tradition differ from one another, they have created a chaotic plurality that confuses people in some serious matters.⁴⁷

In relationship to music-related activities, the taste of the head of each government can create huge changes. The Iranian government defines itself in terms of a religious mission to build an independent powerful nation. As a result, politics and religion are closely associated, but since various factions within the government have their own interpretation of *shari'a* law, there are disagreements about cultural policies. As Hooshang Mahrooyan explains, this may partly be 'the result of the continuation of a tribal system', (2004, 15) but the evidence of the socio-political conflicts demonstrates that the apparent tribalism is itself an outcome of various interpretations and inconsistencies over religious rulings. Therefore a change in the head of the government would lead to the change of the second or even the third level chairmen of various organizations, not on the basis of merit, but just for the support they have provided for the new ruling person and his cultural or political policies.⁴⁸

(2) The Media and the Conservative Control. I believe that controlling the access of people to free flow of information and to unwanted audio-visual material is one of best way of moulding people's minds or directing them in the desired ways. Therefore, besides the military forces, the National radio and television channels are the only organizations that from the beginning of the revolution have been controlled by the 'conservatives' and remained 'under the direct supervision of the Guide of the Revolution', (Youssefzadeh, 2000:57) even during the time reformists were in power. The energy spent over controlling the media is rooted in the

⁴⁷ This plurality, however, has not produced the expected pluralism that gives freedom of choice to people. It has rather caused more problems because the socio-political redlines are continuously changing, but rarely expanding. For instance, the dress code for women which had been relaxed during the government of President Khatami has become a major concern during the Ahmadi-Nejhad's presidency.

⁴⁸ These overhauls, however, never result in unified legal attitudes towards artistic practices because there are parallel structures in the country which are beyond the executive domains of the president. These organizations at times follow different cultural policies that reflect their conflicting interpretations of the Islamic law.

desire of the political establishment to have full control over the public and private lives of people. The same is true of all major periodicals (except for a period in reformist era), which are either controlled by the government or have to follow strict regulations or censorship process if they want to continue working.

As to the position of music in this government controlled media, the situation has been subject to little change. The function of music broadcasted from Iranian television channels has been just to fill in the gaps between programs without any reference to the album, composer, instrumentalists or singers. Since the rulings of some Shi'a clerics are against the public viewing of musical instruments, and music is to be considered a trivial activity, even after the legalization of music and the establishment of concerts and festivals; still no musical instruments are shown on Iranian television channels. On very rare occasions there may be long shots of musical instruments; otherwise, the scene is shot in a way that the hands of the players and the instruments remain hidden behind flower baskets or other accessories of the scene. To this purpose, in the case of revolutionary songs or songs in praise of the martyrs scenes from the Iran-Iraq war or the revolution are usually shown on the screen while the music is playing; while in the case of classical Iranian music, scenes from parks, meadows, mountains, flowers and rivers are more regular. However, even this is still kept to an absolute minimum and just for filling the gaps between programs or commercials and programs. There have been some cases in which some western musical instruments (like keyboard, guitar, and piano) and regional musical instruments of Iran (like *dotar*/of the family of long-necked lutes, *dohol*/large, double sided, cylindrical drum, *sorna*/double reed wind instrument) were shown. But they were played in programs that are not directly related to music, or if related, in midnight broadcasted programs. Iranian classical musical instruments have remained absent.

Either in consequence of the attempt to decrease the importance of music and artistic activities or because the television is more likely to care for the opinions of the radical than for the average Iranian viewer, one can also observe a negative attitudes towards advertising music-related or art-related events. As Pari Saberi (b.1938), the female Iranian theatre practitioner commented on the case of the musical (and dance included) performance of a legend from Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāme*: 'It is very astonishing that Iranian television broadcasts a lot of commercials for companies that produce unhealthy food for children, but allows no commercials for a play on the basis of Ferdowsi's masterpiece.' (Pari Saberi, 2010, 1)

The control over the media has been aggravated by a desire to control the type of music listened to in private spaces such as cars and homes. Most of the popular musicians, singers and artists, who left Iran after the revolution ended up in Los Angeles during the 1980s, and managed to continue the production of Iranian pop music and their videos and cassettes had a very popular black market in Iran.⁴⁹ To maintain a greater control on people's lives, revolutionary guards used to stop cars to search them for 'improper music'. They also used to raid people's houses if they suspected them of having video players or video tapes and cassettes of LA based Iranian pop stars and hits of western pop music. Having video players was illegal for about a decade during the 1980s, and people who had them at home could end up paying heavy fines or be imprisoned. Besides the random check-ups in the streets, every school and organization had guards and informers that searched people at the entrance for any improper, un-Islamic item such as music cassettes, videos, pictures. These people usually prepared reports on students' or employees' conducts during the work or school hours or even outside. In the case of girls and women, the checks became more rigorous and also involved checking they wore 'proper *hejāb*' and did not carry cosmetics or wear make-up.

⁴⁹ According to Renee Montagne, 'Community estimates put the Iranian population in Southern California at 500,000. In Beverly Hills, Iranians now account for 20 percent of the population and 40 percent of the students in the schools. Iranian-born Jimmy Delshad is the vice mayor of Beverly Hills.'

After the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Khāmenehi became the supreme leader. Although there were reports stating that he used to play the *setār* in his young age, his religious decrees about music have not appeared to be different from Ayatollah Khomeini's. According to his religious decrees, if a music piece carries the clear signs of futility (*lahv*), it is forbidden (*harām*). *Lahv* music is any kind of singing and/or performance that drives human beings away from spirituality and pushes them towards leading a loose and futile life, committing sins, and pursuing base passions. Therefore, any type of singing or playing which is for the partying and having fun is forbidden. He insists that if the music is of the type that defines as *lahv* even if the text is spiritual, it is forbidden. Furthermore, he adds that the trading and using of any musical instrument which is essentially used for *lahv* is also *harām*. Nevertheless, he does not mention any specific musical instruments. (Khāmenehi, 2008, 1)

With this media control system operating under strict guidelines and possessing satellite receivers criminalized; I.R.I.B. (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting) has become a powerful force in the lives of most Iranians. It makes instrumental use of everything, including copyrighted material, to inculcate the official doctrines into the minds of people. Yet as the heads of I.R.I.B are also influential in deciding which music is authorized (*mojāz*) and distributable and which is unauthorized (*gheir-e mojāz*) and non-distributable, the right-holders prefer to ignore these cases of instrumental exploitation to avoid conflicts and increase the possibility of acquiring permits for their future works.⁵⁰ These cases of helpless overlooking and self-censorship are common practice among many Iranians. In Laudan

⁵⁰ As an instance of this instrumental use, one can mention the case of a classical love song (*Elāhe-ye Nāz*) repeatedly broadcasted along scenes from the funeral of Ayatollah Khomeini. In another instance, the nationalistic refrains of a patriotic song containing the term *mīhan* (motherland) were cut and the song was broadcast along with the pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini, suggesting that the famous singer and musicians who produced the song had made it for Ayatollah Khomeini. Of course, this was not an exceptional case, and if one compares the original versions of foreign cartoons, films and TV series with the ones broadcasted from Iranian TV channels, one can see that with the help of editing and dubbing, they make major plot changes so that lovers may become brother and sister.

Nooshin's terms '... musicians are so familiar with the system that they practice subliminal self-censorship long before the music reaches official channels'. (2005: 480)

However, despite all these pressures, partly because Iranian television channels do not broadcast enough music or programs that satisfy the taste of average Iranians, people have remained interested in the music videos of LA based Iranian pop singers and recordings of pre-revolution singers. Although installing and watching satellite receivers is illegal, many people continue to watch their favorite shows through the system and are ready to accept the risk of paying fines or suffering detention rather than to limit their entertainment or news sources to what is produced by Iranian television channels. This is particularly the case because the six internal Iranian channels refuse to visualize even the recordings of authorized Iranian classical concerts or some of the music that have been legally distributed, but the thirty odd Persian satellite channels all broadcast popular or classical music clips of different types.

(3) The Pitfalls of Receiving Permits from MCIG. With the passing of the *fatwā* and the legalization of music in 1988, the need for a centre to decide which types of music are legal and which types illegal became more necessary. New centers in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (previously Ministry of Culture and Art) were established, gradually creating a bureaucratic system full of twists and turns. Since the early 1990s, as Youssefzadeh (2000) explains, the production, publication and distribution of cultural products have been controlled by the following departments within the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance: (1) Protection and Preservation, (2) Guidance and Orientation, (3) Supervision and Control. Among the offices under the last department, which is concerned with controlling artistic activities, the ones related to music are the followings. (3.1) Control of Recorded Music is responsible for issuing permits for distribution. The office works faster when the previous works of the person are known, but at times it takes months to make a decision. It is also

possible to appeal or attend a session to explain certain aspects. (3.2) Permits for Music Teaching is namely to increase the quality of teaching, but in the majority of cases it is more concerned with control. The applicant must have a degree in music, or be examined by a commission from the MCIG. The proposed teaching space must be adequate in size, 50 to 60^{sqm} and lighting. Yet Islamic standards stand above all these. Women, for instance, could only be taught by women in state sponsored music classes.⁵¹ (3.3) Organization of Music Events deals with issuing permits for music concerts. The office has inspectors who check and adjust the original program and then attend the rehearsals and a preview performance. (3.4) Launching New Projects deals with establishing the desired programmes or events. There is also the Council of Evaluation of Music and the Council for the Authorization of Song Words. The evaluation of the first council is essentially based on their experts understanding of sublime and trivial music. As its name suggests, the latter council checks the song words to ensure that they do not offend 'public sensibilities'. Love poems in which there are explicit descriptions of the beauty of the beloved or terms about parts of body or physical attraction are not likely to receive permits. Those poems that reflect on social problems or suggest despair are also deemed inappropriate.⁵²

Some cases that may lead to the rejection of the project or requiring corrections are: improper lyrics, especially if the words declare love for anyone but God; solo female singing which has detailed regulations; shaved heads, inappropriate clothing or appearance or any behavior that violates the Islamic codes of conduct; too many rifts on electrical guitars, excessive stage movements, or anything that may suggest excitement and lack of control.

⁵¹ These regulations were observed in state sponsored music classes. The authorities control over the private section was not as strong as the state sponsored ones.

⁵² Ayatollah Khāmenehi has recently made this more complicated by stating that focusing on the failures in the country is like espionage and treason. See <<http://cinemapress.ir/NSite/FullStory/News/?Id=10783>>

Any cultural product needs to have a permit from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance for mass production or distribution. The ministry which has different departments for music, theatre, literary works, cinema etc also controls the publication of all forms of printed material.⁵³ As such publishing books on music also goes through a rigorous process that controls the contents and the formats of the books. Only books on legal forms of music are allowed and the content of the book should by no means criticize or confront the Islamic standards. The final manuscripts have to be sent to the ministry to go through a process that demands the authors' and publishers' readiness to accept the suggestions for change or removal of words, sentences, paragraphs or even chapters.

As to the publication and distribution of audio-visual material, similar processes are in place. The first stage is the issuing of a recording permit which begins by the submission of the texts of the lyrics and an audio or video tape of the music. The programme may be then approved of, rejected or sent back for revisions. If it is authorized, the group can then start recording in a recording studio which until the early 1990s allocated by MCIG. The product is then sent back to the ministry to be checked by councils of music and poetry. Finally after the required changes are made, the permit for publication and distribution will be awarded. The issuing of permits for live performances is similar with the difference that the applicant group does not receive a recording permission but after receiving the final approval, it is allocated a government controlled space for the concert.

Some genres have generally been known as permitted or legal (*mojāz*), and the groups associated with them have been relatively more successful in passing through the permit stages and receiving permission for public broadcast or distribution. These include revolutionary and war songs associated with the Islamic revolution and Iran-Iraq war; classical Iranian music,

⁵³ For more on MCIG, see Ameneh Youseffzadeh's article 'The Situation of Music in Iran since the Revolution: The Role of Official Organization.' in *the British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 9, 2: 35-61, published in 2000.

particularly of the traditionalist type and those with lyrics that suggest divine love; and mystic music both of regional and urban types. The group also includes religious music, although many types of it are not known as music by clerics. As to such genres as Iranian regional music and European classical music, they are also generally easier to receive permit for. There are basically three main reasons for this: (1) the words on these genres are not as important as Iranian classical and popular music, (2) the audience is normally much smaller, and (3) the frequency of their performances has been less.

As a rule, content wise, the lyrics of Iranian songs, produced after the revolution, have been expected to be restricted to religious, revolutionary, and mystic subjects or to the praise of abstract or inanimate objects or natural phenomena. Their musical forms have also had certain recurrent qualities. Religious hymns are usually performed by a male solo singer, accompanied by no musical instruments, but by rhythmic chest beating and other forms of self-flagellation. Sometimes, the hymns are accompanied by cymbals and/or drums that maintain the rhythm.⁵⁴ Revolutionary songs, on the other hand, may be performed by male solo singers or a combination of female and male voices in a choral arrangement. They are much wider than religious songs in their musical spectrum and make use of different melodies and rhythms, usually performed by a variety of string, brass, and percussion instruments. Sometimes they also use some forms of Iranian classical music with revolutionary lyrics. Unlike the revolutionary songs that developed during the constitutional revolution, however, they use melodies generally used for religious elegies and hymns.⁵⁵

Iranian classical music is also expected to avoid rhythms that encourage dance and use mystic poems that edify and suggest divine love. The first type of Iranian classical music that achieved

⁵⁴ There have been instances of using keyboards in some religious ceremonies in the last couple of years.

⁵⁵ For the constitutional revolutionary songs, see Houchang Chehabi, 'From Revolutionary *tasnif* to Patriotic *sorud*. Music and Nation-Building in Early Twentieth-Century Iran,' *Iran* 37 (Summer 1999): 143-54.

this accepted status was the type associated with the traditional classical music, which was more likely to pass as religiously allowed. This relative ease, however, is also important from other perspectives. The attitude of the Iranian political establishment towards cultural activities and everyday life during the 1980s and the heavy control of music-related activities by MCIG and the police motivated some radicals to use the opportunity to talk of extreme forms of traditionalist tendencies in Iranian classical music as the sole representative of Iranian music. To be able to justify the presence of music, these few practitioners began to use and propagate such terms as ‘mystic’ or ‘spiritual’ music (*Musiqi Erfāni*) in nativist senses to describe and glorify their particular understanding of Iranian classical music. Their analytical and training terminology also took a religious colouring. In the past, this religious colouring could be seen in the training system of these traditional forms, which was structurally similar to the systems used for training clerics and novice mystics. Within this system the relationship between the trainer and the trainee was defined in terms of the unquestioning apprentice and the all knowing master (*morid va morād*). Now they adopted a more religious-political attitude for their analysis of other types of music, allowing such terms as ‘treason’ or ‘betrayal’ (*khiyānat*) or ‘heretical modification’ (*tahrif*).

During the first decade of the revolution the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance would basically accept or reject a production, but with the legalization of music, it gradually became possible to appeal or make minor changes in order to get permits. Thus the different departments and councils of the ministry gradually began to give more permits by advising the practitioners on how to censor or change some parts or make minor or major changes.

Apart from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance; the two other major organizations that get involved in regulating aspects of the musical life of the country are The Musical Unit of the Department of Art and Islamic Propaganda (*Vāhed-e Musiqi-e Sāzemān-e Honar va*

Tablighāt-e Eslāmi), and the organization of the national television, which is known as the Sound and Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran (*Sedā va Simā-ye Jomhoori-e Eslāmi-e Iran*). Yet at times, these organizations are in conflict with one another and with the Ministry of Justice or with the vice squad sections of the police force. This problem is so serious that, as Youssefzadeh also explains, one can see a rift between 'official declarations and actual practice'. (2000:45-7) Thus even if the actual permit is issued, the performance may be stopped due to the internal conflicts between various organizations and their conceptions of what is permissible. The officials may appear from nowhere with a number of readymade excuses to deprive groups from giving concerts or participating in major festivals. According to Hengameh Akhavan, a prominent female singer and the director of *Bahār* group,

The officials are inconsistent in the way they treat women musicians. For example, the . . . group, which is much less experienced and has been less active . . . manages to get permits without any problem. However, when it comes to a group like the Bahar group, which consists of much more experienced performers, they try our patience to the limit with their bureaucracy and red lines. (Akhavan 1998, 131)

This makes the work of professional performers extremely difficult and creates a chaotic condition in which even the activities that have been officially permitted by one or the other of these three organizations could be criminalized by local clerics or police authorities. There have been cases in which the permits have been cancelled just two hours before the performances; or even after the first one or two performances.

Nevertheless, this plurality of interpretation also creates a limited form of openness to debate so that for some religious authorities all secondary religious regulations can be interpreted according to the exigencies of time and place. As a result, many musical types categorized as illicit or sensually arousing during the first decade of the revolution gradually changed status to become tolerable and then good enough to be used even in semi-religious ceremonies.

During the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad some of the positive practices that had been established in the reform era have been discontinued. The officials seem to have been ordered to create obstacles for rather than facilitate the cultural activities that include music. The case of the concert of Hesār group in Shiraz is a clear case. After the initial agreements and arrangements, the members of the group realized that the authorities of MCIG would only issue the permit for two nights and had suddenly raised the renting rate of the intended music hall by two hundred percent. To enable the participation of more people during the two nights, the group then located a bigger and less expensive performing space. However the authorities refused to issue a permit on the ground that the new space was 'inappropriate'.⁵⁶ In these cases, the impediments or cancellations do not follow a specific pattern for restricting specific genres or the performance of female performers. It is rather the question of fearing the gathering of crowds. The decisions are, therefore, more dependent on immediate political situations than on long-term cultural policies. During the last few years, due to the sensitivity of political atmosphere, this security approach has been extended to smaller groups, which are likely to attract more than one thousand people.

The result is a chaotic situation in which the energy and the time of the performers, composers and singers are wasted. A recent case reflecting the political nature of these kinds of attitudes was the cancellation of a pre-planned, authorized concert of Hessamoddin Seraj (b.1958) in Sanadaj in July 2010. The concert was cancelled by the paramilitary forces of Basij and the plainclothes agents of the government (*lebās shakhsi*) who locked, sealed and guarded the doors of the concert hall on the day of the performance, making the excuse that Seraj had backed one of the presidency candidates that had protested the results of the election. In another case as Ehsan Khajeh-Amiri (b.1984) was leaving Tehran for Amol to perform in an

⁵⁶ For a report in Persian, see *ILNA News* at <http://ilna.ir/newsText.aspx?ID=161593> (accessed on 25-11-2010).

authorized pop concert, for which five thousands tickets had been sold, he was stopped by the police who insisted that the concert had to be cancelled.⁵⁷

The problem here is that the paramilitary forces of Basij usually embark on these kinds of illegal activities by supporting their arguments with statements made by Ayatollah Khāmenehi, who, whether pleased or displeased with these cases, continues to support them as he considers them his most staunch supporters. Apart from Ayatollah Khāmenehi, there are also other religious authorities (*mojtahed*) whom the members of Basij may refer to for immediate rulings that may disturb cultural activities. His decrees, however, are recognized as official rulings that have to be followed by everyone in Iranian political establishment.

One of these rulings, formally declared in response to a religious inquiry (*esteftā*) about learning musical instruments, suggests the types of statements that are often used to stop music-related activities on the basis of what is referred to as political or cultural necessities. In his response to someone asking about the learning of music instruments, he states that,

The spread of music, teaching it and setting up music classes, even if the aim is the production of religiously allowed (*halāl*) types, conflict with the higher goals of the holy system of Islamic Republic. It is, therefore, better for our dear youths to spend their precious time for learning useful sciences and crafts and occupy their free time with sports and healthy leisure. (Khāmenehi, 2010, 1)

The ruling clearly states that any other activity should be given priority over music and that music in itself conflicts with or is at odds with the higher goals of the system. As such, even if rooted in a misunderstanding of this case-based ruling, the general assumption of a member of the paramilitary forces of Basij is that regardless of having a legal permit, a music concert or a space in which music teaching is undertaken is potentially harmful for the higher goals of the

⁵⁷ For a report in Persian, see *Ayandeh News* at <http://ayandenews.com/news/20927/> (accessed on 24-11-2010).

system that he is attempting to represent and defend. Thus it becomes relatively easy to target music related activities with simple excuses.

(4) Financial Issues, Copyright Problem, Music Halls and Sponsors. With these disparaging rulings in place and the web of different cultural and military organizations working with or at times against each other to control music and other cultural activities, the financial means of the people involved in music-related activities determines the course of the whole industry. Lack of strong copyright regulations, which makes people or musicians unable to invest in music-related activities, poses a great threat to the industry. A potential sponsor considers that s/he has to pay the songwriters, the music composers, the instrumentalists, the poster designers, the recording studios or the music hall, etc, but the album may finally be rejected or the concert may be stopped. Or if everything goes as has been planned, the national television or radio channels may broadcast the album without any payment, and free downloads and black market recordings become available immediately after the release of the album. In case the group is self-financed, the problem becomes really serious for the instrumentalists and the singers who have to practise on a regular basis for a long time while their hopes for financial gains may be easily turned into nothing by a single decision.

The publication of the books may also face similar challenges. After passing through the maze of the offices that regulate the publication of books, the product may suddenly face a ban imposed by a judicial, military or religious ruling. For instance, Aminollah Rashidi's book on the history of Iranian music, *Iran in the Course of Time (Iran dar Rahgozar-e Zamāneh)* remained in the censorship office of MCIG for five years until very recently he was told that he had to make eighty-eight changes. One of the items that had to be deleted was the picture of Abolhasan Saba, the renowned musician of Iranian classical music, with her daughter playing

Piano (1902-57).⁵⁸ There have also been several cases in which published books have been recalled from bookshops and have been illegalized due to a decision made after the publication.⁵⁹ This again makes publishers hesitate to invest in the publication of books that may conflict with the tastes of some radical elements within the political and military establishments. It also makes scholars unable to predict the outcomes of their work in terms of public engagement, proper distribution or financial gains.

Closely related to the copyright problem, is the organization and allocation of music halls across the country, which are in general owned by the state. To get a better understanding of the music performance spaces in post-revolution Iran, I divide them into four groups:

(1) major music halls which are built for the basic purpose of music performances; (2) ordinary ones which are mainly in cultural centres and designed to be used for staging plays, screening films, and having lectures, conferences and music performances; (3) open air spaces, which may include any extended open space owned by the city council, including the gardens of the palaces of the former king of Iran; (4) sports stadiums. This last one has been used by some classical groups with huge numbers of audience. In recent years, some music groups have managed to buy sound equipment that improve the quality of these outdoor performances, but during the 1990s, most of these performances lacked special sound equipment.

Lack of state sponsorship is clearly indicated in the number of music halls across the country and the quality of their audio-visual equipment. The only professional music hall in Tehran, Rudaki Hall or Rudaki Opera House, was built with the initiative of Empress Farah Diba (b.1939) in 1967. Using a plan similar to that of Vienna Opera Hall, the hall has proper acoustic

⁵⁸ See a report in Persian in *Fardā* at <http://www.pcparsi.com/fardanews/News/124057.html?id=124057> (last accessed on 10/11/2010).

⁵⁹ The book by Tuka Maleki, *Female Musicians of Iran* was recalled from bookshops because some radicals protested against some parts of the book.

qualities and can seat about 900 people in three floors. The hall is placed at the centre of a complex of buildings that accommodate the major offices of Iranian performing arts.⁶⁰

The sound equipment, however, is the one installed during the 1970s, reflecting the lack of interests in music-related activities. Another case reflecting the same problem is that during the last thirty-two years, no professional music hall has been built. The halls that have been made since the early 1980s are in general designed for conferences. The most famous of these halls, Milad is a multi-purpose hall that is occasionally used for concerts because of its appropriate capacity (1859 seats) and its location outside the city centre.



Rudaki Music Hall⁶¹

The situation has become more complicated by the fact that many of the pre-revolution halls which have more facilities for music performances cannot be used for the purpose because they are in the hands of city councils of different cities which work under the supervision of the

⁶⁰ The hall was named after the Iranian poet and musician, Rudaki (858-941) but was changed after the revolution to vahdat (unity) or (*Tālār-e Vahdat*).

⁶¹ The picture is from my personal previously collected photograph archive.

government. During the 1990s, the reformist mayor of Tehran, Gholamhossein Karbaschi (b.1953) launched a number of major projects that involved the demolition of some dilapidated areas in Tehran to construct cultural centres (*Farhangsarā*) that work under the supervision of the city councils of different regions in Tehran. The reformists who were concerned with providing the youth with the opportunity to occupy their time with different activities later extended these kinds of plans to other major cities. These cultural centres (*Farhangsarā*) provided interested people, practitioners and learners with facilities for music concerts as well as music classes. Since 2005, however, the functions of most of these spaces have been adjusted to the aims of state related groups, and they are primarily dedicated to activities other than music such as religious classes.

As a result of this, the music groups in Iran normally have no place for practising. While the small groups can use the houses of the performers for their rehearsals, this becomes a serious issue for the bigger groups.⁶² What intensifies the problem is that city councils demand such high rental fees for the halls that none of the groups can actually afford to rehearse in them. As a result, it is very likely for the audience and the performers to encounter problems with the sound equipment or the lighting in the first night of the performances. The depth of the problem can also be seen in that in recent years the management of the Rudaki Hall as the only proper space for music concerts has been given to officials who use it for seminars, exhibitions, opening and ending of ceremonies and theatre performances. There is a joke among music performers that the managers of the hall will soon start renting it for wedding ceremonies.

Since the fees for renting music halls and similar spaces are high, sponsors (if any) or the managers fix the ticket values at a higher price than it is affordable for average Iranians. This by itself leads to having a small number of audiences, and, therefore, fewer performances. Thus

⁶² Lack of such places can be one of the reasons that bigger groups do not last.

for most music groups having performances is not a way of earning money but, a way to keep the group stay together and on stage. In 2008, the rental fees for small places, which are essentially the ones based in cultural centres, varied between two to five million Tomans (£1,200 to £3,000) per performance which is very high if we consider the average income of Iranians. In his article on the economy of Iranian music, Mohammad Reza Lotfi, the renowned *tār* player and composer gave the following details and complained that these prices are up to three times higher than the rental fees of music halls in Europe and the USA:

- Ministry of Interior Hall (3,000 seats) 30,000,000 Tomans (£17,650) per night;
- Milad Tower Hall (1,859 seats) 20, 000,000 Tomans (£11,765) per night;
- Niavaran Palace Hall (3,000 seats) 24,000,000 Tomans (£14,120) per night;
- Sa'dabad Space (5,000 seats) 20,000,000 Tomans per night, with equipment;
- Vahdat Hall 12,000,000 Tomans (£7060) per night with equipment. (2008, 1)

As the list shows, the prices seem to have been designed to prevent the performers from earning any significant amount from their performance. To this amount one should also add the expenses associated with sound engineering, lighting, the payments that should go for parking, traffic and space (*amāken*) taxes, etc. If one balances these prices against the prices of the tickets and the number of the actual audience in a country in which concerts cannot be advertised in national television and radio channels, one realizes that in the end the members of self-funded groups would not be able to earn much more than their minimum wage. In other countries, it is the norm that between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the income of a concert goes to the investors and performers and the rest is dedicated to the expenses. In Iran it is vice versa. The concerts seem to provide the government for a good opportunity to tax music loving people.

This is particularly important in the case of classical Iranian music, because sponsorship, even when it has existed, has been mostly for popular music concerts rather than classical Iranian

ones. With about forty percent of the ticket income spent on the Hall and equipment, it becomes very difficult for groups with more than twelve performers to hold performances, as the costume, travel, posters and billboards expenses may exceed the amount that is earned, putting the performers in debt rather than providing them with an income.

Considering these financial pressures and the potential problems that may stop concerts, sponsors would prefer not to risk their money on works that may face problems, and as the recent evidence indicates the number of concerts of Iranian classical music which faced problems in 2010 has been relatively higher than the other genres. Homayoun Shajarian's concert in Shiraz, Keivan Saket's in Babol, Hesameddin Seraj in Sanandaj were among the classical music concerts that despite having permits from the MCIG and having well-known performers had to be cancelled because the paramilitary forces of Basij, local authorities or clerics had decided that they do not want these performances. In these cases, the ministry which has issued the permits refuses to interfere on behalf of the performers.

Another issue is that a concert that has been smoothly performed in Tehran may face problems in other cities. For instance *Hesār* ensemble concert in Tabriz was cancelled because according to the executive director of the MCIG in Tabriz the presence of female instrumentalists in front of more than 2000 audience makes the performance unsafe.

There are also some cities that musicians, specifically women, would not even think about when considering the performing possibilities of their concerts. The system confuses the performers as well as the very few sponsors. If a performance is legalized by a national institution that is responsible for cultural activities, how can it be banned by others? With MCIG not guaranteeing its permits, and the local radicals easily cancelling music or theatre performances or even film screening events, it is no wonder that the number of sponsors is so limited and the musicians often avoid going to other cities despite people's enthusiasm.

In recent years, though some forms of popular music have faced limitations, in average, it has been easier to find sponsors for and launch concerts for popular and fusion music types than for classical Iranian music. While the ticket prices for a pop concert are usually between fifteen and fifty thousand Tomans (£10 and £30), those of the classical Iranian groups of Kamkars have been between twenty and forty-five thousands Tomans (£12 and £27) and those of Kalhor group has been between fifteen and thirty thousand (£10 and £18). The ticket prices of the female only performances of classical Iranian music are normally between twelve and fifteen thousand Tomans (£7 and £10). As a result of these restrictions, the main source of income for instrumentalists, scholars, composers and even singers of Iranian classical music is teaching rather than performance or publication. Many ensembles have less than ten nights of performance per year and for some of them the number of their performances outside Iran is much more than the ones inside Iran.

The majority of performances are only for one to three nights, but the performances given by such leading ensembles as Shams or Kamkars may run for up to ten days. The hiring of the halls at times may face other problems. For instance, sometimes despite the interests of the people, when a government programme requires a space or a more politically correct programme appears in the horizon the music programme is stopped. The management of the hall may thus inform the group two days before their programme that they cannot perform in their hall. Then they may or may not change their mind by the arguments of the performers.

For women the situation is somewhat different. As instrumentalists, composers or co-singers working with mixed groups, their situation is similar to that of their male colleagues, but as performers in female-only performances the problem is more serious. Since such performances involve solo female singing, they cannot be recorded for CD or DVD albums or other forms of distribution. Their poster or billboard advertisements are also more restricted in terms of

variety, photography and distribution. Their main audience, therefore, come from the extended circle of their students, colleagues, friends and friends of friends. In recent years, however, sending SMS has often been a way of advertising music concerts.

This is partly because for many, music concerts are a form of family activity done with the male and female members of the family together. Another thing is that some of the regular concertgoers seem to consider all-female performances as being less serious or lower in quality than the mixed ones. Judging on the basis of those female-only performances that I have attended during the last twelve years, I think that some members of the audience assume that the performance is a party. They ask for more rhythmic pieces and the quality of the performance seems to be of secondary importance for them.

(5) Developments: Gender, Instrument, and Power. There are some areas of music-related activities that reflect positive changes in the allocation of instruments to different genders, in the proper position of instrumentalists and singers in performances and in the methods used for training instrumentalists and singers. Most of these changes are the results of changes in the general attitudes of people towards power and centrality. They often reflect a decentralization of power relations between singers and instrumentalists, masters and apprentices and men and women. In most of these changes one observes a gradual transformation of the values glorified by the traditionalist practitioners of Iranian classical music who had power over the majority of music-related activities of Iranian classical music during the 1980s. As such, some of these changes were the inevitable results of a culture in conflict with its patriarchal overlords. Some others, however, were rooted in the activities of a generation of instrumentalist composers, such as Parviz Meshkatian (1955-2009) and Hossein Alizadeh (b. 1931) whose flexible vision of music enabled their students to transform Iranian music during the 1990s.

One area of music-related activities that has improved during the last thirty years is the one related to female instrumentalists. This is because with the explosion of the interest of the younger generation in music during the late 1980s, and the prohibition of women from solo singing, a great number of women began to work as instrumentalists. Another influential factor was that home-based music tutorials before and after the legalization of music were also focused on training instrumentalists. Thus during the 1990s, women became increasingly involved in music-related activities as instrumentalists rather than singers.

Examining the works of female instrumentalists in pre-revolution era shows that the main instruments they played were *santoor*, *tār*, *setār*, violin, and piano. The number of leading female instrumentalists was also much less than their numbers after the revolution. With the advent of the revolution some instruments which were mainly performed by men began to be performed by women at professional levels, both in female-only and in mixed performances. These included such instruments as *tombak* (goblet drum), *nei* (end blown flute), *daf* (frame drum), and *kamancheh* (upright fiddle).

Another major change that can be referred to as an improvement was that whereas before the revolution most performances of Iranian classical music were centred on the work of the singer; after the revolution the work of the instrumentalists began to find some centrality. This was in some cases due to the fact that many leading instrumentalists such as Hossein Alizadeh, Mohammad Reza Lotfi, and Parviz Meshkatian, who had begun their works with such centres as the Centre for the Preservation and Propagation of Iranian Classical Music began to introduce their new conception of music into the overall texture of Iranian music. Within this conception instrumental performance was as important as the song, and each instrumentalist was given more opportunity to perform a piece in which his or her instrument was central.

This development, of course, had little to do with the attitudes of the major government-controlled media of the singer-centered model. In Iranian television, for instance, as a rule the instruments were never shown, and only the singers, who were all male, were introduced in the subtitles of the programmes and shown since 1990s. The new approach to instrumental performance was rather like a democratic approach to the inclusion of each instrument not just as a contributor but also as a central voice. For some it was also a movement to overthrow the singer as a king and to end the hegemony of the singer as a tyrant whose presence overshadowed the work of the others. To quote one of the masters who were responsible for this change of attitude towards the centrality of instrumentalists, I can quote my late instructor master Parviz Meshkatian, one of the greatest santoor players and composers of contemporary Iran. In 1994 to encourage us to work as hard as possible as instrumentalists and not be cowed by the general conditions that left instrumentalists under the leadership of solo singers, he used to refer to some of his experiences with leading singers and how these singers created technical problems in his performances. In one case, Meshkatian had asked the singer if he could sing a particularly high note and the singer had assured him that he would have no problems with it. Thus Meshkatian wrote the pieces, and the group began to practice it. After practising the piece for a time, the group then began to do it with the singer who, to their astonishment, simply said he was unable to perform the part as required. Meshkatian had thus been forced to change the pieces, and the group had had to start practising again.

This new attitude encouraged the aspiring instrumentalists to focus more and more on enhancing their technical virtuosity. Since the early 1990s, it also encouraged the formation of musical groups that had been entirely based on relationships between the instrumentalists rather than singers and instrumentalists. In such groups the performances have had more instrument-based pieces and the virtuosity of the instrumentalists have been as important as the singer. The singers' salaries have also been the same as that of the instrumentalists. There have

also been instances of performances with no singers. In my conversations with some female-only groups such as Avin, for instance, I realized that they intentionally chose not to have a singer to avoid being bound to women-only performances. As a result, during their performances, they usually perform their musical pieces and then in certain parts sing together in a choral form as they are playing their instruments. The practice, however, is not limited to all-women groups, and some famous composer/instrumentalists may have well-attended performances with no singers. During these performances, the performer may sing as he is performing or encourage the audience to accompany him by singing the lyrics of a famous song that he is performing. The most recent of such performances was the concert of master violinist, Homayoun Khoram (b. 1930) in December 2010 in Tehran, accompanied by a Piano.

Another big change that may be interpreted as having some positive impacts on the long term conditions of music concerns the teaching methods in Iranian classical music. In one of the major pre-modern methods of teaching Iranian classical music propagated by traditionalists and mystic practitioners, it is believed that if learning is made easy, its value will be decreased and that there are mysteries that can be revealed only after years of mystic apprenticeship (*talamoz*). This attitude to teaching is based on a mystic conception of master/pupil relationship in all areas of Iranian pre-modern education, which has been used during the modern era as a method to control the aspirations of the younger generation. It allows the dominant groups to shape the identity of younger people at an early age and disable their creative thinking so that they can continue ruling over them.

Its extreme cases can be seen in the assumption that supreme Shi'a clerics are right about everything, and their decrees must be obeyed by commoners in all worldly and heavenly affairs. The system was widely propagated and glorified after the revolution and was used as one of the main methods of maintaining a totalitarian hold over the country. In its musical

context, it is also the result of centuries of prohibition and degradation which has encouraged serious musicians to articulate the spiritual aspects of their work in religious terms and create an aura of sacredness around their profession to buy some respect among people. Thus the traditional system of training hails the master as an all-knowing, spiritual guide and the pupil a novice who is to be initiated into the world of values as he is learning the music.

The system had its own merits. It transformed the training process into an existential endeavor and provided the trainer with an opportunity to create or convey a system of spiritual signification that made the performance intense by charging it with symbolic suggestions. Nevertheless, in an age of globalization and mass-education, when rivaling cultural forms attract younger people and encourage them to select the most undemanding options and when an increasing number of women push for more opportunities to improve their musical skills, it is almost inevitable that the value system will be abused. Imposters will turn it into an instrument of exploitation, which, in the case of young female pupils, dazzled by the tutor's aura of mysterious sacredness, might go beyond financial and become sexual.

It can thus be argued that the best way to help the survival of local forms, instruments, customs and even their value systems is to gather their variations and systematize them for mass education rather than leave them to deteriorate into their opposites. This will give the learners more options for developing their skills and enhance the general conditions of music. Though it may be argued that it has its own capitalist ideological basis, as a grassroots training project, such an approach demystifies the process of learning and allows the individual practitioners to have access to the global, the national and the local and use them to creative flexible approaches to composing, teaching and performing.

Such a positive process is clearly observable in the case of post-revolution training systems which combine modern and traditional systems in eclectic methods that have proved to be

effective. One of the reasons for such developments lies in the fact that during the 1980s in the absence of concerts, teaching became the main source of income for musicians. As I discussed some parts of it in the section on the genres, the silent presence of these teachers among people encouraged many middle class parents, who would not normally go after music-related activities, to hire them to educate themselves and their sons and daughters in musical instruments, particularly because due to the lack of other recreational facilities, it seemed to be a positive substitute for many outdoor and entertaining activities.⁶³

This rapid increase in demand encouraged teachers to devise new methods of teaching that combined various forms of methods to make music more fun, accessible and understandable. The arrival of new teaching material such as videos, CDs and DVDs increased the momentum for the developments of these new teaching methods that continued to expand after the legalization of music. Women also played an important role in this process. There are very effective educational cassettes and CDs, for instance by Maliheh Saedi (1948), Azar Hashemi (b.1949), Azam Morsal (b.1964), and some other women. This active participation has been characteristic of many female practitioners since the 1980s. Since a lot of families preferred and still prefer to send their daughters to female rather than male music teacher, this presence has greatly contributed to the propagation of Iranian music.

Azam Morsal's *The Legend of Daf (Afsāneh-ye Daf)*, for instance, is typical of this approach. It demystifies and regulates the teaching of daf, a percussion instrument, often associated with mystic circles, in a series of lessons that use notation, pictures, explanations and audio recordings. It also provides a preface that describes some of the mystic concepts associated with the instrument and why the instrument is so significant for mystics. In my interview, I asked her why she chose to write a book on daf. She told me how when she wanted to learn daf

⁶³ During the first decade of the revolution, the tendency was towards Iranian classical music and its instruments, but since the 1990s popular music and its instruments became more dominant among the youths.

in the early 1990s, she faced unnecessary resistance, explaining how her first and second masters, both male, mystified the process and tried to dazzle her by pretending to be doing something very important. As a result, when she finally found a performer and improved her performing skills and knowledge under his supervision, she decided to publish a book on daf to try to end these forms of pretention which may be used to exploit the uninitiated person.

(6) Women, Islamic Cover Performance, Resistance and Choice. Since the early day of the 1979 revolution, the imposition of the Islamic cover made the participation of women in performing activities more complicated. The new codes of conduct and dressing meant that women could never be shown in their intimate relationships or without the cover as they lived inside homes. It also meant that their presence on the stage as performers or musicians had to be characterized by a form of modesty that desexualized their appearance while signifying their gender by a cover. Nevertheless, the Islamic cover also had some positive impacts on the position of women in the arts. With their appearance signifying no immoral tendencies and their roles on the stage characterized by upright attitudes, the rumours about the promiscuity of performing women and the sexist behaviours that it entailed decreased. For some it even enabled them to express themselves without being the targets of the voyeuristic gaze.

Women, however, challenged the norms of this cover, specifically since the 1990s and the formation of women music groups, by wearing bright coloured costume, or, more often, in the regional costumes of Iranian women. Though in contrast to the prescribed forms of cover, the latter are very colourful and magnify the presence of the performers, due to their origins that play along the state's obsession with 'Islamic Iran', 'authenticity' and 'historical continuity', they cannot be rejected.



Mehrbanoo Group (2009)



Kamkar Group, performing inside Iran (2010)⁶⁴

⁶⁴ The Picture of Mehrbanoo and Kamkar groups are from my personal previously collected photograph archive.

Nevertheless, the imposition of Islamic codes of conduct and dress often limits the activities of Iranian women in terms of advertising their activities. It also becomes ridiculous in certain cases, particularly when it comes to researching or publishing on music-related activities.

The following pictures, for instance, reflect the problems that scholars may face in publishing about music groups. In 2009, a group of children performers based at Parsian music institute had some performances intended to make some publicity while encouraging the children who were practising in the music institute. Following the performance, a journalist approached the head of the institute to prepare a report for a family weekly. The first picture is the one originally taken to accompany the report. As seen below, the boys and girls are standing side by side, and the girls are uncovered.



Picture one⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Picture one, two, and three are from my personally collected photograph archive.

The photo was rejected and the reporter went back for a second picture, in which the girls were covered. The problem, however, was that girls were wearing short sleeves, and the boys and girls were standing next to each other.



Picture Two

Thus the second picture also faced criticism, and the reporter had to go back again for a third picture that was finally accepted for publication. In the picture which has been taken as prescribed by the authorities, boys and girls have been separated as much as possible, the girls have been moved to back rows, and are covered according to the prescribed standards.



Picture Three

Conclusion

To sum up, the bans and restrictions on music-related activities are changing with time and the types of people who are in office. As such female solo singing, some forms of popular music, rap and rock music have faced the greatest impediments, but continued to exist in private spaces and in unofficial public spaces. They have also found new forms of expression to occasionally appear in the public. Female solo singing can be heard in female only concerts, pop music is permitted in its less upbeat forms, and rock and rap are practised in enclosed spaces and distributed in a black market.

Regional, Iranian classical, traditional, mystic music, and European classical music have been less restricted and have continued to exist in one way or another in the officially sanctified public lives of Iranians since the early days of the revolution. The government refers to the launching of satellite channels and the US based activities of Iranian musicians and singers as cultural invasion (*tahājom-e farhangi*), but does nothing to support the music industry inside Iran. The scholars, instrumentalists and composers have to carry the financial burdens of an unsupported industry while facing regular problems with passing through censor to get permits. Many of the problems are shared by men and women, but women face more problems. These problems have had negative impacts on the work of Iranian scholars, composers and instrumentalists and waste their energy through stress and financial pressures.

With the high expenses creating a great impediment, people show less enthusiasm to attend concerts or buy the CDs of classical Iranian music. Except for a few very renowned groups most other groups need to popularize their performances and keep the improvisational parts to a minimum to attract some more audience. The problem is more serious in the case of all-female groups who perform in female-only concerts because it is very hard to attract a segregated audience.

In other words as Mohammad Reza Lotfi explains, while different types of popular music find their way to people's houses and sponsors prefer to sponsor popular performances, classical Iranian music has been abandoned:

It is actually the serious music of Iran that is going underground. People's houses are full of what they call underground music... It is as if there is a secret policy to let the so-called underground music grow by ignoring it, but limit serious Iranian classical music. They easily distribute their recordings through the web, or through the black market, but if I upload one of my recorded songs on the web, I will be accused me of distributing illegal or unpermitted music. (2010, 1)

The complaints are many and the incessant conflicts continue to beleaguer the work of Iranian instrumentalists, composers and scholars. It is, however, important to see the gradual change that has improved the conditions of these practitioners since they first encountered the bans during the early 1980s. In the chapter that follows I will trace the career of one of these practitioners, a female scholar, composer and instrumentalist who began her work before the revolution, and despite the bans managed to open new horizons in Iranian music.

Chapter Three

Instrument, Gender and Restoration of *Ghānoon*: A Case Study on

Maliheh Saeedi

Introduction: Remembering an Achievement

I began to learn about Maliheh Saeedi when I was in the first years of my undergraduate studies in Iranian music in 1993. During a discussion about the origins of *Ghānoon*, I realized that her research, her performing style and her work on reconstructing the instrument during the 1970s had played a major role in inclusion of the instrument in Iranian classical music and the gradual increase in the number of women playing it.⁶⁶ Then in several occasions, I met her in the Centre for the Preservation and Propagation of Iranian Traditional Music of Iran (CPPTMI) (*Markaz-e Hefz va Eshā'e-ye Musiqi-e Sonnati-e Iran*, 1968). I remember her as a warm, welcoming and energetic woman who was very helpful in responding to questions. Her students were also very happy with the way she taught them.

During those years my knowledge of her work was limited to her activities in CPPTMI as a researcher and practitioner, the two albums that she had released and some of her performances, but her role in reconstructing *Ghānoon* always intrigued me to find an opportunity to learn more about her work. When I began to work on my PhD research, therefore, she was in the list of the people that I wished to interview, particularly because like my other major interviewees, she was in her late twenties when the 1979 revolution distorted her career as a young professional instrumentalist. I made my initial arrangements with Maliheh Saeedi during February 2008. Then when I went to Iran in summer 2008, I went to see

⁶⁶ *Ghānoon/Kanoon/Qanun* is an instrument of zither family with a trapezoid shape. It is played by two plectra attached to the forefingers. Its importance in contemporary Iran is because some musicians use the evidence found in Farabi's book on music to argue that it was originally an Iranian musical instrument.

her in her Music Institute, Bāgh-e Naghmehhā (Garden of Melodies) on 21 August. My first visit lasted about two hours, during which I talked to her about my project and watched her teach some of her students. Saeedi's institute is based in a three-bedroom flat in a building which consists of both business and residential flats. The building is in Falakeh-ye Dovom (the Second Square) of Tehranpars, in the east of Tehran, a district characterized by a big population of middle class population, who enjoy the benefit of several music institutes.

For our second meeting which took place on 24 August 2008, I was equipped with my voice recorder and camera. She was very welcoming. She invited me to sit in the main hall and gave me some of her CDs and one of her books. She answered all my questions in detail and with interest covered most of the details that I needed to know, except for those which could be related to politics, which she replied with brief references before turning the discussion to something else. After the interview which lasted for about three hours, she played some pieces for me to record. I also visited her institute on two other occasions the following week.



Maliheh Saeedi and I (August 2008)

Saeedi's position as a leading female instrumentalist, composer and researcher is very important to my research. Her experience and career sums up the life of many women active in these fields during the last forty years. As such, though her career has been rather steady and not seen as many vicissitudes as those of Parissa's and Farzaneh Kaboli's,⁶⁷ her achievements in the light of the major changes in the position and number of female instrumentalists make her unique. In the case study that follows, therefore, as I discuss her career and reactions to the bans, I will try to demonstrate some of her qualities, such as her managerial skills, which enabled her for instance to change the liminal position of *ghānoon* in Iranian classical music, have female-only performances in private spaces during the 1980s, and re-include *tombak* in the curriculum of *Honarestan-e Melli-e Musiqi* (The National Art School of Music). The chapter, therefore, has sections on (1) her early life and education, (2) her role in reconstructing, changing the performing styles, popularizing and composing for *ghānoon*, and (3) the financial, censorship or family problems she has faced in her work on *ghānoon* or in her publishing her work or having performances with her groups. For any information from my interview, I use Mozafari A to clarify the source. If the information is based on what I have heard or learnt from other practitioners during my student years I use Mozafari B.

Family and Music Background

Maliheh Saeedi (b. 1948) was born in a music-loving family. Her mother was an amateur violin player with great enthusiasm for anything related to music. Her father was keen on literature and poetry and encouraged her to practise with her mother. This ambiance of poetry and music encouraged all the children, three brothers and three sisters, to practice a musical instrument and resulted in the production of two leading instrumentalists, Saeedi herself who plays the *ghānoon* as her major instrument, and her sister, who plays the oboe in Tehran Symphonic

⁶⁷ I will discuss Parissa's career in Chapter 5 and Farzaneh Kaboli's in Chapter 7.

Orchestra. Saeedi started music at the age of four, when her reactions to music intrigued her sister's tutor to teach her an instrument.

This is what my parents told me. I don't really remember it myself. Apparently whenever my sister had her music lessons with a tutor,⁶⁸ I used to play the rhythm on a tray.⁶⁹ Then one day the tutor, Master [Mansoor] Khaledi, who was also a family friend, hears the rhythm and notices that it is correct. He then talks to my parents and suggests that I can start music with learning the *tombak* [goblet drum]. (Mozafari A)

As she grew up, she also had some opportunities to have live performances along with her sister, including a few in Kids' Keyhan program and other children's program in Iranian television when she was about ten years old. She recollects that the programme was fun and very popular because 'I was so small that [sitting on the chair] my feet could not reach the ground'. (Mozafari A)

In 1963 she began attending The National Art School of Music, where she selected violin as her main instrument and left an excellent record as one of the top students. Her violin practice involved both styles, Western classical that was mainly conducted under the instruction of the Italian violinist and music teacher Luigi Pazanari and Iranian classical music under the supervision of Iranian instructors. Despite her success as a violinist, when she was in her second grade in 1964, she heard the sound of *ghānoon* from a nearby class and fell in love with the instrument. She craved to change her major instrument from violin to *ghānoon*, but the school board did not allow her to do so because since *ghānoon* was not considered a major instrument, it had neither a repertoire, nor a curriculum. As a result, she went on with her violin practice, but began to practice *ghānoon* as her second instrument under the instructions of Master Mehdi Meftah (1909-96), the leading *ghānoon* practitioner and performer of the time.

⁶⁸ Between the 1930s and 1960s most of the music classes used to be in private houses, either the houses of the masters, or as in the case of girls in the trainee's house. With the increase in the number of music institutes during the 1960s, in Tehran and other big cities, the process gradually changed. After the revolution, particularly during the first decade, private houses became once more the main space for music learning activities.

⁶⁹ In the absence of any instrument, it is customary among Iranians to use a tray, a pan, or even a plastic jar as a percussion instrument in informal gatherings and sing along and dance.

To practise *ghānoon* beyond the normal level of a second instrument, she used to perform on *ghānoon* all the Iranian and most of the European music pieces that her instructors used for violin. She also practiced with the music pieces that she wrote for her composition classes. From her third year she also enhanced her musical skills by working on viola, piano, as well as *gheichak* (upright fiddle).

As she recalls, she practiced much more than most of the other students and preferred to stay longer at school. 'I used to take some small sandwiches from home and give my dinner money to the school guard so that he would let me stay longer at the school and practice with the instruments.' Then upon her graduation from the high school, she got married in 1966.

Although we were cousins, the cultural atmosphere of our families was different. They were from the Sheikh Hadi family. I mean Sheikh Hadi was my husband's grandfather. His father was also a clergyman, and well, they did not think high of music as a profession. Actually, they thought that it was essentially a bad idea to be a musician. It is obvious that your life will be affected. Though he knew about my background, my husband was against a career in music. Well this was a barrier that I had to overcome with patience and hard work.... So I quietly fought for it in a way that my husband finally changed his way to join me. (Mozafari A)

As seen in the above quotation, Saeedi's case properly reveals the anomalies of the middle class life in a transitional society in which the value systems are rapidly changing. In 1960s Iran it was/is still customary for cousins to get married, yet though such marriages would not create any challenge to any of the families up to the beginning of the twentieth century, during the twentieth century due to the big rift between the secular and the religious layers of society or even the members of the same extended family, it caused problems. These were usually arranged marriages determined by parents or sometimes grandparents. To maintain the support of their families, the couple often had to go on with the plan even if one side might think that it was not a good match. The general belief was that such marriages strengthen the family bounds and that the couple learned to love each other in time.

As it happened then and may still happen to a lot of young female musicians in Iran, they had to or may have to stop playing or performing in concerts with the increase in family responsibilities and the lack of support from their husbands or families. It is clear that like many other families, her husband's family had assumed that she would soon stop her musical life. However, Saeedi's love of music and hard work, on the one hand and the opportunities that the Pahlavi government provided for musicians, on the other, enabled her to resist these forces and continue her career. In 1968 upon the retirement of Master Mehdi Mefteah, she was invited to join the National Art School of Music to teach *ghānoon*, an opportunity that she used to safely re-launch her music career.

Then between 1968 and 1974 she gradually extended her work. First she joined *Orkesr-e Bānovān* (Women's Orchestra), as a violinist with Ophelia Partow (b.1938) as the conductor, which in turn gained her other performing opportunities with Saba Ensemble headed by Hossein Dehlavi (b.1927). Then to continue with her Iranian classical music, she began to play the *tombak* in a group of *tombak* players headed by Master Hossein Tehrani (1911-73) and after his death with another group headed by Mohammad Esmaili (b.1934). Another Iranian classical extension came with the opportunity to become the main *ghānoon* player in *Orkesr-e Melli* (National Orchestra) of Faramarz Payvar (1932-2009).

Judging from the ways she described these activities, it was as if she was rebelling against a socio-familial situation that had intended to turn her marriage into a space for restricting her activities: I used to wake up early in the morning and work until 1 or 2 o'clock in the next morning [at home and outside]. [Sometimes] I slept just for three or four hours.' (Mozafari A) In her article on Fanny Hensel (1805-47), Nancy B. Reich suggests that class could be as great a hurdle for a woman for practicing her music at a professional level as religion or any other patriarchal variable. To register this power, in a memorable paragraph she records a few

sentences from some letters that summarize the attitude of Fanny's father towards the immense artistic talent of his daughter.

Music will perhaps become his profession while for you it can and must always be only an ornament, never the root of your being and doing.... You must prepare yourself more seriously and diligently for your real calling, the only calling for a young woman—to be a housewife. (2004, 20)

Nothing could better suggest the position of women in Iran of the 1960s. It was a time in which rather than the state, the families stopped women from practising their music at professional levels. As such in the majority of cases rebellion became necessary. Yet as it may be expected rebellion is usually more difficult in the case of middle class women who have strong family ties, and thus they may have to patiently defy their beloved ones and try to win them over rather than rebel against them. Saeedi's case, at least before she managed to involve her husband in her work seems to have been characterized by such a patient defiance. Of course, part of her success in the process may have also been rooted in the fact that her own family supported her music career and that her husband was an educated man with some artistic tendencies that compensated for their initial disagreements about her career.

While busy with her performing activities in different orchestras and ensembles, in 1971 she also began doing her undergraduate studies in the department of music at the University of Tehran. In her performance entrance exam, she played both violin and *ghānoon*. The head of the department, Dr. Daryush Safvat (b.1928), who had a particular interest in reclaiming the traditional forms of Iranian classical music, asked her if she preferred to work on *ghānoon* as her major instrument. This was good news for her. From this point onward she dedicated all her musical and scholarly life to *ghānoon* and graduated in 1976 with a thesis on the history of *ghānoon* and its performance styles in Iran. In the meantime she also began to restructure an 'Iranian gahnoon' on the basis of the medieval description of the instrument when it was used as an in Iranian instrument.

In 1972 while she was doing her BA, Daryush Safvat who was also the head of the Centre for the Preservation and Propagation of Traditional Music of Iran (CPPTMI), employed her in the centre, which had been launched in 1968 to support the work of the greatest masters of the traditional forms of Iranian classical music and train new musicians to offer the best models of these traditional forms. The employees were assigned to different rooms where they could use the recording facilities and listen to old or contemporary recordings available from the library of the centre. While working in the centre, she went through the *radif* and everything that she had already practised with *ghānoon* under the supervision of masters of Iranian classical music as Daryush Safvat, Noor Ali Boroomand (1906-77), Mahmoud Karimi (1927-84), Yousef Forootan (1891-1978), and Saeed Hormozi (1897-1976). In our interview, she asserted that she thinks the best thing that ever happened to Iranian classical music was the establishment of CPPTMI by Master Daryush Safvat and the research studies and performances that he initiated.

Saeedi also emphasized that it was mainly due to Safvat's support that she managed to reconstruct *ghānoon* and re-include it in Iranian classical music. When she raised the subject, I began to talk to her about the process through which she did the job. She agreed that it was a process that still continued with her attempts to popularize it and attract the younger generation to think of playing the *ghānoon* as their major instruments, but then she began to recount the events that led to the initial work on the structure of the instrument. As Saeedi's work on *ghānoon* can be counted as her major achievement; in the following section, I will go through her pre and post-revolution career on the basis of her involvement with the instrument, examining how she managed to make changes in its performing styles and made it popular among the youth, particularly among the women.

Reconstruction and Restoration of *Ghānoon* as an Iranian Instrument

During her undergraduate years in the 1970s, Saeedi made extensive research on *ghānoon* before beginning to work on its structure. From her research she concluded that though the origins of the instruments are not clear and a similar instrument has been performed all over the ancient Middle East; the instrument as it is has most possibly been invented by Abu Nasr Farabi (872-950), the renowned Iranian philosopher and musician. She also found out about a version of the instrument called *kenar*, which in Persian means 'side' or 'embracing' is still being played in Armenia. Her research also confirmed to her that such an instrument was played in medieval Iran, particularly between the tenth and the seventeenth centuries, while the earliest time the instrument is recorded to have been played in the Arab countries was during the thirteenth century.⁷⁰ She also concluded that sometime towards the end of the Safavid era (1501-1736), due to its size, the instrument lost its centrality to its smaller rivals.⁷¹ The process may have been triggered by the religious restrictions imposed during the reign of Shah Soltan Hossein (r.1694-1722) and the political turmoil that followed his reign. Thus in the absence of state support, *ghānoon* was bound to houses and the instruments which could be more easily carried around such as *setār* and in extreme situations even book-like *setār* (*setār-e ketābi*) or cloak *setār* (*abāi setār*) proved to be more practical.⁷²

Whatever the case, during the following two centuries, *ghānoon* became very marginal and disappeared from the formal range of Iranian instruments. The gradual relaxation of the religious pressures after the constitutional revolution (1906-1909) and the spread of Art music in public spaces did not change this process and Iranian musicians did not show any interest in

⁷⁰ For more see Saeedi (1990).

⁷¹ The evidence of the latest courtly performances, for instance includes two murals in Chehel Sotoon Palace showing Mir-e Ghanooni performing the instrument sometimes during the early seventeenth century.

⁷² For music during the Safavid era, see Khaleghi (1956) and Mahshoon (1994). See also Mathee (2005).

the instrument. While other classical Iranian musical instruments flourished and found their specific places in Iranian classical music, *ghānoon* remained unappreciated so that twentieth century Iran can only claim five major performers of the instrument. Among them, Rahim Ghanooni (1875-1945) was the one who learned the instrument in Arab countries and began to use it in Iranian music. Then his son, Jalal Ghanooni (1906-89) became a leading performer and even recorded a few solo performances for Iranian radio. Mehdi Meftah (1911-96), on the other hand, was influential in that he devised a teaching method for the instrument. Simin Agha Razi (1938-2009) was also the first female instrumentalist who began to perform the instrument more regularly in concerts.⁷³

It was, nevertheless, Malieheh Saeedi who brought the instrument back to Iranian classical music by changing its performing styles during the 1970s and 1980s and making it popular among women during the 1980 and the 1990s. Her work was also significant in that the instrument was generally associated with male instrumentalists until the 1970s, but since the 1980s it has come to be more of a female instrument, which signifies that the number of female performers of *ghānoon* in Iran is markedly greater than the male ones.

Changing the Sound Range and Tone of the Instrument. The main reason that *ghānoon* had not found a proper place in twentieth-century Iranian classical music was because of its Arabic ‘tone’ (*lahn*). That is to say that since the main performers had been trained in Arabic styles, they often mixed Arabic modes/maqams, melodies, and rhythms with Iranian ones which made their music sound Arabic. The ways they performed tremolos and ornaments, which are among the most significant points of distinction between Persian, Arabic, and Turkish music was also similar to the way they are performed in Arabic Music. Moreover, the instruments which functioned as a model for later *ghānoons* in Iran had been made in Arab countries. Therefore,

⁷³ For more about these performers, see Khaleghi (1956) and Maleki (2002).

Saeedi's main concern in the earliest stage of her work was to transform the Arabic tone into a Persian/Iranian tone by creating a Persian repertoire and by restructuring the instrument. To fulfil this, she insisted on not using any Arabic elements in her performances and working with her husband to make changes in the structure of the instrument.⁷⁴

Master Ebrahim Ghanbari Mehr (b.1928), the prominent musical instrument maker in Iran, believes that a good instrument maker must be a good instrumentalist. (Mozafari B) Such a combination of talents would be possible for a practitioner in the pre-modern era, when the instrument maker did not have to make tens of instruments every year. Since all the main Iranian musical instruments had passed through the process of change by the nineteenth century, their structures were fixed so none of the great masters thought it necessary to start learning woodwork in order to transform his instrument. In case of *ghānoon*, however, the story was different. If it were to be included among Iranian instruments, a master had to take the responsibility of learning woodwork and making a new instrument. To solve the problem, Saeedi encouraged her husband to join her in doing the task.

Ahmad Sotoodeh (1345-2001), Saeedi's husband was educated in French language and literature, but in his free time he did subtle decorative carpentry (*moragha' va monabbat kāri*). While she was implementing her innovative stylistic changes to make the instrument sound Iranian, Saeedi realized the need to change the structure of the instrument. As a result, she encouraged her husband to learn instrument making under the supervision of Master Ghanbari Mehr. Then working on a budget from The Ministry of Culture and Art (MCA), the three worked together to make changes that transformed the sound range of the instrument, a job that Saeedi and her husband continued after the revolution with personal investment.

⁷⁴ Since Saeedi's project was in line with the Pahlavi nation building plans and the state's attempt to 'purge' the culture of Arabic and Turkish influences she received support during the early stages of her work.

The major part of the job which was carried out by Ghanbari Mehr, with ideas from Saeedi, involved trying different shapes and sizes for *kharak(s)* (bridge) and *sim gir(s)* (grip), and increasing the number of courses and the alloy of the strings. Thus, judging on the basis of the sound of Armenian *ghānoons* with 24 to 25 courses of strings, Turkish ones with 26 courses and Egyptian ones with 28, they finally decided to use 29 to 33 courses of strings. Another change came with the transformation of the shape of the *pardeh gardān* (latches) which eventually resulted in installing rail-based, mobile *pardeh gardān(s)* that made it much easier to have 24 quarter tones and enabled the performer to change the tones instantly. The final product made by Ghanbari Mehr with Saeedi's help and her husband's cooperation sounded much more Iranian and brought *ghānoon* back to Iranian classical music. Though their cooperation with Master Ghanbari Mehr discontinued after the revolution, Saeedi and her husband continued working on the instrument and set up a workshop for making *ghānoon*. She also expanded her work on performing in different genres.

Saeedi and Her Work with *Ghānoon* after the Revolution. During the late 1970s, Saeedi who had continued her performing career with several ensembles began to appear in concerts of CPPTMI. Then after she gained new employment with The Ministry of Culture and Art (MCA), she dedicated more time to the research and performing activities. In any case, by the time the revolution happened, she was a well-known *ghānoon* player, researcher and teacher.

Her life, however, went through some changes with the revolution and the impositions of the bans during the early 1980s. The bans led to the closure of the Music Art School and the university music departments, and all the musical groups she worked with fell apart. MCA, her full time employer, also began to go through a process of radical change and became the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG). The employees in music and dance departments had no place to work in as their offices had been closed. The situation was like a

deadlock both for the employees and for the government. There were many employees whose only source of income was their work with these departments, but there was no work to do. For a year or two she and many of her colleagues were stopped going to work. A year or so after the initial confusions, however, as she notes those who had remained in Iran and their work did not involve popular music and dance were invited to get back to work. However, it seemed as if the country no longer needed any musicians; we just went there and waited. 'I had to sit in the library [of the office] and stay there until the official working hour ended. So I asked for an early retirement because I could not tolerate it.' (Mozafari A)

When I asked her about her financial conditions during the 1980s, Saeedi began to share some of her bitter memories: 'Those were hard years. I mean emotionally and financially. To help provide for my family during the years of financial crisis and war, I even started making decorative plastic flowers and selling them.' (Mozafari A) Yet she never stopped practising: 'I wrote many pieces, filed them, practised them, and recorded them later [after the removal of the bans]'. The transformations of her life had some positive impacts on her work. While in her pre-revolution years, she was more concerned with her career as a professional instrumentalist, after the revolution she also began to compose more and devise new ways to teach *ghānoon*.

She also worked on her performing approach, devising a method through which she used all the ten fingers rather than the normal six or eight which excluded the little fingers. During the same years she also prepared the material on her two books on teaching and performing *ghānoon*.⁷⁵

With the legalization of music in 1988, Saeedi began to enhance her music activities. Since 1982, she had once more begun working with CPPTMI, which was now very limited in its

⁷⁵ She also devised some signs for special techniques of playing of *Ghānoon* that now a days are used by players in Iran.

activities. She had also continued teaching *ghānoon* on a limited basis at home and in the Music Art School, which had been reopened in 1982. Yet her performance and publication activities which had remained limited now began to become more pronounced. Her first move for making her instrument more accepted during this period was to record and publish her first album of Iranian classical music, *Delnavā* (The Sound of Heart, 1988) in which she also played some of her compositions either solo, or along two other *ghānoon*(s) (of her students), or in accompaniment with Mahmoud Farahmand's *tombak*. Then she published her first book, which introduced her methodology for teaching *ghānoon*. Published in 1990, *Amoozesh-e Sāz-e Ghānoon 1* (Teaching the Musical Instrument *Ghānoon* vol.1) offers a general historical overview of the instrument and a simple, but effective methodology for teaching it. Between 1991 and 1993 for instance, she prepared ten of her students, who were all female, to join her in performing in *Orkesr-e Mezrābi* (the Plectrum Orchestra) which was organized and headed by Hossein Dehlavi, as his project of having an orchestra of Iranian plectrum instruments. (Mozafari A & B)



Dehlavi Plectrum Orchestra with Saeedi and her students performing in the middle (1992)⁷⁶

⁷⁶ The Picture is from my personal previously collected photograph archive.

Meanwhile in 1992, she also released her second album in classical music with the singer Abdolhossein Mokhtabad (b. 1967). In the album, *Safar-e Eshgh* (The Journey of Love), she used some of her compositions. The success of her work in her two albums and her performances with Dehlavi Plectrum Orchestra gradually enabled her to extend her work with different organizations including CPPTMI. In 1995 she formed Neyriz ensemble in two forms, one with all female and the other mixed.

In the same year she and Parissa (b.1950), the leading pre-revolution singer of Iranian classical music, along with some other instrumentalists, decided to go for a series of performances in European countries. Though the final product was relatively successful, it resulted in a letter that required her and Parissa to stop from teaching at CPPTMI. This, however, was a unique situation, in continuation of her earlier attempts to involve women singers in her work, which I examine in the next section.

Helping to Transform the Post-Revolution Performance Boundaries for Women. Saeedi's earliest attempts to increase the performing spaces for women began in 1988 immediately after the legalization of music. During the fall of the same year she launched a female-only group in Tehran and organized some private performances, which due to their private status did not have any permit, but were risky in terms of possible radical reactions that it could create in some layers of the political establishment. In such performances the parking areas or basements of residential buildings or the reception rooms of large houses or flats were used as performance space. The group would usually use rented chairs and some basic sound equipment to facilitate the attendance of the audience. Following these activities she was approached by some people from MCIG who explained that since her activities are not against any of MCIG's principles, they can support her to go for legal performances.

In thirteenth Fajr Music Festival in 1997, female only music performances were legalized by the government in which the *Neyriz* ensemble had some performances.⁷⁷ After the relative relaxation of some cultural pressures during the 1990s, she left a record of working with different mixed (mostly men) groups like Molana ensemble headed by Jalil Andalibi (b. 1954). She has also shown her ability to compose for, set up performances and release albums with classical Iranian male singers, including Abdolhossein Mokhtabad in *Safar-e Eshgh* (The Journey of Love, 1992) and in *Ghogha-ye Jan* (The Uproar of the Soul, 1999), Fazel Jamshidi (b.1959) in *Yar-e Penhan* (Hidden Beloved, 1997), and Razavi Sarvestani (b.1935) in *Nava-ye Ghorbat* (The Sound of Nostalgia, 2009). Thus her decision to work with Parissa in European concerts was basically a calculated shot in the dark to determine the extent that this relative relaxation of censor could be used for female performances. Though the decision caused some problems, it marked her career with another positive attempt for changing the performance limits of Iranian music. She has thus been among the first female musician to challenge the post-revolution boundaries for women (specifically singers) by starting private performances, female only concerts, and overseas performance.

As such it seems that she has tried hard to use any opportunity to include women's voices in her work. During the last decade, for instance, she has produced several CDs on the basis of the memorable songs of regional music with female singers such as Hoorvash Khalili in *Nava-ye Gharyeh* (The Sound of the Village, 1999), *Ahoo-ye Vahshi* (Wild Deer, 2001), and *Ava-ye Roosta* (The Call of Village), and involved the pre-revolution female singer, Pari Zangeneh (b.1939) in *Hezar Ava* (A Thousand Calls, 2004) with choral accompaniment. In the process she has displayed a desire to include women's voices in her work and challenge the boundaries.

⁷⁷ Fajr Art Festivals were launched in 1982 to celebrate the anniversary of the victory of the revolution. Music first entered the festivals in 1982 as *Jashnvareh-ye Sorud va Ahang-ha-ye Enqelabi* (the festival of Revolutionary Hymns and Music Compositions). A few years later, however, the government decided to include Iranian classical music in the festivals, and thus the First Fajr Festival of Music was held in February 1985.

Saeedi's Role in Changing the Post-Revolution Educational Boundaries. Saeedi's career has also involved her in several teaching and management positions that have improved aspects of music education, particularly in relationship with the teaching of *ghānoon* and female music education. As noted before, with the reopening of the Music Art School in 1982, Saeedi began to teach some courses in the school. The school was now segregated and the girl's school had constant difficulties, but due to the general status of music Saeedi did not get involved beyond the minimum level of teaching *ghānoon*. During the reform era, however, immediately after she was invited back to CPPTMI, she was approached by MCIG to undertake the management of the Girl's Music Art School which was in a state of disorder and financial crisis. During the five years that she headed the school, as she recalls, Saeedi dedicated her time to restructuring the use of the budget and the financial contribution of the parents to renovate the building and the instruments. She states that sometimes she had to stay in the school until eleven at night each day to check the account books and make sure that the changes are implemented properly.

In educational terms, one of the major improvements that she managed to implement in the curriculum was to re-include *tombak* which has not been taught in the school since the early 1980s. To fulfil this, she selected a number of students to make a *tombak* group that she worked with for free during the extra hours that she spent at school. The group then performed a brief piece before the executive director of MCIG during the Teacher's Day Celebrations in May 1999. The executive director decided that the programme sounded interesting and culturally okay and thus issued a permission to have courses on *tombak*. Though the process suggests the patriarchal basis of decision-making about cultural matters in Iran, it also suggests that the attempts of individuals may often produce positive results.

Another educational aspect that she reformed had to do with the issue of segregation. Her general attitude towards the segregation policies of the Iranian government is that since it has a

legal base under the current political establishment, it has to be followed, but should be questioned and negotiated. Since 1982, her post-revolution teaching in the Music Art School was always in Girl's school but in 2003 she decided that she has to find a way to teach in Boy's School because, as she believed, it was necessary for them to be familiar with *ghānoon*. After some haggling and discussions, the officials finally agreed to allow her to teach there. Then she also began to use material from her own work to produce a repertoire for *ghānoon* and write a curriculum. The work finally enabled her to register *ghānoon* as one of the instruments that the young musicians can learn as their major instrument. She made similar changes in CPPTMI, where the regulations did not let any boys more than ten years of age to have a female music teacher. Thus she offered to teach them for free, which opened the way to overcome some of the limitations imposed by segregations and in turn made it possible for her to teach boys. (Mozafari A)



Neyriz 2008

In terms of managing her two Neyriz ensembles, Saedi follows the same approach to segregation policies and the issues that it may create for the groups. Originally she set up two

groups, one with female instrumentalists and a female singer for female-only performances, and the other with male and female instrumentalists and singers. She argues that this was because she wished to have as many performing opportunities as possible. Thus though she does not like the segregation policies and thinks that ‘the cooperation of men and women in music should not be restricted or distorted because of the gender of the performers or listeners,’ she has made arrangements to have two groups for different occasions. Yet she emphasizes that ‘my works with these groups are not much different from each other’. As such she may use the members of her female ensemble with the male ones when the situation allows her to do. (Mozafari A)

Her flexibility, perseverance and readiness to go along the general public policies while challenging the ones that she finds unnecessary and changeable provided her with some good opportunities during the reformist era. Her success in managing the Girls Music Art School (1998-2003), while producing a number of good albums in Iranian classical and Iranian regional music, teaching *ghānoon* at university level and popularizing it among the younger generation encouraged MCIG to grant her an honorary PhD in 2002. This recognition was very valuable because since the mid 1990s, Saeedi has been the most significant female instrumentalist in Iranian classical music who has managed to produce several solo albums. In 2001, she even managed to gain a permit for a private Art School, but since the officials did not extend her permit to register students for music courses, she did not launch the school. Nevertheless, she has continued to run her *Bāagh-e Nghmeh-hā* Music Institute

Making *Ghānoon* Popular. After her reconstruction of the instrument in collaboration with her husband and Master Ghanbari Mehr, and her success in creating training and performing repertoires that transformed its performing style, Saeedi’s major achievement in relationship to *ghānoon* has been its popularization as a versatile musical instrument. Before the revolution, it

was more possible to hear the sound of *ghānoon* in hybrid popularized music forms as performed by average instrumentalists, but after the revolution, particularly between 1988 and 1999, it was only heard in Saeedi's style in classical Iranian music. It was also occasionally heard in the LA-produced music videos of popularized Iranian music. In 1999, however, Saeedi decided that to make her instrument more popular, she had to try new ways to take it into the houses of different kinds of people and engage the younger generation. Thus she reconstructed a number of rhythmic and joyful regional music pieces and songs to produce a number of albums that attracted a greater number of aspiring musicians to the instrument.

While between 1979 and 2000 she continued her pre-revolution focus on classical music and produced four cassettes; since 1999 when she began her work on regional songs, she has released six albums on regional music, among which four as mentioned above include female singers accompanied by co-singers and two, *Navā-ye Del* (The Call of heart, 2000) and *Shabnam-e Sahrāi* (Desert Dew, 2001), have solo performances with *ghānoon*.

Her more recent work has been intended to provide another perspective of her composition and of the instrument abilities. *Sabzeh-ye Rizeh Mizeh*, (The Little Olive Child, 2009), for instance is a collection of children's songs, composed by Saeedi, based on radif and sung by Hamid Jebeli (b.1958), an actor in the genre. More recently she has also produced her remake of some famous pieces of film music, such as *Godfather*, *Titanic*, and *Bodyguard* with *ghānoon* as the main instrument. The album which is called *Asheghanehaye sinama* (The Romances of Cinema, 2010) has solo performances *ghānoon* with an orchestra of classic guitar, drums, violins, saxophone, keyboard and chorus.

She has thus systematically used *ghānoon* for different styles of music — Iranian classical, Iranian regional, and more recently children's music, and western popular and classical— to display the abilities of the instrument. The process has involved many younger people who

have been interested in a career in music or in learning an instrument to *ghānoon*. If one compares the popularity of *santoor* and *ghānoon* during the 1980s and 1990s, for instance, one finds that while *santoor* was more or less among the most popular instruments along *setār* and *tār*, during the first fifteen years of the revolution many people did not even know what *ghānoon* was like. In our interview, Saeedi noted that many students did not even know about the instrument and even in the Music Art School in 1980s, she sometimes had to introduce and show the instruments to the parents to make them interested. Yet nowadays mostly due to her attempts, an increasing number of musicians play the instrument and many of her students are among the first rate performers of the instrument.

In fact, one can even claim that it is because of her ceaseless efforts that *ghānoon* can be seen in many performances of Iranian classical music and arrangements of regional music. In a way she was the person who kept *ghānoon* alive after the music bans of the 1980s. It is, in fact easy to imagine that if she had left Iran after the revolution or kept silence, *ghānoon*, as an Iranian classical instrument would have fallen into oblivion or remained in its non-Iranian forms rather than becoming an instrument which is now performed regularly.

Composition. One major aspect of Saeedi's popularization of *ghānoon* in Iran has been her constant work as a composer providing performing and practice material for learners and performers. I asked Saeedi about the methods she uses to compose a new piece of music and how she plans her work with her ensembles in term of improvisation, arrangement and alterations during the rehearsals. She stated that if she has a poem, she keeps whispering it to herself, waiting for the moment of 'inspiration'. For deciding the arrangement of melodies from regional music or adding pieces to them, she uses a similar method: 'I whisper the melodies to find how it works better with different instrument, or if it is composition, until it inspires me with a series of new melodies for preludes and other pieces.'

Saeedi's composition has been done in two main styles: classical Iranian music and Iranian regional music. In her Iranian classical performances and albums, which due to their emphasis on *āvāz khāni* (free-rhythm singing) cannot be done properly with female co-singing, she produced works with male singers. For regional music, however, her approach has been different. Since she has focused on regional rhythmic pieces(s) in which *āvāz khāni* (free-rhythm singing) is not essential and the rhythmic qualities allow for co-singing, she has decided to use female co-singing. This, however, has decreased the aesthetic qualities of her composition and arrangement. In *Ahoo-ye Vahshi* (The Wild Deer, 2001), for instance, since the production uses back vocals for the solo singer during the whole performance the beauty of the singer's voice is completely ruined, and this ruined voice ruins the beauty of the music as well. The high qualities of the music is revealed on the minutes with no singing. Despite their awareness of this situation, Saeedi and her major singer decided to go on with the project and to sacrifice the beauty for experimenting with the forms, producing new versions of these songs and remaining on the stage. This is in contrast with the decision of many other composer and singers who decided to leave the country, as Sima Bina did, or keep silent in Iran and perform only outside the country, as Parissa did. These decisions suggest that Saeedi's approach to the bans has been to compose and experiment within the imposed limitations and try to transform their limits with new forms.

Instrument and Gender: the Transformation of a Position. In her *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Elen Koskoff, writes

Music performance can and does play an important role in inter-gender relations, for the inequalities or asymmetries perceived in such relations may be protested, moderated, reversed, transformed or confirmed through various social/musical strategies through ritual behaviour, disguise, secret language, or social "deceptions" involving music... Four categories of music performance thus emerge in connection with inter-gender relation: (1) performance that confirms and maintains the established social/sexual arrangement; (2) performance that appears to maintain established norms

in order to protect other, more relevant values; (3) performance that protests, yet maintains the order (often through symbolic behaviour) and (4) performance that challenges and threatens established order. (1989: 10)

Koskoff uses these categories to describe the cultural functions of particular acts of music performance in terms of inter-gender relations. Yet the collections of a person's music performances or music-related activities in general can also be judged on the same basis. The same process of 'protesting, reversing or transforming the inequalities and asymmetries' can also be traced in the overall presence of an individual in music related activities. Life is by itself a collection of inter-related performances that determine the personas, the projected images of the individual in his or her different roles. Thus if one applies Koskoff's general categories to Saeedi's music career as a self-projecting performance since her childhood in the 1950s, one finds that her very presence in certain spaces and her individual acts of performance and defiance have always threatened and challenged the norms of inter-gender relationships while remaining flexible to avoid conflicts.

Her engagement with two *tombak* playing ensembles in 1970s Tehran, for instance, is the first case in hand. While it was customary for Iranian women to learn *tombak* and play it at home; due to the stigma attached to it as an instrument primarily suitable for popular or even vulgar performances, the number of married women who dared to perform the instrument at professional level in male groups was very few. Another case is the role that Saeedi played in reconstructing an instrument, which has been traditionally preserved for male masters. As a case in point, the only other people who have devised or transformed instruments on the basis of ancient models in contemporary Iran, have been Mohammad Reza Shajarian (*Sorāhi*, *Shahbāng*, *Shahnavāz*, & *Shah Sorāhi*) and Hossein Alizadeh (*Sāghar*).

Yet Saeedi's persistent approach allowed her to find her own ways of collaborations that even involved her husband and then her son in improving the instrument to make it appropriate for

Iranian music. Even the choice of the instrument is interesting. In contemporary time in neighbouring countries *ghānoon* is primarily performed by men, and in Iran prior to Simin Agha Razai and Saeedi, it had never been played by women. It was usually performed by second rate performers in bars and night clubs. Saeedi's activities, however, completely transformed the position of the instrument and its gender association.⁷⁸

Saeedi's approach to including women's voices in her work and her performing of regional music pieces and song with female voice is also another form of transformation of inter-gender relations and roles. The series of concerts that she had in Europe along Parissa in 1995 is a prime example of her readiness to risk her career for a unique performance that opened a new space for female solo singers and instrumentalists. Her regional music albums have also played a similar role. After the revolution, most of the albums that have been produced inside Iran on Iranian regional music have had male singers. In fact, even Sima Bina (b. 1944), the renowned female singer of Iranian regional music had to limit herself to performing in occasional concerts abroad or to female-only performances before she left the country. The four regional music albums that Saeedi produced with Hoorvash Khalili and Pari Zangeneh, and their co-singers, therefore, marked a major transformation in Iranian regional music by performing it with *ghānoon* and bringing female singers back to it.

Saeedi's career, therefore, has been very significant in terms of its displacement of gender-instrument relationships and effort in returning women to the centre of Iranian music life as singers and instrumentalists. This is particularly significant in the context of the gradual rise in the number of female instrumentalists in present Iran, which apart from the rise in

⁷⁸ A similar thing happened to *Daf*. Unlike *Dāyereh* (small frame drum) which was often played by women in Iran and the other countries of the region, *Daf* was primarily a regional male instrument occasionally played by women. Even when it was introduced by Bijhan Kamkar into Iranian classical music in the 1970s, it was primarily understood to be a male instrument. During the 1990s, however, the insistence of some female instrumentalists to play the *Daf* gradually transformed the instrument into one widely played by both men and women.

population, and the rise in the number of educated women, is rooted in the decline in women's role as singers and the rise of female-only concerts that require all-female ensembles. The latter has been very influential in the process because it necessitated the training of instrumentalists who performed on instruments that were traditionally performed by men. In present Iran, therefore, one can see female instrumentalists performing all Iranian musical instruments.⁷⁹

Though I have already examined the causes of this rise in the number of female instrumentalists and the increase in the number of women active in society, I would like to reconsider the case once more and discuss some other causes. When Iranian people and musicians faced the bans in the 1980s, the only solution was to move the music classes inside the houses. It also became a point of pride for some to encourage their children, boys and girls, to participate in art and music-related activities. With the legalization of the music in 1988, the trend affected the lower classes and some members of the government responded by establishing cheaper arts and music classes at cultural centres. Furthermore, due to the compulsory Islamic cover, young girls from religious families found it easier to gain their parents' permission to attend universities, and thus the cultural divide between the educated elite and religious people gradually narrowed.⁸⁰ The overall knowledge of ordinary people also increased, partly because the university educated children of religious and lower class families returned home with an expanded understanding of their world and partly because watching T.V. was no longer a taboo in religious families.

As Roksana Bahramitash argues, during 'the Shah's regime...coerced adoption of western customs alienated women from the lower strata of the society' and 'many professions were

⁷⁹ Despite this rise, the number of instrumentalists working in Iranian classical music, particularly in such musical instruments as *Nei* and *Kamanche* is not enough. This shortage makes some female-only groups change their arrangements or select pieces of music which do not require these instruments.

⁸⁰ Many of the Pahlavi programs were not successful because they were not rooted in the ancient or pre-modern cultural practices and had not been sanctioned or even reluctantly ignored by the religious establishment. The new conditions, however, created new initiatives among the lower classes.

closed to women who refused to embrace middle-or upper-class codes of conduct'. With the revolution, however, these sections of society used the opportunity to attend universities and find work. In the past 'it was mainly the upper-and-middle-class women who had been brought into the public sphere during the modernization and not the low-income women from often traditional families', but now women of various classes entered society. (2004: 164-65).

These musical and socio-cultural elements have thus all contributed in the marked increase in the number of female instrumentalists that one can observe in contemporary Iran.

Publication of Books and Albums: Problems and Concerns

As we continued the interview, I began to ask Saeedi about the problems that she had faced for gaining permits and publishing her music and research. She seemed rather reluctant to talk about these aspects, but in response to my question she talked about what and how she had done the work. Meanwhile as she explained the details, each time she referred to common or specific problems, she insisted on denying the problem by stating 'but that is not a problem, we do our work'. (Mozafari A) In this section, therefore, I will refer to the problems that she has faced in the context of the problems that I have already discussed in general and try to relate them to the specific cases that she raised without fussing about them.

Books. Saeedi published her first book, the first volume of *Āmoozesh-e Sāz-e Ghānoon* (Teaching the Musical Instrument Ghānoon) in 1990. Though the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance had offered to publish the book, due to bureaucratic obsessions and the constant changes of the directors, they postponed it for such a long time, she finally had to publish it by her own investment. The expense was 100,000 Tomans (then about £1,000) for 3000 books. As she recalls, none of the major art publications would support the book as *ghānoon* was not a well-known and popular musical instrument. Yet despite all the

reservations, she has managed to sell two thousand copies, which considering the relative unfamiliarity of the people with the instrument in 1990s seems good. Some, of course, 'have possibly bought it for their libraries', some for the historical part about the instrument and some for actual learning. Her other books include *Radif-e Mirza Abdollah baray-e Ghānoon* (Mirza Abdollah's Radif for *Ghānoon*) which is accompanied with audio CDs and an introductory section that teaches the technique of playing with ten fingers.⁸¹ She has also published a revised version of her book on teaching *ghānoon* in two volumes, a collection of music pieces for improving performance techniques for different fingers. The third volume of her book on teaching *Ghānoon* is also ready for publication. Saeedi notes that apart from occasional financial problems and minor censorship modifications she has not had any basic problems with publishing her books.

Audio Material. As to audio publications, she states that *The Hidden Beloved* (1997) in which she worked with the male singer Fazel Jamshidi was published by the major state-supported publishing house, Soroush.⁸² The publication, however, refused to publish it again, although the album sold well and it is no longer available. The same is true about *The Call of Nostalgia* (2009) in which she worked with the renowned singer Nooreddin Razavi Sarvestani. The album was published by the state-supported Hozehe Honari Institute, but though it sold out in the first year, it has not been republished yet.

Another case that she was upset about was her album, *The Little Olive Child* (2010). She stated that the album had 27 tracks, at the beginning of each of which, before the *tasnif*, she had included a free rhythm piece based on one of the main *gusheh(es)* of *radif* performed solo by one instrument. Unfortunately, however, Soroush publication house removed all the

⁸¹ Mirza Abdollah (1843-1918) was one of the most prominent masters of the old school of Iranian classical music. Each master could have his/her own interpretation or version of *radif*.

⁸² Soroush is the publishing house of IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting).

non-rhythmic solo preludes without her permission. Moreover though she had prepared a well-designed leaflet and case, the publication presented the CDs in cardboard packets.

Such problems have made her try to continue her work with non-governmental publishing houses. She even applied for a publication permit which involved sitting for an exam on the processes of publishing a book, the size of books, the amount and the types of papers, etc. Gaining a permit for publication has made it easier for her to publish her books and CDs, but it does not decrease the problem that she faces for gaining permits from MCIG. As she states, although her books and CDs face no major problems, the process is too time consuming. (Mozafari A)

Problems with censorship. The present political establishment in Iran has always believed that it has to control the contents and the forms of cultural products in order to avoid violating the religious and cultural sensibilities of the people. It, therefore, believes in examining all cultural products and excising or modifying — *sānsoor* or *momayezi* – the sections that violate the norms that they consider sacred. A basic problem in this regard is that in the majority of cases the standards set for judging Iranian cultural products are not set according to the general consensus of the people who produce or consume these cultural products, but on the basis of the taste of radical fundamentalists who are rarely interested in these products. Another problem is that despite the compromise of various groups within the establishment over the censorship, more than three decades after the revolution the borderlines are still not clear and a performance or a publication authorized by MCIG may simply be stopped by other organizations, which may even fine its authors or its performers.

In May 2010, during his first news conference in office, Hamid Shah Abadi, the then head of artistic activities in MCIG, explained that so far some officials in the censorship departments have regularly judged the qualities of the art and literature productions on the basis of their

personal taste and that he intends regulate the process of censor so that it becomes less personal. (2010, 1) However, the only change has been a harder permit process, but fewer conflicts with radicals.

In the last thirty-two years the only person who has managed to bring a degree of balance into the permit process of MCIG has been Mohammad Khatami and the team of the people who have worked with him. During his two terms as the head of MCIG (1982-1986 and 1989-1992), Mohammad Khatami initiated some positive changes in the musical atmosphere of his time. Many of the music forms, songs, or even groups that had faced difficulties for receiving permits were guided to find new ways to receive permits during his time, specifically during his second term as the minister. The same positive approach was implemented during his two terms in office as the president (1997-2005), when the people whom he assigned to lead MCIG created the best ever post-revolution atmosphere for cultural activities. The number of films, books, theatrical performances and concerts and their diversity and qualities went far beyond any post-revolution period. A clear indication of this positive approach can be seen in the criticism directed towards Khatami's government by radicals during and after his presidency. For instance, Mohammad Hossein Safar Harandi, the head of MCIG during Mahmoud Ahmadi Nejad's first term in office (2005-2009) once claimed that 'seventy percent of the books that received publication permits during the previous government [Khatami's] have essential problems' and that the government needs to pay more attention to improving the cultural activities of the mosques or other religious centers. (2009, 1)

Iranian religious centres have always been financed and supported by religious people, and since the 1940s no one succeeded in controlling their cultural activities. Iranian art forms, however, have always faced serious setbacks, and they remain in desperate need of systems that allow them to flourish within the limits of what is culturally possible in Iran. As the

experience of the last two hundred years has shown, though mild censorship, as in the case of post-revolution reform period, often triggers artistic reactions that create innovative forms, severe censorship always stymies the development of cultural products and encourages artists and writers to relocate in other countries. Thus the current policies of MCIG are not likely to lead to any positive development in Iranian music or other cultural products.

I have examined some examples to show how this censorship works. Music censorship in Iran is usually applied on three major components: the music, the words and the images used for the production, publication and publicizing the products. Since I have already referred to the music and image, I will here mostly discuss them in relationship with Saeedi's work and add a few points about the censorship of words used in songs as they are more relevant to some of the problems Saeedi has faced. As in the case of other verbal statements in cultural products, there are some basic rules that most practitioners and writers are aware of and need to observe in the songs. For instance, they know that the words should not contain anything against the supreme ruler or the political policies of the government, or anything that criticizes Islam or the current government's conception of it. However, there are many unwritten rules that may change according to the ideas of the heads of the ministry.

For Iranian classical music, since it has often been practiced with the reduction of dance rhythms after the revolution, the music itself is normally considered 'safe' and thus the process of giving permit mostly concerns the evaluation of the song words. Most groups preclude this problem by basing their songs on poems by Iranian mystic poets, especially on the basis of *ghazal(s)* (sonnets) by Rumi (1207-73), Sa'di (1209-93) and Hafez (1325-90) whose poems are particularly rich in their poetic merits. Apart from some special cases in which a term has to be modified to avoid suggesting physical love, these poems do not face any problems.

In the case of folksongs or contemporary poems, however, censorship becomes multifaceted, involving religious, moral, political or even occupational sensitivities: the words should not, for instance, contain anything that degrades a profession or violates a moral concept. However, besides politics, the most frequent reason for rejecting a song is the suggestion of physical love. The irony is that the poems of Persian mystic poets have words and phrases that if a contemporary poet uses in his or her song, the song will be definitely rejected. Mistresses, kissing, embracing, wine, tavern, drunken men and women are everywhere in these poems, yet they are interpreted as referring to divine love and the wine of unity with god, etc. Songs that praise the prophet or the shi'a saints may also be allowed to use terms that cannot be used in normal songs. Thus one may read a contemporary love poem that near the end refers to a saint or to the prophet so that it can be interpreted as an expression of religious zeal.⁸³

As to Saeedi's work, she did not raise any point about facing problems with MCIG Council for the Authorization of Song words, but my research on her reproduction of Iranian regional songs revealed some interesting cases. In only one of her albums, *Ahoo-ye Vahshi* (Wild Deer, 2001), for instance, one find the following changes in the lyrics of the folksong.

1. In the second track, *Tasnif-e Dāee Dāee* has been expanded to include another famous folksong, *Asemoon be Oon Gapi* (The Sky That is So Immense) so that the publisher could avoid putting the name of the latter in the brochure. The most famous part of the love song has also been altered to such an extent it has become a didactic song. The actual line is '*Asemoon be oon gapi gooshash neveshteh/ Har ki yareh khoshgele jash too beheshteh*' (In the corner of this immense sky, it is written that/ Anyone whose beloved is beautiful has a place in paradise). The Council for the Authorization of Song

⁸³ This is a long established poetic convention which when used for the saints becomes rather confusing. Some modern critics have even suggested that it reveals suppressed homoerotic tendencies in some religious poets. In its original form, however, it is likely that the poet may have composed the poem for a beloved one, but fearing the radical reactions has covered her human desires and dream with mystic referencing.

Words has changed the second line of the couplet to '*Har ki khoobi bekoneh jash too beheshteh*' (Anyone who does good deeds has a place in Paradise). There is also another part of the song which is completely deleted. '*Ey shirin joonom, ey shirin delbar/Gar bekhai bosom nadi/Beh zoor misoonom*' (Ah sweet, my life; Ah sweet, my beloved/ If you don't kiss me, I will take it anyway).

2. Another case is in the fifth track, which is mentioned in the brochures as being the wordless music of *shirin jan* (Sweet Darling). Yet towards the middle of the track the actual song is properly matched with the music, with a change in one word, which has decreased the romantic aspect of the poem. The actual song is '*Dokhtaroo noon mipazi nooni ham be ma de/Miyoon-e noon pokhtanet boosi ham be ma deh*' (Dear girl, baking bread, give a loaf/As you're baking give me a kiss). The Council has changed the *boosi* (a kiss) of the second line into to *nooni* (a loaf) which considering the expression of the same demand in the first line does not make sense. In the same track in '*Be havaye Zolfe kamandet be havaye cheshmaye ghashanget be havaye lab mesle ghandet*' (For your lasso-like hair / For your beautiful eyes/ For your sugar-like lips) the last phrase, '*lab mesle ghandet*' (Your sugar lips), was changed to *zolfe bolandet* (Your long hair).
3. Then in the second part of the ninth track, the Jooni Jooni *tasnif* is performed as an instrumental piece as the text is problematic. The text that has been deleted is below:

*Ze booye zolfe to majnoonom ei gol,
 Ze range rooye to delkoonom ei gol,
 Mane ashegh ze eshghat bi ghararam
 To chon Leili o man Majnoonom ei gol
 Jooni jooni, yare jooni, Rashti-o MazAndaruni,
 Man miram tanha mimooni*

I am mad like Majnoon of the scent of your hair, flower
 My heart is bleeding for the colour of your complexion, flower
 I am in love and restless for you
 You're like Leili and me like Majnoon, flower

Dear darling, dear beloved, you're from Rasht, Mazanadarn
If I go, you'll remain alone.

4. Another case is in the tenth track, *Aroosi-e Shoostari* (Shooshtari Marriage) in which 'Shirin kardi kababom' (Sweetie, you are burning me), which complains about the beloved sulking, has been deleted and replaced by a repeated phrase 'Shirin nemide javabom' (Sweetie, [why] you don't talk to me).

Similar lists can also be made for other albums, but the examples are clear enough in demonstrating the approach of the officials to songs that have been part of Iranian local cultures for one to two centuries.

Finances. Another set of problems and concern are related to financial problems that I discussed in Chapter Two. These include problems that musicians and their ensembles face for hiring performance space, recording studios, sound equipment, technician, city council, etc, which become particularly hard for female-only and amateur performances, which have to set their ticket prices at a low level to attract more audiences. When I asked Saeedi about her financial problems, she said she faced severe financial problems during the 1980s, when she and her husband were trying to make the final alterations to the instrument:

Such projects need grants and financial support for a life time dedication. We spent 3.5 million Tomans — which was then the price of a three storey building — but as the money was not sufficient, we had to sell 150,000 Tomans of industrial shares that we had saved for difficulties. I sold my Royal Piano for 350,000 Tomans. I sold my violin and *tombak*. I sold some other musical instruments and many other things to put the money together. (Mozafari A)

She stated that making *ghānoon* is a difficult, time-consuming process, and since there are not enough instruments and instrument-makers involved in making *ghānoon* in the country the average price of a *ghānoon* is very expensive for an average family. As a result while people can afford buying a non-professional *santoor* or a *setar* for about 200,000 Tomans (about

£120), they have no way to pay between two to three million Tomans (about £1,200 to £1,900) for a *ghānoon*. After Ahmad Sotoodeh, Saeedi' husband, passed away in 2001; their son Alireza who began working with his father since 1982 has continued making instruments and working on his unfinished projects in their workshop.⁸⁴ This is a job with huge expenses and low demand. Since there is in no governmental support, the number of people interested in learning to make the instrument is low. Alireza, her son, has so far tried to teach the making of *ghānoon* to several people, but each time because they were not sure of its financial potential, they left after two, three months. (Sotoodeh 2009, 1)

Performances. Music performances in Iran have some timing restrictions. Although in post-revolution Iran the government has been the main factor in imposing such restrictions, some aspects of these time restrictions are also rooted in the general religious practices of the people. There are, for instance, some specific religious days and months that music performances are banned.⁸⁵ During these occasions, one can hear the regular sound of religious music, which may even, as in the case of the last decade use some slow-paced pieces from popular and even rock music, but the music remain closed during the whole period. Arguing that religiously sanctioned music is always legal, some musicians have tried to challenge these unexplained religious rules. Some have even intentionally tried to have performances of Iranian traditional music in research concerts.⁸⁶

Apart from these general restrictions, and the general difficulties of gaining permits and acquiring a space, there are also other issues that make performances more difficult. For

⁸⁴ Her son received his BSc in wood and paper industry to be able to enhance the technical aspects of their work on *ghanoon*. That is why their family is known as *Khanevadeh Ghānoon* (the family of Ghānoon).

⁸⁵ Since the Iranian calendar is solar but the Islamic one is lunar, the actual dates of these occasions change every year so that sometimes the religious days of mourning fall in the middle of the Iranian days of festivity.

⁸⁶ One continuous series has been '*Negareshi bar Gham dar Musiqi-e Iran*' (Exploring Sorrow in Iranian Music), a research concert and lecture series by Majid Kiani (1941) held for the first time on 20th and 21st June 1995, which coincided with 21 and 22 Moharram of 1416 (lunar Islamic calendar). It has been held each year since.

instance, the images, the words and design of any poster or newspaper advertisement used to publicize the performance has to go through a permit process and be double checked by the officials of the performing space, a process that normally takes one to three weeks. Or the names of the members of group must be confirmed by *herāsat* (the security) and *amāken* (parking, traffic and space) officials three weeks prior to the performance. Since the process, which in average, takes a month, is related to space rather than the music and the words, it may be different for each individual performing space. Thus if a group wants to perform the same performance in different places and times they must go through this process again. In numerous cases after the organizers of the groups have been running around for a year to receive permits for different things, the group falls apart and everything has to be cancelled.

Since I was aware that the responsibilities of the people who act as the directors of an ensemble is often too time-consuming, I asked Saeedi about how she handles these problems.

Sometimes I am not sure whether to think about my composition, about rehearsals, about gathering of the members of the group. It becomes too confusing ... Such things shackle one's mind and one's hand. Because even getting a simple permit is so difficult. Sometimes I assign a manager, but managers often can't do what I myself can do. When I get involved things are done much more quickly but when officials see a manager, they just make them run around for everything. They do it much faster when I go myself, but it is a burden, anyway. (Mozafari A)

Despite these difficulties, Saeedi has continued to run her groups and in general has had no serious problems with having performances or releasing her albums. This may partly be explained in terms of the fact that unlike Parissa and Farzaneh Kaboli, whose careers I will study in Chapters Five and Seven, her field was such that she did not face complete bans. Yet her situation may also be explained in terms of her practical, flexible approach to work, which has enabled her to seize the opportunities that have appeared in her path. She herself, however, states that 'it is partly because I have always worked when I have had MCIG permits or when I knew there is nothing illegal about my work.'

Conclusion

Saeedi's attitudes towards the bans and segregation policies, therefore, has been characterized by a calculated, practical approach, which has allowed her to maintain some of her ideals while keeping her flexible in experimenting with different methods to achieve them. Her ultimate goals, as partly guided by her financial needs and partly by her urge to do justice to her talent and training, has been to popularize her favourite instrument. To do this, in the initial steps she involved her husband, encouraging him to turn his decorative woodwork leisure activity into serious instrument making skills that preoccupied most of his time during the last fifteen years of his life from 1986 to 2001. Then she conveyed the urge for instrument making to her oldest son who is now a significant *ghānoon* maker in Iran. Thus though the revolution initially stymied her career and with the removal of governmental grants burdened her with financial burdens, she has more or less been able to achieve a considerable degree of success.

Having displayed the problems and the developments of female music making in Iran in relationship to an instrumentalist who also works as a composer, teacher and manager; in the following chapter, I focus on the works of female singers in Iran, discussing their rise during the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979), the challenges they have faced during the last thirty-two years and their emotional, artistic and intellectual response to these challenges.

CHAPTER FOUR

Female Singers and the Transformation of Singing Genres

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I went through the history of women's presence in Iranian music and examined the contemporary genres and the post-revolution challenges that musicians in general and female musicians in particular have faced. I also referred to some specific changes in the careers of instrumentalists and offered a case study on a leading female instrumentalist.

In this chapter, I will examine the condition of female Iranian singers in the context of contemporary Iranian history. To contextualize my work, I refer to factors such as public and private, urban/rural divide, Iran or abroad, class pressure, religion and education that determine the music-related destiny of potential female singers in Iran. I touch on some concepts discussed in relationship with music in villages across the world in Ellen Koskoff's *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. I also refer to issues related to the urban life of female musicians, their victimization and empowerment in different contexts as reflected in Jane A. Bernstein's edited book, *Women's Voices across Musical Worlds*. My aim is to find the multiplicity of roles that singing has played in the life of Iranian women and their contribution to the musical life of the country before and after the revolution. The first section examines the difference between the rural and urban lives of Iranian women. Then I examine the indoor music-related activities of Iranian women during the last two hundred years, the expansion of singing genres and the appearance of women as leading singers during the twentieth century. I will then show how State support and the establishment of new space for performance helped women rise in stature and fame between the 1920s and 1970s to become the leading stars of Iranian music.

The section provides the background to reflect on the cultural shock that came with the 1979 revolution which removed the majority of spaces in which women performed and prohibited female solo singers from singing in Iranian official public life. It is then followed by a discussion of the locations and the forms in which female solo singing appeared, referring to professional performances inside private houses, outside the country, in female-only spaces, as co-singers and with altered voices. The final part also refers to some impediments that female singers face in getting permits for their songs, setting up music groups, and finding and training new talents.

The Musical Life of a Culture: Past and Present Singing in Public

In Iran's rural areas during the pre-modern era women's public presence was significant.⁸⁷ Women actively participated in the everyday life and made a strong contribution to the financial status of their families and communities. Their voice could be heard both literally and metaphorically. They could be seen and heard singing lullabies and nursery rhymes during their child care activities inside and outside their homes, celebratory songs during weddings and festivals, hymns, prayers and laments during funerals and mourning rituals, or incantations during such therapeutic rituals as *Zār*, *Nobān* or other more religious ceremonies.⁸⁸ Though the balance of rural and urban population has drastically changed since the late nineteenth century, some of these facts are still true to Iranian rural life.⁸⁹

Generally, women in small urban communities are more likely to suffer under patriarchal pressures, but in villages, the economic necessity of women's labour has kept them outside

⁸⁷ Prior to the twentieth century, the rural population of Iran, including the nomads, was about seventy percent of the population, but with the intense centralization and land reform plans implemented during the 1900s, most nomads were settled in cities. Their population is estimated to be between thirty to thirty-five percent of the population now. For more See Nikki Keddi (2003)

⁸⁸ For healing rituals in Iran, see GholamHossein Sae'di (1966) and Mohsen Sharifian (2004 & 2005)

⁸⁹ For women and music in rural Iran, see Houshang Javid (2004).

their homes, and involved in most forms of cultural activities. Another factor is that, in the majority of cases they have been more immune from the radicalization of Islam after the revolution, particularly because their religious life is usually regulated by local clergies, who are more concerned with their local image, religious questions and clerical functions than reinforcing radical Islamic views on villagers. Though the condition of women in urban areas is in general much better than their conditions in rural areas in terms of hygiene, education and potential for growth, some of the cultural and religious prohibition has been much more serious in cities.

Traditionally, a woman's singing voice, like her presence and her financial role in society, was bound to private spaces, including their houses and the houses of their friends in female only gatherings. Any other instance of a female singing in public including the ones conducted in the private yards and halls of the courts of local and national rulers and the houses of rich families would be associated with immorality and promiscuity. The situation was rather similar for male singers. The more conservative layers of society considered male singing in urban public spaces, especially those forms performed by itinerant performers or *looti(es)* in celebratory ceremonies and characterized as entertainment as a marker of loose morals and lack of concern for social and religious norms. They could invite these performers to entertain their guests for a celebration, but in general considered them cheap and/or immoral.

Even the forms associated with what is known as classical music today were bound to professionals performing and teaching music in the courts or private spaces in the houses of other middle and upper middle class performers who did not think of their music practice as a profession.

Due to these religious prohibitions and cultural presumptions, the only publicly respected singing forms were the ones practised in religious dramatic performances such as elegiac

recitations (*nowheh khāni*), the passion plays of *ta'ziyeh*, and other ceremonies associated with the martyrdom of Shi'a saints. People in general appreciated their works in these religious contexts. They also often praised their good voices in terms of range and mastery of melodies and ornaments as a means for religious catharsis that edified and purified the singer and the audience. They regularly commended the best of them by comparing their voices with that of the prophet David, as a god-given gift that attracts people to religious activities.

But for women the problem was more complicated. In urban areas, particularly in more religious districts which were usually closer to the mosques even the public presence of women was not appreciated. Describing the position of female performers in Egypt, Karin Van Nieuwkerk refers to the Islamic belief that women's power of seduction is a potential tool for gaining advantage over men and disrupting society. As such husbands have to satisfy the sexual needs of their wives, but to avoid '*fitna*', 'sexual disorder that is initiated by women', 'several institutions usually interpreted as instruments of male power, such as seclusion and sexual segregation' help to protect men from women, as Islamic cover and modesty codes protect women against male sexual violence. (2006, 148-50) In its various forms, the same approach to controlling women has delineated the position of women in different cultures. The forms may be different, but what is central to all of them is that they define women in terms of their physical presence or their bodies rather than as people. That is why if this physical being, this 'body' breaks its seclusion, segregation and silence, and appear outside its boundaries; it is actually doing nothing but presenting a body and a voice that divert men's attention from work and prayer with a powerful temptation.

The situation has been rather similar in Iran. The presence of female body and voice outside the legal domains of home and mosque has always been subject to control. As such the female voice has been considered to be as seductive as her body.

up to the beginning of the twentieth century, upon answering the door to a male visitor, women would either have to distort their voices or clap their hands, instead of asking 'Who is it?' Indeed, a woman's voice could not be heard by any male who was not a close relative. (Youssefzadeh 2004, 130)

Of course, this audio-visual seclusion is not unique to Islam. As Bernstein writes in her introduction to 'Cloistered Voices' in *Women's Voices across Musical Worlds*,

The phenomenon of segregating the sexes so that men cannot hear women sing occurs in several religions around the world. In strict Orthodox Judaism, for example, the female voice is considered to be a serious distraction to men. They celebrate weddings and other joyous occasions in separate venues where their musical performances cannot be seen or heard by men....And in the Roman Catholic Church, St. Paul's dictum that women should remain silent in church continues to be present day with the exclusion of females from officiating at services as celebrants. (2004: 87)

Yet rather than being entirely religious, this prohibition seems to be based on patriarchal premises that prefer to seclude women rather than try to improve men. Whatever the roots, the problem is that according to radical Islamists a woman's voice must not be heard by a *nāmahram* (non-first-rate-relative) that is any man other than her husband, brother, father, son and son in law. For other less radical Muslims, female singing or speaking voice may be forbidden or permitted depending on situations that a pious woman can determine by herself. As it stands now, the average Iranians of different classes, including religious ones, seem to be relaxed about these rules and the respect they demonstrate for a good voice always allows a space of tolerance. Yet the religious rules against some forms of solo singing, particularly female solo singing, and the class-based attitudes that refuse to consider singing as a serious profession, have been detrimental to the growth of secular solo singing in Iran.

As in the case of other music-related activities, discussed in the previous chapters, the tug of power between the religious and the political establishments has been a major determinant in the relative position of solo singing in the public. The key issue is that when state support has been missing, solo singing, particularly female solo singing, has declined or gone into hiding;

and when it has been powerful, it has re-emerged in different forms. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, usually considered the beginning of Iranian modernity, this power conflict took a particularly intense form. The secular trajectory of the constitutional revolution (1906-11) led to the relative devolution of political power in Iran, but could only temporarily change things related to women. It reduced the power of the state and tried to confer it to the parliament, which was relatively secular, but could not really reduce the influence of the clergy. It was, therefore, only during the Pahlavi period (1925-79) when the government finally managed to confront and channel the power of the clergy that female solo singing found the status of an artistic public activity.

The Expansion of New Singing Genres before the Revolution

A historical survey of Iranian music shows that the first instances of public performance of classical Iranian art music occurred in 1906 during the constitutional revolution. Prior to that time professional musicians and singers were bound to the royal and regional courts and indoor spaces. From then until the establishment of the Islamic government in 1979, solo singing went through a period of expansion which at first only included men, but since 1921, which marks the gradual rise of Reza Shah to power, expanded to provide more spaces for women. Prior to the early 1920s, the urban professional singing genres involving women were limited to female-only gatherings in celebratory religious and non-religious festivities, religious mourning ceremonies and more formal house parties for people with a taste for Iranian classical music.

The non-religious celebratory gatherings included wedding and circumcision parties and other forms of house parties. They included various performing activities, including dancing,

singing, role playing and plays.⁹⁰ In such ceremonies professional female entertainers — including instrumentalists, singers, and dancers — who were paid for their performance conducted a variety of entertaining activities. If there were no female performers available, male performers were hired and placed behind a curtain or were blindfolded to provide the music required. In informal parties the singing and dancing was done by the guests and the hosts and their performance could be accompanied by a single percussion instrument such as a *dāyereh* or a *tombak* or, at times, by a tray, pan, or jar used to keep the rhythm.

The celebratory religious gatherings known as *moludi* were and are still held to celebrate the anniversary of the dates on which Shi'a sacred figures, known as 'the fourteen infallibles' were born. In female-only *moludi(s)* the female preacher usually talks about the religious figures that the ceremony is held for and sings praise songs that are accompanied by the clapping, snapping, and co-singing of the present women. The songs may be accompanied by a percussion instrument such as a *daf* or a *dāyereh*.⁹¹

Women's religious, mourning ceremonies were and are still held to commemorate the martyrdom of the twelve Imams or other religious figures. They are generally known as *rowzeh*, but their singing part is also referred to as *nowheh* (lament or elegiac song). The preacher recites and sings poems about the virtues and the deeds of the religious figure, laments his or her sufferings in confronting the enemies of Islam and recounts the story of his or her martyrdom. The performance is accompanied by people's crying and chest beating,

The importance of such ceremonies is that most of their songs are based on specific *dastgāh(s)* of Iranian classical music such as *Shoor* and *Segāh*. In fact, some of the prominent, female singers of classical Iranian music during the Pahlavi era had begun their singing careers in such

⁹⁰ I will be discussing these forms in my chapter on dance. For more, see Safa-Isfahani (1980).

⁹¹ *Tombak* (goblet drum) and *dāyereh* (small frame drum) are more associated with happy occasions and *daf* (large frame drum) with mystic, religious ones.

gatherings as young singers accompanying the main *rowzeh khān(s)* or *nowheh khān(s)* (preacher-singer), usually an aunt, a grandmother or a cousin. In the case of Qamar-ol Molook Vaziri (1905-1959), for instance, her grandmother was a *rowzeh khān* who usually took the young Qamar with her to these ceremonies to function as a helper or second singer.⁹² The same was true of Delkash (1925-2005) and Marziyeh (1926-2010). Of course, this is not unique to Iran, and religious and devotional singing both in its choral and individual forms has often functioned as a means for developing the talents of male and female singers at early stages of their lives. As Virginia Danielson, reports, for instance, Umm Kulthum's father was the 'Imam of the local mosque' of their village, and her first childhood performances were based on a repertory that 'consisted primarily of religious songs, including those that constituted the story of the Prophet's life'. (1998, 22-23) Such spaces, therefore, function like singing institutions for the talented children of lower class or religious families, who could freely practise and learn through experience and encouragement.

During the pre-modern era, and before that, it was possible for those born in rich or upper class families to have private lessons given by prominent singers or instrumentalists and as the reports of historical books demonstrate some aristocratic women did take their private singing or performing lessons very serious. (Khaleghi, 1956, 466-69) However, since they followed the dictates of their society and class, they had no public performances, and their singing remained limited to their families or, if they ventured beyond that, to female-only gatherings.

As a result of these cultural and religious restrictions, the first public performance of a female singer in Iran was held during the reign of Reza Shah (1925-41), whose plans for modernization included some drastic measures for changing the status of Iranian women.⁹³

⁹² For more on Qamar's life and career, see Zohreh Khaleghi (1994).

⁹³ In 1935, for instance, he forced women to remove their veils which created uproar among people.

The performers involved in this nationalist top-down project for modernization were trained by a number of modernist musicians to literally leave 'indoor' spaces to have 'public' performances supported by the government. Although the state was supportive of women's formal performances in public, the emergence and mushrooming of night clubs provided a strong case for the clergy to condemn the presence of female singers in different spaces. The state support, thus, made the presence of women possible but could not completely overcome the familial, social and religious bans that female singers faced.

As one can conclude from the biographies of different female singers of the era, the more reputable female performers, however, came from an altogether different background. They were mostly from families who had recently moved to Tehran, or those lower class families who had embraced the newly established system. They did not have the burden of an unrespectable history. They were very young and had been lucky enough to be discovered by their school teachers or employers who had then introduced them to such leading musicians as Ali-Naqi Vaziri (1887-1979), Abolhassan Saba (1902-57), Ismaeil Mertash (1904-80) and Rouhollah Khaleghi (1906-65) who gradually trained and prepared them in their music institutes.⁹⁴

Relying on the support provided by the government and music or theatre groups they worked with, female actresses and then female singers were the first group of women to appear in public, but then instrumentalists and finally dancers also began to perform. With the increasing support of the government and the production of several records during the late 1920s, the number of female singers rapidly increased. Between 1926 and 1931 more than seventeen female singers, including Qamar, Rooh Angiz (1904-84), Roohbakhsh (1908-89), Molook-e

⁹⁴ For more see, Tuka Maleki's *Zanan-e Musiqi-e Iran* (Iranian Women Musicians), and Zohreh Khaleghi's *Ava-ye Mehrabi* the life history of Ghamar.

Zarabi (1910-99), and Farah Angiz (1911-98) and many others recorded their voices. (Maleki 2001, 171-210)

One of the first women who had her voice recorded during the 1920s and 1930s was Qamar, who is at times referred to as the best female singer of classical Iranian music or by some as the Umm Kulthum of Iran. The two, however, had different destinies. Umm Kulthum's knowledge of Arabic, power of articulation and voice played an important role in the cultural decolonization of Egypt, 'the national artistic revolution' through which the 'public taste' of Egyptian people 'turned from Ottoman and Turkish song to historical Arabic song'. (Danielson 2004, 148) Since her voice reflected a return to the language of the people, which was also the language of the Koran, she became the voice of her people. In the case of Qamar, however, the situation was more complicated. She had all the good qualities that Umm Kulthum had, and, as a result, became the initiator and the best voice of a new form of female singing that signified the nationalist renaissance of Iranian classical music in the contexts of the constitutional revolution and then Reza Shah's push for modernization. However, the secular nationalism she voiced entailed a confrontation with certain aspects of religion, which she, unlike Umm Kulthum, could not compensate by playing a role in returning to the language of religion. Her world and her vocal excellence were in Persian, which the promoters of the cultural renaissance of the late 1900s attempted to purge of its Arabic influence and turn into a secular tool.

In 1924, when Reza Khan was in full power as the premier, but had not yet become Reza Shah; Qamar, who was only nineteen, appeared in a concert without a veil, gaining the title of the first woman to sing in a public concert. The removal of the veil cannot by any means be referred to as a means to increase her sexual appeal. It can more be interpreted in the context of her own courage and the secular vision of the leading musicians with whom she worked. She became so popular that produced around 200 records with leading companies, including many by the

British His Master's Voice Company. Yet despite this fame, Qamar had to sing in nightclubs to earn a living, an economic problem which perpetuated the image of female performers as being immoral and promiscuous.

The launching of the first Iranian radio station and the establishment of its official organization in 1940 created a new momentum for Iranian female singers. It provided a new space and a new source of income for female singers. Besides singing in nightclubs, producing records and working for the office of Radio Iran; some women singers also began appearing in plays and then films. The use of female singers in cinema which dates back to 1937 became an inseparable part of popular Iranian cinema during the next four decades. Some of these women, including Mahvash (1925-61) and Parivash who sang in nightclubs and performed in the mainstream Iranian films became very popular among the lower class men who frequented the bars and night clubs of Tehran. Mahvash, for instance, was so popular that her funeral is said to have been the biggest ever until then. (Maleki, 2003)

During the 1930s and 1940s, among the women involved in artistic activities, women from Muslim families were more likely to be working as singers, producing records and singing on the radio, but women from religious minority were more likely to be engaged in theatrical activities and singing in operettas. This was partly because most women of the latter group were of Christian Armenian background, and, thus, spoke Persian with an accent that did not create problem in theatre at that time. (Talajooy forthcoming 2012) Yet it was also because some of the women from Muslim background preferred not to be seen on the stage. The list of leading Armenian-Iranian actresses of the period includes Pari Agha Babayof, Siranoosh, and Loreta, who were among the first to work with Ali Naqi Vaziri's Musical Club (1924) and break the taboo of working as actresses and singers. As in the Safavid period (1501-1726),

therefore, due to religious pressures, non-Muslim women were in the forefront of artistic activities.

As already noted singing in public and removing the veil (*hejāb*) were impossible without state support. In other words it was the state support that made the endeavours of individuals successful or even meaningful. As the evidence of earlier conflicts reveals without the state support, such drastic social changes were impossible. Rābe'eh, the great Persian poet of the early eleventh century, for instance, was the first woman who publicly removed her veil to denounce its value, but the very act made it possible for the religious authorities to accuse her of prostitution and have her executed though she was known to be a poet of high merits and respectable character. (Safa 1970, 306) The support of the state, however, meant financial security and social immunity. During the first Pahlavi era, apart from the protection provided by the police, the top-down approach to modernization produced a number of public spaces where female performance and their participation in music-related activities became possible. While the gradual separation between the religious and political establishments intensified the animosity between the state and the clergy, it helped narrow the gap between the public and private lives of average Iranians.⁹⁵

The process of modernization allowed many female singers to sing for mixed audiences in an increasing number of genres. As the critical writings on twentieth-century Iranian music (Khaleghi 1956, Binesh 2003) reveals, singers or musicians categorized themselves or their colleagues in different manners, but the general categories always included classical, regional, religious, popular and their subdivisions and the fusion forms that have gradually developed.

⁹⁵ The relationship between society and the individual is normally defined in terms of a gap between the public and private lives of people, but in some societies the gap is much greater than one may expect. The reduction of this gap for women meant leaving the 'indoor' spaces and appearing in 'public'. The public space for men was mainly the numerous tea houses across the city and their work places, but for city women it was the indoor parties and their normal gatherings inside the houses. Unlike rural women who had a chance of working on farms, urban women were mostly housebound and their work was limited to housework, handicraft and rug weaving.

Under the category of Classical Iranian Music, the different forms include the followings. The first is traditional (*sonati*) classical, in which the singers have to be educated in the repertoire of Iranian classical music and be able to sing in its two major ways *āvāz khāni* (non rhythmic, improvised, *radif* based singing) and *tasnif khāni* (rhythmic, old or new but *radif* based songs). The second form is popularized classical music in which singing *tasnifs* with chamber orchestra and some solo Iranian musical instruments is central and *āvāz khāni* has little or no place.

Under the category of Iranian Regional Music, the different forms include the followings. The first is traditional regional (*mahalli*) in which the singer sings regional/folk songs in their original forms and in regional languages and dialects with the accompaniment of regional musical instruments. The second is popularized regional forms. This form is heavily influenced by mainstream popular music in that it often uses standard Persian rather than regional dialects and is accompanied by instruments which are not normally used in regional music.

Under the category of Religious Music, there were a number of forms associated with *Rowzeh Khāni*, *Nowheh Khāni* and *Moloudi* which I have already discussed. These were cross-genres between dramatic story-telling and singing. They used melodic recitations to evoke an emotional response in the audience. But there are also various forms associated with *Ashurai* mourning ceremonies, in which tunes from sad sounding popular songs are used to sing songs about the sufferings and the martyrdoms of the Shi'a sacred figures.

The last category, popular music, has two major subdivisions. The first has been heavily influenced by western popular music — such as jazz, blues, rock and roll and later rock and rap — and is known as '*pop-e gharbi*/westernized popular music. The other is known as *ru-howzi* which involves a combination of dancing, singing, and theatrical performances. This genre has been the most important non-formal indigenous form that mixed music and drama. In its

pre-modern forms that one may call urban folk music, it usually involved men acting and singing as women and very rarely women performing some of the roles, but it also had women-only forms in which women performed as men and women in musical plays that often ridiculed some patriarchal attitudes. Though during the last fifty years and specifically after the revolution, due to the governments' concern with its satiric force and bawdy humour, the number of its performances has been decreased, the form still survives in popular comic plays.⁹⁶

Reza Shah's modernization projects played an important role in the growth and spread of these forms, particularly because it changed the general status of women involved in artistic activities. Thus the singing genres that Iranian women were involved in during the first Pahlavi era gradually expanded from religious and celebratory to popular Iranian, classical Iranian, religious and western popular forms. In the second Pahlavi era most of these forms continued to expand, and new genres associated with popularized regional, popularized classical Iranian, classical western, popular western, and children's music developed to place women at the centre of Iranian solo singing.

The number of the female solo singers involved in different genres of music in pre-revolution Iran demonstrates this centrality, revealing a space in which female singers were in some cases more active and/or more prominent than their male counterparts. Some female singers were so famous that they actually left little space for male ones. The gap was so clear that even the most well known male singers of today Iran are far from achieving the degree of fame achieved by such female singers as Hayedeh (1942-90), Googoosh (b.1949), Delkash and Marziyeh . This fame was, of course, partly due to what can be described as the auditory and visual voyeurism

⁹⁶ The category of European/Western Classical Music, also can be mentioned that involves singing in Persian, solo or in choirs in western classical forms, as seen in operatic styles of signing and accompanied by a symphonic orchestra. The other form, which has been less frequent, involves singing in actual dramatic operas and operettas both in Persian and in European languages.

of some male spectators who glorify the female performer as an object of desire and automatically turn her into a model of emulation for women, a process that may work conversely for male performers and some female spectators. Based on this perspective, it might be expected that in a patriarchal society, where men's presence has more cultural weight, women performers become more famous. Despite these theoretical misgivings, however, these female performers, particularly Delkash (1925-2005), Marziyeh (1925-2010), Pouran (1933-1990) Hayedeh, Mahasti (1926-2008) and Googoosh had great artistic merits and their male colleagues often commented on their unique skills.

The Contraction and Transformation of Music Genres after the Revolution

The rising stars of female Iranian singers, however, came to a rapid decline during the early 1980s. The tow of power between the state and the clergy and the secular and the religious in Iranian collective subconscious continued underneath the westernized surfaces of Iranian social life with its art festivals and secular gestures and resulted in the 1979 revolution and the establishment of an Islamic government. In fact, the presence of innumerable uncovered women with 'un-Islamic dresses and behaviours' in major cities, specifically in Tehran and on the national television channels was one of the reasons many clerics and religious people backed Ayatollah Khomeini as the religious leader of the revolution. The high intensity of the presence of female artists in public performances was also among the major complaints regularly raised about the cultural policies of the government.

The ban on female solo singing after the revolution stopped women from functioning as the stars of Iranian music life and provided more opportunities for male singers involved in classical Iranian music. After the revolution female singers mainly could sing in choirs to produce revolutionary songs and in indoor spaces of different kinds. Therefore the main difference between pre-revolution and post-revolution Iran was that the process that narrowed

the gap between the public and private lives of less religious people during the two Pahlavi kings stopped and was reversed, producing drastic impacts on society, particularly because average Iranians had been accustomed to the new circumstances and were not ready to abandon them. Nevertheless, the process disintegrated all the state created spaces that had transformed the lives of Iranian female performers and gradually led to the widening of the gap between the public and private lives of people, particularly women.

With the advent of the revolutionary government in early 1979, music was denounced by Ayatollah Khomeini as the opium of the youth. (Khomeini 1986, 205) What he meant by music was mainly music when involved uncovered women and popular music in the forms that encouraged irreligious behaviours or encouraged indifference to work, Jihad and life. The impact was, however, felt across all music-related fields.

The basic changes that happened in the public life of the people had a lot to do with the presence of women in society and the measures taken suggest the government's desire for the segregation of men and women in public spaces and for controlling the appearance of people, particularly women. Ayatollah Khomeini's decree for making *hejāb* compulsory was formally announced in 1980, finalizing a process that had resulted in several demonstrations by women, including a major one involving several thousands in March 1979. However, when it was officially decreed by the leader of the revolution and supported by the religious layers of society, the new ruling began to be enforced by the police, who gradually subdued all protests. Yet this was only the tip of the iceberg and later pressures showed the enforcement of compulsory *hejāb* was like a pilot plan to test the tolerance of people in response to these kinds of laws.

One of the main projects of the new governing system was to create an Islamic utopia on the basis of the social and legal ideals claimed to have been given to the Prophet Mohammad by

God. Some of the rules were more straight-forward than the others because of their importance in Islamic Shari'a law. For instance, the articles associated with women's codes of dressing and behaving were known to be central to the Shari'a law, but the ones about music were less clear-cut.

The complete ban on women's solo singing did not start on an exact date and time immediately after the revolution; it rather gradually became a rule before it was formally announced. The public presence of a Muslim woman is to be modified and codified on the basis of the laws of chastity, tolerance, sobriety, silence, self control, etc, and singing in public, which involves 'putting one's body and voice on a stage of self-presentation' went far beyond this code of modesty and preferable silence.

After the revolution female solo singing gradually disappeared from television and radio under the pretext of the Islamic rules that decreed female solo singing as sexually provoking for men. The ban on popular music in radio and television and the fear of prosecution made many popular singers leave the country during the early 1980s. Most of the Iranian and all the foreign instrumentalists of the Symphonic Orchestra of Tehran and opera singers also left the country in 1979 and 1980. This exodus put a stop on the activities of many music groups.

The activities of the people involved in classical music, however, did not immediately stop. During 1979 and 1980, for instance, a few concerts of Iranian classical music were performed. These were, of course, before the imposition of the overall bans which initiated the worst era in the contemporary history of Iranian music. Even in these early concerts, female singers were absent from the stage, but the cassettes released by some classical music groups include songs by female singers. These included songs by female singers whose voice had been recorded during 1978, just before the victory of the revolution. The cassettes released in these early months included songs by three major singers. Hengameh Akhavan (b. 1955) who had started

performing with the prominent Sheidā and Aref groups in 1977 had her first cassette, *Baz Amadam* (I Came Back), released in 1979. Sima Mafiha (b. 1949) whose redoing of old classical Iranian *tasnifs* was very popular released her cassette *Aqrab-e Zolf-e Kajat* (The Scorpion of Your Curved Lock) in the same year. Hengameh Yashar (b. 1953) also had a cassette of children's music, *Taraneha-ye Koochak baraye Bidari* (Little Songs for Being Awake). Another one is *Rangin Kamoon* (The Rainbow) for children which has solo performances of female opera singers.⁹⁷

The music departments of universities were closed, but Music High School of Tehran (*Honarestan Musiqi-e Tehran*) which re-opened in 1981 in a segregated form, continued working. While the performance and composition courses on Iranian and western classical music continued, singing lessons for girls was removed from the curriculum.

From 1981 onward, the ban on music became more intense. Women's solo voice, however, was never completely vanished from Iran. In its unprofessional forms, it could be heard in the public-in-private spheres of indoor family parties by the female members of the family or in the public spheres of woods or other natural locations which remained free from the gaze of revolutionary guards. As I clearly remember, the unofficial sale and distribution of the cassettes of male and female singers in shops, and then stalls, also continued for a few months until early 1982. These included unofficial copies of cassettes of pre-revolution female pop and classical singers and the revolutionary songs of leftist oppositions. Of course, with the escalation of the war between Iran and Iraq, the street conflicts between the political factions and then the suppression of political parties, these unofficial market of cassettes disappeared for a time, but it soon reappeared in other less visible forms with music from Los Angeles based Iranian popular singers as the most desired commodity.

⁹⁷ It has the permit to be published in Iran again in recent years.

From the beginning of the war between Iran and Iraq in September 1980 until its end in July 1988, therefore, music concerts were quite infrequent. Once in a while, there were small concerts by male singers in music halls or in foreign embassies such as the embassy of Italy and Austria. The general sobriety of the war time life in Iran of the 1980s, the economic sanctions, restrictions, and the occasional armed conflicts left little space for musical activities which were restricted by the ruling system in the first place.⁹⁸ It was only after the end of the war that music concerts began to reappear. There was still no sign of any endeavour to stage female solo singing, but the launching of concerts promised a gradual process of change that brought female singers back to the stage in the second decade of the revolution.

With Ayatollah Khomeini's religious decree and the legalization of music, however, things changed so that from the early 1990s female singers tried to re-enter the musical life of Iran. Since then the main problem has been that according to the current version of *Shari'a* law in Iran, the female singing voice must not be heard by men. Therefore, any attempt by female singers puts them face to face with the clerics in power. This is a stressful situation in which one is always walking on the borders of censorship and working in marginal stages. Many female singers, however, have preferred to use the limited available spaces rather than change their desired profession. In the process, they have also devised new ways to resist and transform the dominant discourse on female singing.

Classification of the Spaces and Styles (1980-2010)

To offer a clear map of the life of Iranian solo singers, I have classified the spaces in which these performers performed, the changes and challenges they encountered and the methods

⁹⁸ In the earliest stages of the bans on music in 1982 and 1983, the animosity of some radical elements with music and female voice was so intense that some even tried to make 'Islamic' versions of revolutionary songs by replacing the orchestral music and the female choir with the religiously authorized sounds of drum and cymbals and male only choirs.

they used to overcome them. The **spaces** in which they performed included (1) state-run television and radio channels; (2) private gatherings inside houses; (3) public performances outside Iran; and (4) female only performances in music halls. The **forms** that became more dominant or were developed to overcome the bans included: (5) singing along a second or third singing voice, which nevertheless allowed the major singer stand out in the performance; (6) singing with a changed voice as a child in commercials or in children's music; (7) solo singing in rare occasions and as part of theatrical performances. As I discuss the spaces and the forms that this process has given birth to and the practices that have challenged the bans, I will concentrate on the personal, social and professional significance of these practices as sites of cultural resistance against forms of censorship, control and stereotyping that have been trying to suppress female singing, particularly female solo singing.

Spaces

(1) Female singers in national television and radio channels. As I mentioned in the previous chapters during the first decade of the revolution except for some special genres, music production and broadcasting on the national television and radio were restricted and female singers were excluded from that space. Women's voices could only be heard in choirs singing revolutionary and war songs. No singers (male or female) or musical instruments were shown on Iranian television channels during this early period. The music broadcasted from the television, in fact, was not different from the one heard from the radio. The difference was that the spectator could see some flowers or natural scenes, or depending on the texts, scenes from revolution days or soldiers in war as listening to the music. Even the names of the singers were not mentioned. In fact, it was not until the second decade of the revolution that the names or the faces of the singers (male) were seen on Iranian television.

The only exception for female singing was in children's programs in some of which female singers (not the pre-revolution prominent ones) sang children's songs with baby-like voices as cartoon characters and puppets. The singing puppets, however, were mainly male, with the rare exception of female puppets singing lullabies.

Another exception is in Davoud Mir-Baqeri's (b.1958) *Mokhtār Nāmeḥ* (The Account of *Mokhtār*, 2010) religious-historical television series in which for the first time after the revolution a female voice broadcasted on TV though singing a lament (*nowheh*) and as part of the title of the series.⁹⁹

Female singing in unofficial, semi-official as liminal performances. The meaning of the term unofficial (*gheir-e rasmi*) is rather complicated in post-revolution Iran. Unofficial in this context means something that is not approved of by the government or by those who have special powers in the political establishment, but is practised by people or artists in the privacy of houses or small private halls. Semi-official signifies those performances that have received aural or implicit permits from those responsible for giving the permits, but are, nevertheless, always in danger of being stopped. The issues related to the relative position of public and private spaces are of great importance to the discussion of these kinds of performances.

(2) Private Performances inside Houses. Since the mid 1990s, with the relaxation of pressures on musicians, there have been attempts – especially among the professional pre-revolution singers – to create space for female solo singing. These attempts have included small private performances held inside houses or in large basements. There have never been reports of raids by the revolutionary guards to such concerts mainly because the raids have

⁹⁹ The hard liners criticised the female solo singing and the singer announced that the producers used her performance of the lament without her approval because she knew that female solo singing is Haram. Strangely the series broadcasting continued with no change. See also the news in Persian on <http://www.khabaronline.ir/news-98024.aspx> accessed 10-10-10

been restricted from the early 1990s onwards and the reformist government tried to put a blind eye on such private performances. Moreover, the raids have been, in general, more concerned with popular music and dance in wedding or other similar parties, while such concerts only included classical Iranian music, which has always been less problematic than popular music. Depending on their purpose, these performances which were usually held in major cities may or may not sell tickets, but, as a rule, they are more motivated by artistic rather than financial intentions.¹⁰⁰

According to Pari Maleki (b. 1951), the Iranian Classical music singer, these house concerts began as underground performances, but they gradually found a semi-official status. The Music Centre of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance would give verbal consent to some female musicians to have performances in their houses with two female guards inside and two male guards outside. (Maleki 2008, 1) This practice is like a distorted return to the early modern (1890-1920) approaches to performance in which since music did not have a respected place in the public life of people, prominent musicians held private indoor or garden performances. Yet whereas in the early modern era, the fear of being socially ostracized prevented the musicians from performing more openly, in the post-revolution era, it is the fear of the radical people in the political establishment that prevents them from having concerts.¹⁰¹

With the reforms of the late 1990s, the Ministry of Cultural and Islamic Guidance formally recognized some female groups and took measures to prepare concert halls for female-only performances. This positive attitude led to a marked increase in the number of female-only

¹⁰⁰ Since the late 1990s, these performances, particularly illegal ones have expanded to include concerts by different pop and rock groups. In the case of these latter 'underground' groups, since there are fewer opportunities for legal performance, it is more likely to sell tickets within the extended circles of friends and musicians. For more on these forms of performances, see Nooshin (2005).

¹⁰¹ The recording activities of Iran's leading musician which began during the late Qajar era mark the first steps for turning music into a respectful art form. However, in the absence of any real public space where people could engage with the meaning of music making, these activities did not initiate a real transformation, and only expanded the public life of the elite in their indoor spaces.

groups, which gave an irreversible momentum to female music activities and encouraged some leading singers to have occasional concerts inside the country. The situation, however, has not improved since the early 2000s, and some female singers may face more problems for getting permits for their music, their lyrics, and the place of performance in comparison with the late 1990s.

(3) Female-Only Performances in Music Halls. These kinds of performances began in the mid 1990s. The first ever female-only music concert was in 1994, during the presidency of Mohammad Hashemi Rafsanjani, when the head of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was Mohammad Khatami. Later during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, these performances were institutionalized to provide some space for female solo singers.

It is worth mentioning that female only concert was mainly introduced to public during a festival for the celebration of the birth of Prophet Mohammad's daughter. The situation is somehow comparable with the post-Islamic era in Iran, when many cultural practices which were banned found their ways into religious ceremonies and were given some Islamic justification. The same situation reoccurred after the revolution. Since everything had to be suppressed or justified in Islamic terms in order to have the right to exist, forbidden artistic forms began to reappear in ceremonies held for the celebration of the victory of the revolution or in Shi'e religious rituals. Those members of the government who knew the value of propaganda welcomed these forms and despite their claims against 'instrumental use of art' provided subsidies and launched festivals with strict guidelines to fulfil their own plans.

Thus, for instance, Fajr Music Festival is held annually to celebrate the anniversary of the victory of the revolution, or Yās Music Festival, Iran's women-only music festival, is held for the birthday of Fātemeh the daughter of Prophet Mohammad. They are also organized to promote the image of Iranian Islamic government as a progressive state that has inclusive and

open-minded cultural policies and is capable of giving Islamic taste to all aspects of life including arts and entertainments.

In the case of women-only events, however, this Islamization, in my opinion, which I share with some of the singers that I interviewed, is an essentially distorted form of segregation. In her writing on the functions that women's voice can perform in social, cultural and political life of people, Jane Bernstein writes,

Singers' voices can empower women....They can also 'speak' for whole communities, whether it be for political, social, national, or universal causes, as in the case of Umm Kulthum, Joan Baez, and Mercedes Sosa. Conversely, voices can be disempowered through segregation and/or subjugation, as observed in ... public and private or the cloistered voice. (2004, 4)

Even if they are rooted in some positive intentions, the women-only performances are, indeed, a prime example of a form of segregation that has disempowered women. It is a painful reminder to any woman that their presence and their aspirations are to be suppressed because of their gender. In other words, they have to follow the image of womanhood prescribed by the patriarchs if they want to have a limited space for performance. This is, indeed, a major case of disempowerment in which female cultural activities are marginalized so that their position is clearly highlighted to them and to the people who are aware of this bordering.

The ideal image of womanhood for the leading Iranian officials is Fātemeh and Zeinab, the daughter and the granddaughter of the prophet who are described in such terms as *mazlum va ma'sum*, (sacrificing and innocently pure). Their histories are often referred to in different forms to demonstrate that they only talked when they were supposed to defend Islam in the absence of their men. Thus apart from imposing the official codes of dress and behaviour on women, the government tries by different means to reshape all women and create controllable Islamic puppets.

Within these limits, the women-only events have been formed not as officially desired practices, but as safety valves to control people and musicians' demands for public performances. As a result, even though these festivals go through all the necessary paths of Islamization, as Wendy DeBano explains, 'images of women, especially female musicians, and the names of specific female performers are ... almost absent from public' and there is only limited publicity for the festivals. (2005:449)

On the other hand, these forms of festivals by their very nature demand compromise on the parts of artists. The music and the words of the songs are controlled and musicians have to adjust themselves with the state-desired image of womanhood. Yet more importantly, as Farzaneh Milani explains '...placing women in a gender-marked category automatically downgrades their works to a subsection created especially for them'. (1992: 11) DeBano's report of Yās Music Festival demonstrates that these segregated festivals are not as significant as the mixed ones: '... the movement of restless children, the sounds of women rustling chips bags, and whispering during performances, [are] noises that are rarely noticeable in mixed-gender performances'. (2005: 454) As a result, as I gather from my interviews and personal encounters, some women musicians believe that these events should be boycotted, yet some others believe that they should take advantage of these spaces and gradually push their limits to turn them into what they really want.¹⁰²

In her paper, 'The Frame Drum in the Middle East' Veronica Doubleday states that: 'Middle Eastern women often enjoy the privilege of all-women space ... which facilitates the power of female solidarity and provides the principal context for music making'. (1999:103) This is indeed, true for a traditional community where women's artistic talents remain undeveloped

¹⁰² For more also see DeBano's chapter, 'Singing against silence: Celebrating Women and Music at the Fourth Jasmine Festival' in Nooshin's *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, (2009).

and non-professional. In the present day Iran, with hundreds of female musicians active as trainers, instrumentalists and singers, however, this all-female space means exclusion from other performing spaces. Thus female music production is marginalized and the quality of her work and her proficiency remain uncontested and unappreciated at a professional level. It also deprives female musicians of the critical views of their male colleagues, which in turn would encourage collaboration and aspirations.

In terms of its social impact, it is clear that one reason why the works of women solo singers is limited in contemporary Iran is that the authorities wish to avoid providing unwanted role models for young women. If it had been just for the radical Islamic conception of female body appearing on a stage and presenting her body and her voice to an audience, women should have been stopped from appearing in any singing or performing positions. Yet women regularly sing in music groups as co-singers in covering yet attractive costumes. The body and the voice are both there on the stage. They have performed choreographed movements in theatrical performances in which the body and the voice have been used to create situations in which moral themes and ideas are projected in action. From an Islamic point of view, therefore, for a government that has allowed these forms, the solo singing of a 'respectable' woman, who is performing in a 'dignified sitting position' and whose work has 'profound artistic qualities' should not be a problem. Yet as the history of post-revolution Iranian cinema also reflects, some sections of Iranian government seem to have a problem with projecting the image of powerful women who control the men and women around them. It is thus possible that, since the position of the solo singer of Iranian classical music is often likely to project the image of a powerful woman in control, the government prefers to keep to women and deprive young women of role models that may violate their patriarchal constructs.

Although some singers appreciate this little space, others believe that it violates their codes of conduct or deprives them of actual spaces where they can perform with their male colleagues and be criticized or praised according to their merits rather than their gender. The problem is that the dominant attitude of the audience in some of these concerts is that of going to a party, which does not pose any artistic challenge and may even trivialize their performances. Thus some leading female singers prefer having concerts abroad, where they would benefit from being recorded and getting critical feedback — which is normally not possible in female-only performances. Women are allowed to take their scarves off when they enter the music hall, but the mobile phones must be handed to the female security guards upon the entrance when women's bags and bodies are searched for recording devices. During the performance, even the close circuit security cameras are turned off. If someone manages to traffic in a mobile, a camera or a recording device and try to record the event, the security guards rapidly take action. Thus one may observe some walking, talking and grabbing during some of these performances, which are, nevertheless, ignored by the performers who continue their work with no concern.

Judging on the basis of the female-only concerts that I have attended, I can say that in comparison to the mixed gender performances of Iranian classical music, the performers include more rhythmic pieces. This is partly because of the audience's enthusiasm. Another feature of these performances is that though they can have female solo singing, they include a relatively high number of songs that can be sung in group performances. This is because the performers want to do the same programme in front of mixed gender audiences, and, thus, they include pieces that can be sung through group singing. This means that the traditional *āvāz khāni* which is the base of improvisation for a classical singer is to be left for *tasnif khāni* which is known as a more popularized form. This creates a gap that suggest their works as being more popularized than their male colleagues who can preserve the *āvāzi* form.

During my interviews I also noted that prominent female instrumentalists and composer prefer to work with male singers because they do not want to be bound by additional regulations that may distort their work. Another problem which is being gradually solved is that most experienced sound engineers are male. Thus since these performances need female sound engineers, at least during their first decade (1996-2006), when female sound engineers were not experienced, the sound qualities of these performances were lower. Due to these limitations, the quality of female only performances is generally lower than the mixed groups.

(4) Public Performances outside Iran. Most of the pre-revolution Iranian singers who left Iran during the 1980s settled in the United States forming music groups and companies that occasionally absorbed younger singers from Iran and from the Iranian diaspora community in Europe and USA. Since 1981, these performers, who were mainly pop singers or singers of popularized Iranian classical music, began to produce cassettes and music videos that stormed Iranian black market of music. They also launched concerts in the USA, Europe and later Iran's neighbouring countries, which Iranian people living in those countries and some people based in Iran attended.

Most performers of classical Iranian music, however, remained in Iran and limited their work to teaching and semi-public performances. Yet from the 1990s gradually a new trend started in which female classical singers began to go on short trips to Europe or to the USA to give concerts. This began in 1995 with Parissa's concerts in several European countries in which she performed solo and without the Islamic cover. Since then others have followed Parissa's example, but not as freely as she did it. They have all preferred to keep the pretence of Islamic cover, for instance, and some have even kept their co-singer to avoid being accused of solo singing. The issue of Islamic cover is an important subject. Although the government has normally taken no action against those women who appear uncovered outside Iran, it is usually

considered very brave of a female performer to perform without the cover because no one can really predict the reaction of radical elements in the political or religious establishment.

Forms

(5) Performances with a Second or Third Voice Accompanying the Solo Singer. This has been the most frequently used style of female singing in recent years. The practice was initiated during the early 1990s by musicians who wished to overcome the present rules against female solo singing during the 1990s. They tried to get permits for two female singers or a male and a female singing together for their concerts and music cassettes. The arguments were strong and had some roots in Islamic regulations, but the process of getting permits for recordings or concerts faced difficulty, particularly because there were apparently no precedents in the Islamic law to reject or allow such a practice. Since the beginning of this practice, there have been different reactions to it depending on the views of the heads of MCIG. Some, for instance, have allowed such practices only when there is a male accompanying voice, but there have also been a few cases in which two or three women have been allowed to sing together.

I have personally observed performances with one, two or three female singers with a male singer. In several cases, the male co-singer(s) restrained their voice(s) to allow the main female singer to sing more clearly. In the concert of Shams Ensemble in August 2008, for instance, in occasions, for a couple of seconds, the female singer, Najmeh Tajaddod (b.1950) sang solo or near solo during the performance. The same may happen in published cassettes. In Maliheh Saeedi's *Avā-ye Roostā* (The Voice of Village, 2005) side B, there is even a part that the female singer sings alone, as the male one lowers his voice to make it like a background whisper.

Another feature of some of these performances is that as in *Avā-ye Roostā*, while the female singer sings the *āvāz* (free rhythm) parts, she is accompanied by a male singer, but when she

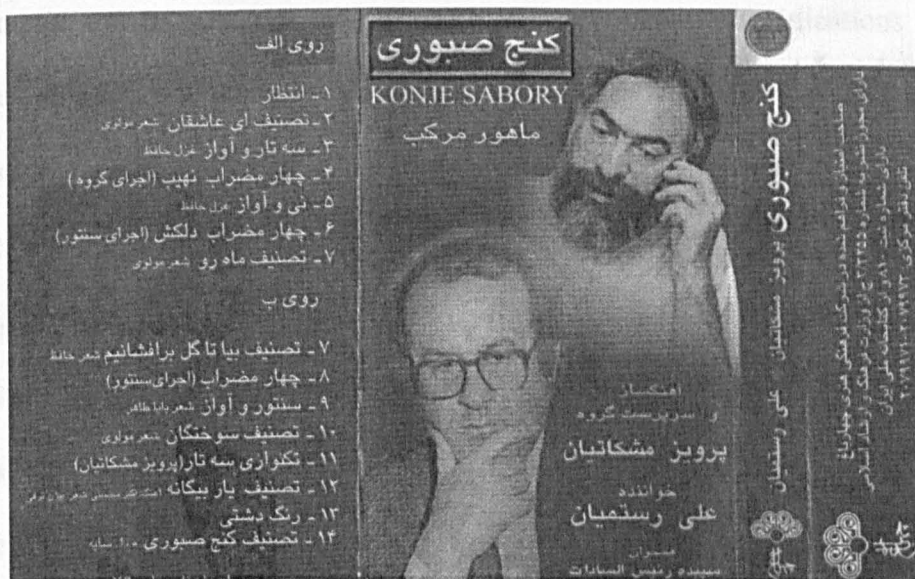
sings the *tasnif* (ballad) rhythmic pieces she is accompanied by a female choir. In both cases the combination of the voices is more at the service of creating a spirit of comradeship than the artistic production of a song, and the beauty of the song and the voice of the main singer remain unappreciated. Thus the whole practice, for many female singers, is more like an unwanted situation that they have to tolerate in order to survive. This performing style, therefore, has not been created for its beauty, but just as an act of resistance that helps keep a space for women.

(6) Singing with a Changed Voice. Such performances can be classified in two types. One is changing the voice to sound like a child; the other is singing in soprano voice observable in film music or background music of some poetry recitation cassettes. The first examples of female solo singing in post-revolution Iran occurred in the music recorded for children in which female singers altered their voice to sing like children. These forms of singing have been prevalent since the early 1980s, and most of the children's programmes in Iranian television and radio channels and music cassettes that were published for children included this form of female solo singing. Although the practice is important from a social perspective, and has positive impacts on children's familiarity with music, it has never been considered an artistic activity worthy of serious review or critical scholarly study.

The second form, the use of female soprano voice in film music or the background music, occurred for the first time in Ali Hatami's *Delshodegān* (Lost in Love, 1992), a historical film about the first group of Iranian classical music that went abroad to produce a record. The score of the film which had been composed by the leading musician, Hossein Alizadeh (b. 1951) used the wordless voice of Soodabeh Salem (b. 1954), a pre-revolution soprano singer, creating a powerful nostalgic effect. This style of wordless singing has also been used by some other composers like Ahmad Pejman (b. 1935) in film music or background music of cassettes.

(7) **Solo Singing in Rare Occasions and Theatrical Performances.** In some very rare occasions, there have been performances of solo female singers with permits from MCIG. One can, for instance, mention Darya Dadvar's performance as Tahmineh in *Rostam va Sohrāb* opera by the Iranian-Armenian composer, Loris Cheknavian (b.1937), performed in Iran with the symphonic orchestra of Armenia in 2003. The permit was originally issued because Dadvar's solo performance had been categorized as being in an altered voice. However, though tickets had been sold for several nights, the actual performance was cancelled after the first night in response to the protests of some radical newspapers.

Another significant instance was in the case of the album of *Konj-e Saboury* (The Niche of Patience, 2000) by the renowned Aref Group, headed by Parviz Meshkatian with the male singer Ali Rostamian (b. 1949) and the female 'co-singer' Sepideh Raissadat (b. 1980). In this album, in certain sections, for the first time after the revolution, the female singer performed in solo. Yet as one can see from the cover of the cassette below, the group managed to avoid problems by deemphasizing the role of the female singer while publicizing the album.



The cover of the Niche of Patience

As seen above, the front side of the cover carries the images of Parviz Meshkatian and Ali Rostamian whose names have also been printed in the lower right corner in bold font under the

titles of 'composer' and 'singer'. The female singer's name, however, has been printed in normal font at the very bottom, under the title of 'co-singer'.

Apart from these rare music-related instances, during the late 1990s and early 2000s and afterwards, in several theatrical performances, female characters briefly sang to themselves or sang in non-serious manners in plays.

Singing Classes and the Prospect of Finding New Talents

After the revolution, many women who had been trained to perform as singers in Iranian classical music had no other choice than to run singing classes because they could not have performances. These singing classes provided an opportunity for interested people to practise singing. However, since singing also needs certain inborn vocal qualities, finding new talents became a great problem, particularly because there was little hope to urge young women to embark on developing their voices for professional performances.

Finding new talent, of course requires that such music activities should not remain limited to underground or indoor activities and be supported by national organizations that set up programmes to attract and develop the potential of young people. Most of the pre-revolution singing talents, for instance, were discovered by their school teachers or by people who were connected to leading music practitioners and had accidentally heard their voices. Even during the 1960s and 1970s when music departments, institutions and recording companies had been established in Iran only a few of female Iranian singers entered the profession with academic backgrounds in music. For instance, as noted above, Delkash and Marziyeh, learned how to sing in religious mourning and celebratory ceremonies and were later discovered and introduced to the leading musicians of their times.

As such, despite the interest shown by many young singers, due to the absence of the challenge and aspiration which concerts create for singers, the number of figures who have been referred to as particularly good has been close to nothing. The choice of leaving the country also does not solve the problem because, even if, as in the case of Sepideh Raissadat, the female singer leaves the country, it is not likely for her to be able to develop her work beyond the limits of 'exiled' music groups.

The only positive development in this regard can be seen in the case of the number of women singers who work as singing teachers. In pre-revolution Iran all the prominent singing teachers in Iranian classical music were men, but now there are many female teacher, a fact that may by itself increase the number of younger women who get engaged with learning Iranian classical singing.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the contemporary history of Iranian classical singing regarding female singers. I also discussed its expansion between the 1920s and 1970s, the impediments it faced between the early 1980s and the late 2000s, and the new forms that it developed in response to these barriers. Having gone through these forms, I think that apart from the general development of Iranian classical music, most of the new forms that have developed to include female singing have functioned as temporary developments with limited positive impact on the expansion of new genres.

In the following chapter I will examine the life of one of the most important female singers of Iranian classical music to see how she reacted to the bans and what ways she devised to continue her work.

Chapter Five

Tradition, Modernity, Mysticism and Continuity, A Case Study on Parissa's Singing Career before and after the Revolution

Introduction: Remembering a Presence and Recording It

I do not really remember when and where I first heard Parissa's name. Her name was a household name usually referred to with some praise for her character and good voice. Since I began to have my music tutorials in 1981, however, her name became increasingly more important. My music tutor often dropped her name with regrets, when he taught me piece that she had sung. Thus I began to listen to her memorable performances with the masters of Iranian music and watched videos of her pre-revolution concerts, in which I could clearly see her unique approach to performance. Wherever there was talk of Iranian classical music and singing, her name was an inevitable point of reference, often associated with a deep nostalgic sense of regret and loss.

During my undergraduate and graduate years in the 1990s, however, I began to find out more about her, and learned that she is still working as a singing tutor. The pieces that she had performed with Master Parviz Meshkatian were my favourites. I often practised them to improve my performing skills on Santoor. I also remember how excited I was when in 2000 I got hold of the video tape of one of her first post-revolution performances outside Iran. She looked older, but carried herself with the same grace and poise. She was still a master performer, but one that had been forced into silence for more than two decades. My mixed memories of her work and character and her position as the most significant pre-revolution performer of Iranian classical singing encouraged me to study the stylistic features of her work as a female performer who was once considered as great a master of Iranian classical music as

the singer Mohammad Reza Shajarian (b.1940), and the composer/instrumentalists Parviz Meshkatian (1955-2009) and Hossein Alizadeh (b.1951).

When I began to do my PhD, therefore, she was always at the top of my list for case studies. Early in 2007, I contacted her about my projects and arranged to meet her during the summer. My interviews included three three-hour visits. The first was in summer 2007 when I mostly acted as an observer watching her teach and practise to decide how I wanted to conduct my cases studies. She lives with her husband, an industrial engineer, in a well-designed flat in the upper part of Tehran. They have been married since 1973 and have two daughters and a son. She was dressed comfortably but elegantly as I remembered her in her music videos. During this initial meeting, I found her to be a serious yet kind practitioner, generous in sharing her knowledge and experience and persistent while graceful.



Parissa and I (August 2008)

Then when I finalized my plans, I arranged another set of meetings for summer 2008. The interview was conducted in two consecutive days as I watched her teach and practise in formal and informal settings and talked to her about aspects of her approach to teaching while raising my questions about her work and career, before and after the revolution and her opinions and emotional reactions to the bans. Her pupils, whose singing proficiency varied on the basis of their experience and background, were mostly university students doing different undergraduate and graduate courses, including engineering, music and the arts.

During these nine/ten hours, I found answers to most of the questions that had preoccupied me as I was researching her career for my case study. The chapter that follows, therefore, combines the results of my research on Parissa (b. 1950), one of the most important female singer of 'authentic' and 'traditional' Iranian classical music. During the course of the case study, whenever I use direct quotes from my interviews, I use Mozafari C, which refers to the first day of my interview on 9th August 2008, and Mozafari D, which refers to the second day of my interview on 10th August 2008. There are also a number of subjects about which there are no publications, but I have learned from them through my encounters with the masters of the previous generation, particularly through those who began their professional career as young musicians during the 1970s or from their students. Whenever I use these sources, I use Mozafari E to suggest that it comes from my own position as a practitioner who has studied and worked in Iran.

My study is different from other interviews conducted with her and other Iranian female singers in that I have altogether avoided the celebrity aspect and focused on her intellectual and emotional response to the bans. It is also different from studies on female musicians in Islamic contexts such as Doubleday's *Women of Herat* in that it focuses on a very famous professional singer from an educated middle class background. As such I have benefited from Nancy B.

Reich's 'The Power of Class: Fanny Hensel and Mendelssohn Family' (2004) who studies social class as one of the main impediments for women who wished to pursue a career in music-related activities. However, once more since Reich's study is in a context in which religion plays little role, my study introduces a set of variables that are different from hers. Another article that has had some impact on my study has been Annegret Fauser's 'Fighting in Frills: Women and the Prix De Rome in French Cultural Politics' (2004), which studies the challenges of women for entering a male dominated space in the context of the Napoleonic laws that limited the rights of women. Yet my context again is different from hers in that it covers Parissa's presence in two modern periods, during the first she managed to overcome patriarchal stereotyping, but in the second she faced and still tries to overcome religious bans.

As such, my case study is directly relevant to the overall purpose of my research, which analyzes the emotional, intellectual and professional responses of female performers of Iranian classical music to the cultural and political problems that have transformed their lives. It offers a concrete example of the position of female singers in post-revolution Iran. To fulfil this I will trace Parissa's entrance into the realm of Iranian classical music, the impact of her work with CPPTMI on her performing persona, her conditions after the revolution, her emotional response to the bans and the features of her performing style.

Early Career: Learning, Practicing and Becoming Spiritual

Fatemeh Vaezi, who is known by her professional name as Parissa, was born on 15th March 1950 in Shahsavari (Tonekabon), in the northern province of Mazandaran, Iran.¹⁰³ She had a privileged upbringing with a supportive family that encouraged her in her activities. Her mother used to call her '*bolbol-e man*', 'my nightingale', and her father encouraged her to

¹⁰³ In his *Music and Song in Persia*, Lloyd Miller mentions her name as Vahije (1999, 41) which is a wrong spelling of Vajihah.

practise singing. Apart from his father, most of the men in her father's family were very religious. Some were clerics. Her grandfather was a recounting and singing preacher of Islamic moral stories and mourning laments (*vāez* and *rowzeh khān*) equipped with a good voice and some singing musical skills. Her aunts and cousins were all religious. As she reminisces,

My father was open-minded. Although he was very spiritual and maintained firm ethical stands, he did not believe in the marginal things that limited people from listening to music or required Islamic cover (*hejāb*) for women. He actually encouraged me to learn Iranian classical music and later to have a singing teacher. (Mozafari C)

However, her father also kept warning Parissa about the social stigma associated with being an artist, particularly with being a female artist in Iran. He talked to her on how to behave in society to avoid being accused of loose morals. (Mozafari C) This attitude may count as one of the reasons why Parissa projected the image of a very respectable woman and has been among those singers and artists who have never been accused of loose morals even by the clergy.

The general attitude of the middle class fathers towards their musically talented daughters was much worse in Iran of 1950s. Though they may have encouraged their daughters to improve their artistic abilities, they regularly prohibited them from thinking of an artistic career. As a result, many women who aspired to have an artistic career had to rebel against a complicated set of religious, patriarchal and class assumptions. This rebellion was relatively easier for talented women from lower middle class families, who had little to lose in terms of future potential. For upper middle class and middle class women who were tied by family bonds, however, it was extremely difficult. That was partly the reason why many female singers who were active in popularized Iranian music and pop music came from lower middle class backgrounds.

In the case of Parissa, however, the story was different. Her father supported her singing activities at amateur and professional levels, but his frequent warnings helped her construct a

persona that was categorically different from the other female singers of her time. When she was in her early teens, she participated in state sponsored singing competitions for students, in which she once won the first prize. This continued after the family moved to Tehran about the time she was to commence her ninth year at high school in 1963. She began her classical music education by participating in the house tutorials of Master Mahmoud Karimi (1927-84) immediately after she graduated from high school. Prior to that age, she had never had a singing or music teacher, but 'used to sing for' herself 'and imitate her favourite singers'. (Mozafari C) After two years of practising with Master Karimi, he introduced her to the Ministry of Culture and Art, where she gained employment as a singer in 1969 at the age of nineteen. Since Master Karimi knew her parents and was aware of their ethical concerns, he introduced her to the Ministry of Culture and Art, which rather than providing her with the chance to achieve fame through singing opened her way to more training and helped her enter the musical atmosphere slowly. As she puts it, 'My father agreed that I go there, but suggested that I keep a low profile and only sing. He was against the idea of me singing in the national radio, but that was no problem because I also knew that it was not fit for my mentality and personality.' (Mozafari C)

This constant presence of 'the father' as the one determining the destiny of his children or functioning like a spiritual guide is typical of middle class families in Iran, particularly those families in which the father has played a positive role in the development of the children. During my interview, Parissa was clearly stating that her father's positive presence played a role in the formation of her public image. This was significant because in Iran, if it is stated, as in a saying, that the person 'has a father and a mother' or 'has a family', it simply suggests that she or he respects family values, is respectable or knows what s/he is doing. That is why in Iran the artists, particularly the female artists, who had to cut from their families in order to continue their career usually prefer to avoid that subject in their biographies.

For Parissa who was only nineteen when she joined the Ministry of Culture, it was very important to maintain her father's approval, particularly because her father had always supported her singing career. This can also be seen in the choice of her first master who determined the course of her future career. Mahmoud Karimi was one of the greatest teachers of Iranian classical singing, one of the singing masters who was extremely careful about training the students in the subtle details of Iranian classical Radif. But this great master always kept a low profile. As the collection of the articles published in his memory reveals, he prided himself in paying meticulous attention to enhancing the artistic potential of his pupils by infusing them with unique human qualities and maintaining high moral standards, while encouraging them to achieve high artistic skills by hard work. This fatherly attitude which had been tested by several female pupils before Parissa was the main reason her parents send her to Master Karimi. It was also the cause of their positive master-student relationship that lasted for eleven years.¹⁰⁴

Due to her trust in Master Karimi's character and knowledge, despite her early success, Parissa continued her studies with Master Karimi and constantly used his suggestions and ideas in her works until 1979. Parissa's role models in her actual performances were mostly those who preferred to work in *āvāz khāni* (free rhythm singing), but due to the current popularity of *tasnif khāni* (rhythmic ballad singing) were more active in the latter genre. (Mozafari C)

As a rule, a singer engaged in *āvāz khāni* needs many years of apprenticeship to be able to perform as a master performer while one who performs as a *tasnif khān* may become a first rate performer by disciplined self training. In general, however, while a *tasnif khān* is more popular, an *āvāz khān* has higher artistic reputation. Parissa, as she recounts, was particularly interested in familiarizing herself with Qamar's work and 'tried to get' her 'hand on her records to

¹⁰⁴ See the articles in Persian by Parissa, Reaei, & Shahshani, in Hasan and Mahnaz Karimi (1985): 65-85.

practice her *āvāz khāni* and *tasnif khāni* methods.’ (Mozafari C) More than being a reflection of her ambitions, however, this was a reflection of her desire for artistic perfection. The genre of music that Parissa was interested in was known as ‘traditional music’ (*musiqi-e sonnati*) which was current before the establishment of Iran’s national radio in 1940. The modern practitioners of this genre tried to preserve the traditional forms of presentation, instrument arrangement, and singing. The performing group usually consisted of a singer working with one to three instrumentalists. A traditional performance mainly consists of: (1) *pishdarāmad* (prelude) which is a composed rhythmic instrumental piece if played by one instrumentalist can also have improvisations, (2) *chāhārmezrāb* which is a composed, instrumental, rhythmic piece (3) *sāz va āvāz* (playing musical instrument and singing) in which the instrumentalist(s) and singer take turns in the form of *soāl* and *javāb* (question and answer) including virtuoso pieces and improvisations based on *radif* (4) *tasnif* (rhythmic ballad singing) is a composed piece for singing (5) *reng* is a composed rhythmic piece (originally for dance) if played by one instrumentalist can also have improvisations.

After the establishment of the national radio, classical Iranian music began to develop a new form which is now known as ‘national music’. (See Chapter Three) This new form of Iranian classical music was introduced to show the universal abilities of Iranian music to the world. It used a symphonic orchestra, decreased the emphasis on *āvāz khāni* and gave a higher prominence to *tāsnif khāni*. Parissa believes that the musical performances recorded by and broadcasted from the radio between the 1940s and 1970s transformed people’s taste of music, and therefore, the genuine traditional music which was more engaged with *āvāz khāni* became rather marginal and out-dated. (Mozafari D) The process, of course, was rooted in the top-down nationalist modernization plans of the first Pahlavi (R. 1925-41), which were continued more or less by the second Pahlavi king. In its policies about music, it required forms of music that could attract as great number of people across different ethnicities and worldwide

as possible. As such the national Iranian radio and then television played an important role in the creation of a national identity.

In his article on 'The Role of Music in the Creation of an Afghan National Identity, 1923-73' John Baily, examines the impact of radio in promoting the idea of a shared modern national identity 'in a multiethnic society', emphasizing the role of music in creating the idea of togetherness among people who do not speak the same language. (1994, 47) Backed by oil money and the revisionist histories of ancient glories for the Pahlavis and Islamic Iranian glories for the post-revolution Islamists, this role was performed much more effectively than Afghan radio by Iranian radio and television channels during the twentieth century both before and after the revolution. Music, whether in its pre-revolution artistic, entertaining and propaganda functions, or in its post-revolution propaganda, military and revolutionary functions played a central role in this media campaign for nation-building.

Some of the leading musicians of the late 1960s, however, felt an urgent need to found modern Iranian classical music on bases that were more 'true' to its origins. Thus when the musician-theorist, Daryush Safvat (b. 1928) managed to gain some funding to establish the Centre for the Preservation and Propagation of Iranian Traditional Music of Iran (CPPTMI) (*Markaz-e Hefz va Eshā'e-ye Musiqi-e Sonati-e Iran*, 1968), a movement began for refashioning the traditional forms by employing the old masters of Iranian classical music to train the talented practitioners of a new generation. Prior to the establishment of this centre, the majority of the women singers between the 1940s and 1970s performed in the 'national' and 'popularized classical' styles associated with Iranian radio. There were, however, some male singers, including Mohammad Reza Shajarian, who included *āvāz khāni* in their concerts. With the establishment of CPPTMI, however, its students began to launch high quality performances that refashioned the traditional style for modern performances. Shajarian and Parissa became

the leading voices of the refashioned models of traditional singing and achieved high artistic qualities in their unique performances. (Mozafari C)

CPPTMI and Parissa's State Sponsored Activities before the Revolution

Parissa began her professional work as a vocalist in the Ministry of Culture and Art (MCA) in 1969. There, she was supposed to work with different orchestras and have state supported performances inside or outside the country. According to Parissa the Ministry of Culture and Art at that time was somewhat marginal. In comparison, the national radio which supported 'westernized/ popularized/ hybrid' forms of Iranian music was more central to the system and had become a place through which young aspiring singers could achieve fame. (Mozafari D)

According to Parissa, despite this essential difference, both at MCA and at Iran's national radio the main activities of the singers were singing *tasnifs*. Thus she was unable to engage professionally with her major passion, *āvāz khāni* which she had continued to improve under the supervision of Master Karimi. However, when through Karimi's recommendation she was employed by the Centre for Preservation and Propagation of Traditional Music of Iran in 1973, she found the opportunity to focus professionally on *āvāz khāni*. (Mozafari E)

CPPTMI, as she and other members describe it, kept away from popular music activities and aimed to propagate classical music of Iran. It required its members not to engage in lucrative activities, arguing that if they are burdened with fame and money, they could not focus on the task of providing the best recorded samples and teaching materials for Iranian classical music. As such, it brought under its umbrella, the most proficient masters of Iranian classical music and the most talented younger ones that some of them had already worked with these masters. The centre was (and still is) based in a four storey building in Aban Avenue in Tehran, and at the time, between 1970 and 1979, had around 50 employees, including the masters and the

young practitioners. The main focus and duty of the musicians employed there, was to practise and conduct research on those forms of music that they believed was about to disappear. As a result, the centre itself did not have a big performance space, but launched performances in the major festivals inside and outside Iran. (Mozafari C)

As I have gathered from the accounts of different people who were educated in the centre, Safvat's approach was to promote the spiritual aspects of particular types of Iranian classical music in training and performance. This approach to music was not new in Iranian history. It had its roots in the works of some mystic practitioners of the medieval period who used music as a means for spiritual edification and transcending worldly desires. This spiritual approach is clearly stated in some medieval narrative poems of Persian mystic poets. The story of *Pir-e Changi* (The Old Harp player) in Rumi's *Masnavi* (1207-73), for instance, involves Omar (586-644), the second successor to the Prophet Mohammad in a situation, in which, he realizes the possibility that an old musician may have a special position with God that transcends the religious sensibilities of orthodox Muslims. There are also some lines, attributed to Rumi, to refer to the divine value of music:

It is the cry of the circles of destiny
That people perform by *tambur* and by throat
Dry string, dry wood, dry skin
From where then comes this call of the dearest kin?
We have been all the sons of Adam
And have heard these melodies in paradise.

Establishing a connection between paradise, as a place of spiritual unity with God and music promotes the idea of music as a means of approaching unity with god, as a means through which one stops the interior monologue of his/her self-centred being and achieve a moment of

nothingness and ecstatic absorption in the divine being. In this system music was practised for music's sake and financial factors and fame had little or no place.

Within this system, it was not appropriate for the mystic practitioner to use her/ his art for materialistic purposes. Such performers, therefore, would have other occupations through which they could earn a living and the only things they would receive for their music were gifts from their students. The practitioners of this spiritual form had preserved its goals and forms, practising music and earning an income through their limited means. Safvat, however, believed that their spiritual values and approach to music had to be revived to create the major forms of Iranian classical music. Either because he wished to fulfil his politically charged 'return to the roots' ideals through promoting this spiritual form or because he genuinely felt this approach to music was disappearing, he gained state funding to initiate a movement that enlarged the scale of this idealistic approach to music to convey its ideals to the following generations. (Mozafari C) The process became possible because the project played well into the idea of rejuvenating Iranian national forms promoted by the Queen Farah Diba, but it also had traditionalist elements that created the enormous ideological force that left an indelible mark on Iranian classical music.

Parissa who found the activities of the centre closer to her taste resigned from MCA in 1973 and began to work in CPPTMI where she finally found the atmosphere she was looking for. As she puts it, 'The atmosphere of the Ministry of Culture and Art would not satisfy me. There was something else in my mind. Being a singer was not that important to me. I was confused ... looked for a superior purpose in/for music.' (Mozafari C) With its emphasis on training its young practitioners under the supervision of the best masters of Iranian music to enhance the spiritual aspects of their music as a means of mystic edification and its attempts to refashion *āvāz khāni* in Iranian classical music, CPPTMI was the ideal location for Parissa.

MCA was a state sponsored centre, aiming to produce contemporary music. The music they propagated was apparently traditional but the spirituality of that music was not important to them. If a singer had a good voice and was good-looking, that was sufficient [laughter], they could sing, sing *tasnifs*.... But the head of CPPTMI, Dr. Daryush Safvat, strongly believed that Iranian traditional music was mystic and spiritual and if people want to work with it, they should train themselves to understand and value its spirituality, its philosophical essence. (Mozafari C)

The main aim of CPPTMI was to ‘train musicians to be engaged with the sublime qualities of music as a major art form rather than be obsessed with fame and fortune.’ (Mozafari D) It provided a space in which a new generation of young, talented and enthusiastic musicians who were in their twenties in the 1970s began to work under the supervision of some of the oldest Masters of Iranian classical music while benefiting from the scholarly vision and organizational skills of Daryush Safvat as the head of the centre. In Parissa’s terms,

Dr Safvat was an educated man in love with this type of music. He was also a visionary patriot. He was not there for fame, name or money. He really was in love with the music, with the spirituality, with the mysticism of this country. His basic intention was to do something for his people and serve a higher purpose. That was why the Centre produced such good results.... If even one small thing turned out to be against the accurate procedures or the forms that were promoted, we were advised by the masters on how to correct it, and we did correct it. Though individual taste was respected within the limits, it was often guided to avoid breaching the essential qualities of the forms. (Mozafari D)

Parissa’s respect for Daryush Safvat reflects her appreciation of the achievements of CPPTMI as the centre that provided her with the opportunity to approach some of her ideals.

Parissa remembers the years of her employment in CPPTMI as the best and most productive ones in her life. In retrospect Parissa thinks that she and the other practitioners had everything they needed to produce good music: the financial support of the government, the presence of the greatest masters of Iran’s classical music and a library of books and old recordings of the previous masters. She notes that:

It was interesting that we were paid just to study, do research, listen to music and give no services instead.... It was one of the principles of the Centre. It was a fascinating period, but unfortunately it was ruined. During the last thirty years [1979-2008], though the governments have kept talking about it, and though there is still a centre working under that name, there has never been a centre functioning like that. All the good musicians that we have [in classical music] belong to that period. (Mozafari C)

Parissa's last sentence above may sound like an exaggerated statement, but it is in fact true.

Most of the practitioners that created the best examples of Iranian classical music during the 1980s and 1990s (and today) had been educated in the centre, particularly because most of the practitioners of the other forms of Iranian music either left the country or were unable to adapt themselves to the new conditions. The younger practitioners who began working during the late 1990s were also mostly educated by the people who had a background in CPPTMI. It can be said, therefore, that the bases of the post-revolution developments in classical music had been already set in the pre-revolution era.

Another aspect of the role of CPPTMI is in its financial role in the enhancement of particular music practices. For many artists and scholars, across the globe, it is non-governmental and governmental funds and grants that provide opportunities to work. Since the activities of the private sector have often been restricted in Iran since the 1920s, this support has been limited to governmental supports, which in turn demand artists to compromise with the dominant political or cultural discourse. Due to the long term planning that had gained CPPTMI the support of Farah Diba (b.1939), however, the centre had been given some free hand. Parissa's romantic remembrance, therefore, should remind us of larger political contexts in Iran. In Iran having such supports that can rapidly enhance the conditions of an art form has been more like a dream, a dream that was materialized to some extent during the 1970s, but did not last for long because after the revolution all such supports were cut off or redirected to organization that followed the artistic or musical visions of the government.

CPPTMI was state sponsored and was launched and run with the direct support of Empress Farah Diba who had a degree in architecture and was keen on reviving all traditional/classical forms in architecture, music, handicrafts, etc. As the most powerful woman in the country, the Queen projected the image of an artistically talented powerful woman. Acting like a role-model for many apolitical secular-minded women, she was influential in the rapid increase in the number of women who participated in art-related activities during the 1960s and 1970s. She was also influential in passing of laws that directed substantial amounts of governmental money and the money from the national lottery to setting up a number of charity, health and hygiene organizations and launching art organizations and festivals, including CPPTMI and Shiraz Art Festival. The process expanded the artistic horizons of Iran's practitioners in visual and performing arts by establishing links between the local, the national and the global. With the advent of the revolution, the drop in the price of oil, the war with Iraq and the economic sanctions that followed; these activities were stopped, and the tendency was to support only those artistic activities that helped the government enhance its image inside Iran.

While during our discussions in the first interview, Parissa referred to some of these changes, she also made a number of comments that suggest her general theory about artistic activities. Parissa believes that a 'true artist' will never be prosperous enough to be able to invest in cultural activities, and thus, for the art and culture of a country to flourish it is crucial to have the support of the government and the investment of those who are interested in the art. This suggests a worldview in which the artists should stand above worldly needs to be able to achieve perfection in her practice. Money and administrative support should be there, but the moment that artist gets too involved with these, her or his art tends to dilute.

From a critical point of view, an artist may produce a work of art because of three main reasons: (1) self-expression, which involves a psychological process that releases pressures

and gives joy and relaxation (2) aesthetic perfection, which aspires to produce the best possible example of a form through a particular medium, and (3) communication with an audience, which may entail personal satisfaction in the form of receiving praise, gaining money or achieving power.¹⁰⁵

From this spiritual perspective, too much concern with power, financial gain (money) and praise (fame) which are essential tenets of obsession with communication dilutes the work of art so that it gets entangled in satisfying the tastes of the audience. Too much emphasis on self-expression also ruins the work of art by making the work of art too dense and self-obsessed. It is thus only the desire for perfection that if guided properly can lead to the edification of the artist and her/his work, which, in turn, can edify the taste of the audience. Within this system, music is simultaneously a means of edification and an end by itself, a world into which the musician can enter for momentary touches of ecstasy and perfection in unity with the divine. However, in the modern world, in which art has been turned into a major commodity, it is very possible that this 'spiritual' approach to the arts be disappeared. It is thus a good idea for any government or individuals concerned with improving the artistic and cultural potential of the country to invest on supporting these forms of art.

In the case of Parissa, it seems that her personal background and her post-revolution seclusion, as a female singer, have led to the intensification of her mystic conception of music. Her personal narrative thus reinforces her position within the more spiritual tradition of Iranian music that she feels she belongs to.

I had no planning... had no intention to be a professional singer. I liked this genre of music per se. I mean this kind of music was appealing to me and appropriate for my conditions, thoughts, mentality, and spiritual dedications and interests.... I was far from

¹⁰⁵ I am indebted to Saeed Talajooy for pointing out and discussing these issues with me.

being extrovert and party-going. I was a loner, liked to read and learn more about Iranian mystic poets.... I had no urge for becoming famous. (Mozafari C)

This may, of course, be related to her being a woman raised in a middle class household with an interest in mysticism and cultural activities, or the influence of her father on the formation her moral standards. Whatever the case, some of the people who worked with CPPTMI hold similar values but with the difference that they seem to have diluted the reclusive aspect to get involved in setting up groups and making music inside Iran.

In terms of performance, during her employment in the Ministry of Culture and Art, which lasted for about five years, she performed both inside and outside of Iran. These performances were very formal and were conducted as part of her job in the ministry: 'For instance, if some leaders of other countries came to Iran, we were asked to have performances to introduce our music to them...or in some festivals that we were invited to introduce Iranian classical music.' (Mozafari D) The main focus of the CPPTMI, however, was on research and practice rather than performance. The aim of the centre was to train musicians according to the spiritual values of Iranian classical music before they 'fell victim to fame and money and lower their artistic qualities to popularize their music.' (Mozafari D) To Parissa this insistence on preserving the spirituality of music was crucial, 'because' she 'also did not wish to enter the professional world of singing as it was.' (Mozafari D)

The practitioners of the centre were taught to avoid fame and money. The fact, however, is that even the work of Shajarian and Parissa, as the greatest singers working with the centre, was marginal in comparison to the work of the singers of popular music, and the national and popularized forms of Iranian classical music. The voices of the latter had filled Iranian houses, cars and streets through radio, television and cassettes, and were the major sources of income for Iran's music industry. The centre's aim was to differentiate itself from the mainstream music produced by and broadcasted from and through these sources. It maintained a distance

from the 'hybrid forms of music' that combined Iranian classical music with popular Arab, Turkish, North Indian and western music melodies and forms which I discussed in Chapter One and Two of this thesis. The leaders of the centre wanted to preserve the qualities that they described as 'authentic' in Iranian classical music.

The music that we worked with was not present in the everyday life of people. People knew little about us. It was, in fact, later a few years after the beginning of our activities that one of our productions became famous and brought the Centre and its musicians to the attention of people. (Mozafari D)

The term 'authentic', as directly or indirectly discussed by such philosophers as Martin Heidegger (1962) and Theodore Adorno (1964/1973) and ethnomusicologists such as Suzel Ana Reily and Malcom Chapman (1994) carries a persuasive, moral (for individuals), or thematic and formal (for the arts) force. Like the other contexts in which it was used to discuss performing arts during the 1960s and 1970s, in Iran, it had a postcolonial significance and became a catchword immediately after a period of intense intercultural borrowing. It tacitly referred to known or unknown qualities in a form, which automatically brushed other forms aside as being rootless fabrications that do not represent the true qualities of Iran's culture. The concern of CPPTMI with creating 'authentic' practices that kept Iranian traditional music 'immune' from 'popularization' and 'dilution', therefore, was partly explainable as a modern decolonizing process that in the long term produced some tendencies among musicians. Yet as one can understand from Parissa's comments for CPPTMI, the Heidegger-like vision of the leaders of the organization associated the 'authenticity' of the work of art with the moral integrity and the existential authenticity of the practitioners who performed it.

At the time, when Parissa began singing all major female singers of Iranian classical music were active in radio, and television was the realm of popular and pop singers. Thus Parissa and later on since 1976, Hengameh Akhavan (b.1955) were among the few female singers of the centre. During her employment at CPPTMI, Parissa had more than fifty international

performances and more than one hundred performances in Tehran and other Iranian cities. She also joined her other young colleagues at the centre to produce two cassettes. Her performances at Shiraz Art Festivals (1975, 1976 and 1977) along with Alizadeh, Lotfi and Meshakatian and some other young masters who worked with CPPTMI were particularly significant in initiating the change in the zeitgeist of the classical Iranian music. Shiraz Art Festivals had become an international space where such prominent artists as Peter Brook, John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Yehudi Menuhin had performances.¹⁰⁶ The CPPTMI group with whom Parissa worked also received invitations to perform abroad. Her last overseas performance was in 1978 in the Festival of Asian Traditional Performing Arts in Japan. As she recounts, after performing in the festival, their group had to remain in Japan for a few additional days because due to the revolutionary conflict the Iranian airports had been closed.

With the establishment of the Islamic government, however, her activities were stopped. The irony was that the type of music that she was involved in was the only type of music that continued functioning after the revolution without a major halt, but not for women. After the relative relaxation of the censor in the 1990s, it became possible for women to sing in particular occasions. However, since women were not able to sing solo or could only sing in female only concerts which carry some popular expectations, singing *tasnifs* became more central, pushing Parissa who has always preferred *āvāz khāni* to remain distanced from the everyday occupations of Iranian singers and perform only outside of Iran.

Performance, Image and Identity: Parissa's Attitudes towards the Bans

As noted previously, Parissa belongs to that category of Iranian musicians who believe that Iranian classical music is 'mystic' and 'spiritual'. These practitioners insist that to understand 'the essence' of this form of music; one needs to know its spiritual philosophy and train her/his

¹⁰⁶ For more on Shiraz Art Festivals, see Robert Gluck (1978).

soul and body in accordance with that philosophy. They insist that one needs years of apprenticeship to absorb ‘this spirituality’, and that learning *radif* is only one of the many aspects of learning Iranian classical music. To be a ‘true’ musician in this system, one needs to train his or her soul. As Parissa explains, she was not satisfied with just being a singer and wanted to discover more things about music. This aspect of her life gained a new momentum in 1973, as noted, when her employment in the CPPTMI and her acquaintance with Master Elahi’s (1895-1974)¹⁰⁷ mystic philosophy through Daryush Safvat, opened the gates of this form of training to her life: ‘I went through a process of transformation not only in the type of music I practised, but also in my philosophy of life’. (Mozafari D)

According to Parissa, Daryush Safvat’s main aspiration in founding the Centre was to provide a space to reveal, practise and teach the spirituality of Iranian classical music to a generation which was going to lose it to an obsession with ‘fame’ and ‘superficial beauty’. In other words, Safvat had discovered a ‘treasure’ that he intended to preserve by translating it into its modern counterparts in an atmosphere of rapid cultural transition in which the modesty of the older practitioners may have resulted in the annihilation of the forms and the values associated with them. As such the philosophical ideas of Daryush Safvat and the mystic ideas of Noor Ali Elahi have played an important role in the formation of her conception of music and selfhood, and Parissa believes that since the early 1970s her singing has always reflected her absorption in Iranian mysticism. Though her familiarity with Elahi did not last for more than a year, Parissa counts herself among Elahi’s faithful followers. The influence of Elahi’s mystic understanding of music on her work is clear even in her early works with CPPTMI, in which all the songs are written on the basis of poems by Rumi (1207- 1273), Hafez (1315-1390), and other leading

¹⁰⁷ Noor Ali Elahi was a mystic thinker, musician and philosopher whose spiritual understanding of music influenced many contemporary practitioners and scholars — especially the older generation of musicians who worked in classical and mystic music. For more on his work, see the website dedicated to him <<http://www.ostadelahi.com/>>.

mystic poets of Persian Poetry. By insisting on singing these songs which were the trademark of traditional classical practitioners and following other formalities associated with their performance, Parissa became the most important singer of this form.

Despite her position as a leading classical singer, and the respect that she commanded among some enlightened religious people, Parissa was banned from singing for fifteen years. Aware of this mystic background and the unique work that she had done for Iranian music by her voice and her performing image, one of my essential concerns when I began my research was to know what she was doing during this time, how she felt and what plans she had for future. I also wanted to know if she had any students or conducted any research. I also wished to put the familial, social, and economic obstacles that she faced in a critical context and compare her responses to these problems with the typical reactions of other leading female musicians.

After the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, Parissa soon learned that she had been banned from public performances. She continued working in CPPTM as a trainer and researcher until 1981 when she was offered the option of taking a voluntary redundancy.

I was employed as a singer-instructor. Then one day they said 'the Islamic Republic does not need any singer. Female singing is *harām* and against the law. Teaching is the same. If no one is supposed to sing, well, there is no need for singing instructors.' [She laughs.] Then after a time they politely asked me to leave. They called it buying redundancy.¹⁰⁸ Well, what could I or any other woman do then? (Mozafari C)

Parissa had to choose between leaving the country to continue singing or remaining in Iran and putting her career on standby. As she explains she did believe that her main vocation was to fulfil her 'spiritual excursion' for discovering the 'mystic' potential of music.

¹⁰⁸ After the revolution there were two types of redundancy. The first type (*bāzkhari*) was offered to people who, according to the government's view had not done anything wrong, but were no longer wanted. These people received their pensions as a lump sum and were sent away. The other type, purging (*pāksāzi*) was like in effect firing the individual with no right to any protest or any financial help.

Before the revolution I had an interview at Iran's national television in which I was asked what I would do if I were told that I was not allowed to sing. It was in 1974 or 1975. I said, 'my main aim is to study this music deeply and to teach it, not to be a professional singer'. (Mozafari D)

However, as she recalls, the impact of the few years of great practice had made her restless, and she could not stop herself from thinking of what she could have achieved. She had just turned 28 and had already achieved a respectable position as a spiritual classical singer. Her concern was not fame. Her achievement meant the rebirth of the type of music she loved. She was just at the beginning of the path that she had helped to carve. Most of the singers and musicians engaged in this genre of music begin their professional activity in their late twenties. She was, thus, just at that stage of her life when she was due to make effective use of her learning and experience on stage. Parissa's final decision was to remain in Iran. She dedicated her life to her family and to raising her three children (born in 1974, 1979 and 1984) and did not sing for more than a decade. This was more like a self-imposed ban than a reaction to the pressures of the outside world. It was as if she was making a pact with her family to enable herself to reject the outside world that had rejected her and the cause of that rejection: 'I left music aside entirely; I mean I didn't even sing to myself'. (Mozafari D)

My knowledge of the philosophical system in which she has received her music education suggests that her reaction to the ban was in continuation of an old way of encountering socio-religious boundaries. As an Iranian woman who grew up in 1980s Iran with both my parents working in culture related fields, I was exposed to mystic Persian poetry and knew how adhering to its basic concepts could enhance the power of abstinence and stoicism in an individual. With Islamic radicalism in power, however, I was more raised in an environment that was reacting against the religious components of this mystic system by adhering to the more secular interpretations of it. For me this literature-and-art-based mysticism, therefore,

contained no interest in God as a father figure, but carried an emphasis on looking at life with fresh visions and not caring for worldly success or failures.

Iranian mysticism (*Erfān-e Irani*) which combines philosophical elements from pre-Islamic Iranian religions (Mithraism and Zoroastrianism) and devotional Islamic ideas was mainly developed between the eighth and eleventh centuries. Due to the intense engagement of Iranian and Arab philosophers with Platonism and neo-Platonism, these two systems also played an important role in the formation of some of its concepts. Another source of influence came from the contact of Iranians with Buddhism in the eastern borders of Iran. It has had different branches from the ones in which the practitioner undergoes mortification to modernized hippy-like ones in which the appearance seems to be more important than the essence. Historically, the response of mystics to extreme religious or political bans has been to either confront them by secret gatherings or to overcome the passion for doing what one desires to do. If one is free from needs, one will have no suffering. Thus the individual is to tame his or her worldly desires to the point that they surrender and would no longer demand.¹⁰⁹

From one perspective this mystic relinquishment of desire is a form of psychological sublimation that enjoys not-doing as a form of achievement. It thus helps the individual to relax his/her urge for achievement to relieve stress and strike a new balance in his or her life. This form of self-sufficiency, however, is always likely to be rooted in a defeatist silence that hides behind magnanimity. Of course, as Parissa explains, even if we interpret it as a defeatist attitude that may become inevitable under totalitarian states, this philosophical sublimation, at least, saved her from the depression that she suffered from for a while after the bans. She believes that if she had not had such a mystic faith in music, she would not have been able to bear the restrictions and restart her work after fifteen years of silence: 'Music was a special gift

¹⁰⁹ For the history of Iranian mysticism, see Ghani (1996) in Persian and Ridgeon (2010) in English.

for me with which I lived and communicated through my mystic and spiritual ideas. I had never had any desire to jump up and down to show myself off. If I was of such a type, I would have been shattered [by the ban].'(Mozafari D)

In 1990 after some of the bans on music-related activities were removed, Parissa was invited by the Centre for Preservation and Propagation of Traditional Music of Iran to train female vocalists. She continued working with the centre until 1995 when she re-launched her singing career by a series of concerts in England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and Nederland. The title of the album of the concert, *Baz Amadm* (I Came Back) (1995) which was released outside Iran in the same year referred to its major *tasnif* which is based on one of Rumi's famous poems. Yet it also suggests Parissa's return to a space that had been waiting for her for a long time. As her first performance after the revolution, she participated as the singer in a group of instrumentalists that Maliheh Saeedi had gathered. The concert and the album were celebrated by Iranian musicians as a new departure that promised the continuation of a disappearing form of female singing. The concerts were a daring and unprecedented move on the part of the group. Immediately after she returned to Iran, however, she was told she could no longer work in CPPTMI because she had not received any permit to perform abroad, and she had not observed her Islamic cover during her concerts. Having lost her job once more, Parissa began teaching singing in her house and having performances outside Iran with different prominent traditional instrumentalists.

Her first performance after the revolution was the only in which she was accompanied by female instrumentalists. Before the revolution and before joining CPPTMI she had worked with other women. She also states that before the revolution she worked with women in the music centre of the Ministry of Culture and Art and with Women Orchestra (*Orkesr-e Banovān*). After her first post-revolution performance, however, she never had any other

concerts with female musicians. She argues that the pre-revolution Women Orchestra, and the women instrumentalists working at MCA were all leading performers the female ones that she had encountered after the revolution were not as experienced as their male colleagues. As she put it in our interview,

The male ones have always had the opportunity to work, to experience, to go on stage, to be supported, just because they are male, but women have always had serious problems that stopped them from working. The Pahlavi government was supportive of women [to come on stage and work], but after the revolution for two or three years music was forbidden for men and women. You probably remember that even carrying a musical instrument was a crime. During that time women [due to the government's concern with female voice and female appearance on stage] were in a more difficult situation. (Mozafari D)

Having given her views on the history of music after the revolution, Parissa then concluded that her experience showed that men are more experienced because they have had fewer limitations and had more opportunities to practise in one way or another during the bans. They also have less limitations or concerns for performing outside the country. Naturally she prefers to work with a group of professional instrumentalists that have had more opportunities, can perform freely outside Iran, and encounter fewer familial, social and governmental restrictions. This situation automatically increases the necessity of working with men. There are, of course, very good female instrumentalists, but they are not as numerous as men. Moreover, most leading female instrumentalists have their own groups, with singers and co-singers, and thus prefer not to risk their time and their potential to perform inside Iran by programs that can only be performed outside Iran.

This is important because in Iran most leading women musicians perform with female solo singers in female-only concerts and with two or three male and female co-singers in mixed audience concerts. However, if they work with Parissa, they have to restrict themselves to

overseas concerts, which may add another restriction to their work. Thus to preserve their limited performing spaces inside Iran, they prefer to continue working with their own groups.

Parissa thus has no objection to working with professional women musicians, whenever possible. She is, however, not ready to sacrifice the quality of her work and risk people dropping out in the last moment because they are women and have more limitations. She also believes that participating in all-female performances is practically the same as approving the government's policies about the segregation of sexes.¹¹⁰ Parissa herself never participated in female-only concerts even when they were the only space for female solo singers inside Iran.

If I accept to sing in female only performances, it means I have accepted that my approach to music has been wrong. But I do believe that I did nothing wrong. My approach to music and singing has been such that even the traditional/religious layers of society liked it. The way I dressed, my manners while singing, there was nothing in it against religion and/or traditions. ... I believed, and still believe, that I have always been right and therefore I will not accept to sing in all female concerts. (Mozafari D)

Parissa has also avoided participating in group or choral singing. As the second important path for women to continue singing on stage, the regulations concerning this form of singing has been changing since the early years of the revolution, depending on who is at the head of MCIG. As noted in the previous chapter, the term 'group singing' or co-singing (*ham khāni*) may be applied to the singing of two or more singers in a way that the solo singer's voice is not quite recognizable in order to receive permits for women singers to perform in public. For Parissa, however, this is an anomaly. Singers may be able to sing some *tasnifs* or rhythmic pieces together, but it is impossible to sing *āvāz* along another person.

This is just because of the inherent requirements of the form. ... If it weren't for the post-revolution system and these restrictions, you could not see any two women ever singing simultaneously. Two *āvāz khans* never ever can sing together because *āvāz* is

¹¹⁰ Though the political establishment has failed to impose it as much as it has intended, segregation has been a major project in the government's plans for islamicizing the country. In its original full force it demands that in such public places as cinemas, buses, universities... there should be different sections for men and women.

supposed to be solo singing. These new rules have forced musicians to find new ways to continue working or singing. I mean, they do it just for being active because they do not want to give up and sit in their houses. I give them the credit for it and think that they are good. But I don't see why I should do it. I don't have any reason to do it. I have always been a solo singer. ...Why should I do otherwise now? (Mozafari D)

Despite this sense of determination and her desire to downplay the impact of the bans on her career by asserting that she was never after fame, she has not been completely free from regrets. During our interview, she commented on the history of the last thirty years with some regrets: 'Thirty years is a life time. Let's say for someone like me. When I was 26 years old I was on the peak of my voice.... That was the time that the beauty and power of my voice could be revealed. Well, who is responsible for this loss?' She also argued that the ban on women solo singing is going to last much longer than many may expect and would have many negative effects on Iranian music: 'This ban is not temporary. It is one of the worst things that could have happened to the musical life of this country.' Though she made the comment in a scholarly tone, her voice also showed her personal concerns about the future of Iranian female singing. (Mozafari D)

The Post-Revolution Restrictions and Parissa's Position in Iranian Music

Parissa's importance is not just because of her voice but because of her profound knowledge of the *radifs* of Iranian music, *avaz khani* methods, and improvisation. These are the three main skills that some of the most famous *tasnif khans* lack. Her knowledge of *radifs*, her ability in mixing different *gushes* and *dastgahs* while singing (*morakab khani*) and her skills in improvising has made her one of the few Iranian singers with such powers and unique among female Iranian singers. In that regard, she is, in fact, only comparable to Master Mohammad Reza Shajarian, who has for long been considered the best Iranian singer and music scholar.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ As Saeed Talajooy puts it, 'just as Shakespeare's imaginary sister in Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own: Shakespeare's sister" was forced to stay at home and failed to fulfil her enormous promise, Shajarian's female counterpart, Parissa was forced to stay at home for fifteen years.'

Despite her acute awareness of her position, Parissa is not embittered about her loss, but has been meticulous about the situations that may decrease the quality of her work or the type of music that she represents. With her enormous knowledge of *radif* and Iranian classical music, her attitude towards female-only singing and co-singing is not strange. She has gone a long way to develop her skills and her status and is not ready to compromise her position by doing something that she thinks is against the nature of the form she is functioning in.

Parissa has never tried to perform under the present musical ruling system in Iran, and, thus, never faced the problems associated with applying and gaining performance permits. To many singers the process is, indeed, degrading.¹¹² For a singer of Parissa's stature who has no doubts about the value of her music, such a process, as she also states, is nothing but an extended insult. During this authorization process, officials who are not familiar with the essential features of an artistic medium recurrently question and criticize a work of art on the basis of assumed social and religious moral standards. The whole process requires a lot of haggling over details and a readiness to compromise to be able to continue working. These require mentalities and attitudes that are once more not in line with Parissa's character, particularly because she has always insisted that the officials are wrong in judging her type of music in the way they do.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, different musicians have tried different ways to respond to the restrictions against female solo singing. Some use two or three female singers with a male singer, some one female and one male singer, some a group of female singers with the main singer performing in a slightly clearer position. Some women have even tried to

¹¹² As I mentioned in the previous chapters First of all, one needs to receive permits from the Lyrics Council and then the Music Council of MCIG. Then the work needs a recording permit, which allows it to be recorded in an officially approved studio, before it is sent back to the Ministry again to pass the final authorization. The process is too time-consuming and the practitioner needs to spend a lot of energy on arguing with officials to pass different levels of censorship.

continue their work by singing like children and producing authorized children's music. As a prominent singer of classical Iranian music, Parissa believes that the ornaments of Iranian classical music are too subtle to be performed by two singers at the same time. It takes too much energy and makes the improvisation — which is an inseparable part of Iranian classical music — impossible. So she has chosen to remain loyal to her performing style even if it means that she can never perform inside Iran.

Parissa's reaction to the problems in Iran is in complete contrast to Farzaneh Kaboli's (b.1949) approach to the problem, which I shall discuss in Chapter Seven. Whereas Kaboli tries to perform inside Iran even when it means she has to restrict her choreographies to avoid crossing the red lines, Parissa has preferred to remain silent or perform abroad rather than change her style or forms. This is, of course, partly related to the differences of their forms in terms of social acceptance. Parissa feels that she has always had the social support of many layers of society, but Kaboli has never been positive about such a support. Parissa, of course, admits that women have always had problems in society. As she states,

Ours is an old, traditional and religious society. The problem is not new, and we have not converted to Islam recently. Our society has always had problems with music because of those false understandings of Islam which blamed music for things that had nothing to do with music, particularly so when women and music came together.

Here Parissa is referring to some of the cultural and religious beliefs and practices that I have discussed in my chapter on the history of music and female musicians in Iran. These beliefs have often confused the consequences of the poverty and cultural position of musicians in courts with their music practice and have extended their conclusions about the promiscuity and immorality of some practitioners to all musicians. Yet her reference to these negative beliefs also reveals her consciousness of the elements that may have influenced her in constructing her image of respectability and poise and in choosing and reforming her special approach to performance and in, which I will be analyzing in the following section.

Performance Features

In this section, I will examine Parissa's approach to performance before and after the revolution. As such, I will examine the common denominators of her performance spaces and audiences, her physical positions and body movements, and improvisation during her performances.

Performance Spaces and Audiences. Parissa's pre-revolution performances were mainly in festivals in Iran and abroad and also concerts in Tehran and other major cities. Some of her performances were broadcast in the national television. Her most successful performances were the ones performed in the Shiraz Art Festival which earned her fame and the respect of many Iranian experts during the 1970s. During these pre-revolutionary years, since she was at the very beginning of her professional career, she had not yet launched any self-organized tours. But after the revolution, when she embarked on recreating her singing career, she participated in a number of festivals and sang in several tours organized by her and others.

While before the revolution her audience was becoming bigger, especially some of her cassette recordings and of her songs were broadcasted from the national television, after the revolution her audience have become smaller and have been limited to those among the diaspora who like her music and can afford attending her concerts or those who live in Iran and follow her work by buying her CDs. Despite her recent activities, since her work is not broadcasted from Iranian and Los Angeles-based Persian televisions and radios, she has not regained the fame that she deserves. Television and radio have always functioned as major channels of fame and as means of distributing songs and making people interested. However, Parissa's special circumstances have kept her away from these major venues.

Physical Positions and Body Movements. In Iranian classical performances singers are not supposed to move their bodies beyond a certain limit. In her performances, Parissa normally sits on the ground or on a chair. She does not perform in a standing position. Parissa's body movement involves some slight movements of the upper body, the occasional upward movement of one or both hands, and slow movements of her head. Her facial expressions are not significant either. It is a point of pride among many classical singers as it shows that they can perform even the highest notes with no pressure. I have, however, noticed that in her latest performances, especially in the ones with Dastān Ensemble, her body movements are more noticeable. This may be because of the type of music that Dastān ensemble produces which may demand more movements. Alternatively, however, it may show a change in the pattern of Parissa's body movements. In her recent performances, her body language suggests a degree of professional superiority which creates a marked contrast with her pre-revolution appearance and behaviour. This may be rooted in the intensity of her feelings of defiance towards the bans or in her concern with asserting her position or the value of her work. As in the past, she also regularly sings with her eyes shut.

Applying Foucault's theories about Jeremy Bentham's plans for a Panopticon prison and about modern surveillance society to the presence of a body on the stage, one can conclude that Parissa has never been capable of transcending the gaze of her patriarchal other, which has formed her character and determined the qualities of her performance. (Foucault 1977:32-45)

Her performance has unique qualities that link her gestures and positions to the ones usually associated with masculine performance. As to the former, Iran, both before and after the revolution, has had the qualities of a surveillance society, both in political and cultural matters and for many women who appeared outside their homes without the Islamic cover, it was important to demonstrate their respectability. But I think it is the latter point that is more

significant in this discussion. In her analysis of the relationship between performance and gender, Tullia Magrini writes,

In the past, in many Mediterranean societies, men and women usually performed different repertoires with a strong gendered character, so that crossing the boundaries between female and male musical practices could be stigmatized as improper and socially unacceptable behaviour. But most interesting, in many contexts during the past century, the strictly gendered character of several musical practices has been challenged, (or has simply disappeared) through cross-appropriation of music repertoires or practice that had caused a shift in their previously established feminine or masculine nature. (2003, 8)

The same is more or less true about Iran. In the case of Parissa, however, it is significant that there is no pre-modern reference to any female singer performing in a style and manner as Parissa's. In fact, the features of her performance follow the same patterns that male performers have been using. In other words, either because of cross-appropriations that urged CPPTMI to promote the presence of a woman in the refashioned forms of traditional classical music or due to Parissa's personal tendencies, or both; the space that she occupied during the 1970s was a masculine space that though she helped to expand for a few women who followed her example, due to the bans on female solo singing, has predominantly remained masculine.

As such, if we examine Parissa's stage manners through Judith Butler's theories about sex and gender as performance and as rooted in social norms rather than personhood (2004); the positions of Parissa's body on the stage and her movements have been used to downplay her femininity so that she could achieve a degree of respectability denied to many of her female colleagues. As such, like the traditional male singers who have been working in her style, and unlike nearly all her contemporary female singers, she remains static so that her voice, rather than the femininity of her body, becomes the dominant feature of the performance. This, of course, does not deny her the privilege of a feminine voice and a feminine but covering costume, which in her pre-revolution concerts made her look doubly elegant and poised.

Musical Features of Parissa's Post-Revolutionary Works. Since the early 1990s when she began her musical activities, Parissa has performed in several festivals. These include the 1998 Festival of Women in Traditions in Queen Elizabeth Hall, London and the Silk Road Festival, Washington D.C. 2002. She has also gone on several singing tours, including Australia in 1999, Switzerland in 2001, and Europe in 2002.

During this period a movement that tried to reduce the centrality of the singers in classical Iranian music was in progress. The process which provided more performing opportunities for instrumentalists resulted in a marked boost in their technical virtuosity. However, in all the above performances, except for the first, Parissa has been accompanied with one or two instrumentalists. In her performances with Hossein Omoomi (b.1944), the renowned *ney* player, for instance, they followed the old system of a singer and an instrumentalist. The same was true with her performances with Daryush Talaei (b. 1952), the renowned *tār* player, in the Silk Road Festival (2002) and in Berkley (2004), which involved one or two instrumentalists.



Parissa, Daryush Talaei, Hooman Pourmehdi (Berkeley 2004)¹¹³

¹¹³ The picture is from <<http://www.lianrecords.com/pgs/Photo.html>>

According to Parissa, in her style, ‘for the music to be impressive the two performers need to have things in common and to be companions’. (Mozafari D) The subtleties of the music are shared between the singer and the instrumentalist, but at times the singer has to carry the more difficult parts. As a result, she prefers to work with someone who is capable of improvisation and manoeuvring within the modes of classical music.

Parissa’s work from 2002 to 2007 was mainly with the renowned *Dastān Ensemble* which is distinguished for its virtuosi instrumentalists. They had several performances in Canada and USA (2003 and 2006), Europe (2004), Netherlands (2005), Spain (2006), and Morocco (2007).¹¹⁴ *Dastān* consists of a group of leading instrumentalists determined to remain free from the centrality of the singer— as it has been customary in classical music. Parissa does not seem to have any problem with this.

As you may expect, working with such a group means that I need to conform to its stylistic requirements and performing habits. I have never been obsessed with being in control, so I have never had any problems with them. Such an approach is not in line with my beliefs..., but I do have certain principals that I am not ready to compromise. For instance, I will not sing those *tasnif*(s) that contradict my style, so I may simply tell them that I will not sing this or that poem and ask them to change it. (Mozafari D)

In her *āvāz khāni*, as it is the tradition, Parissa has always been the one who has chosen the poems which in her case are mostly by the medieval mystic Iranian poets, but the choice of *tasnif*, as it has been traditionally the case, lies with the composer with the singer’s agreement. So the case that Parissa is putting forward here is not unusual and most leading composers or instrumentalists follow the same pattern.

When I questioned her about the differences between her style and theirs, she asserted that she liked the way worked and their style did not interfere with her principles:

¹¹⁴ See also this page at her website on <http://www.parissa.org/02_events/events.htm>

I understood and liked the type of music they performed. If you are at somebody's house like a guest and agree with the general ways they are doing things, you do not interfere with the details of their work if it does not interfere with yours. So it did not really bother me that they had more instrumental and rhythmic pieces. (Mozafari D)

Thus if her concerts with leading instrumentalists and composers have followed the ideals of the return-to-the-roots movements for refashioning Iranian classical music, her works with Dastān has offered some minor but significant digression from those ideals, which suggests her flexibility so far as it is within her norms. The instrumental pieces are relatively complex in these performances and emphasis on solo music pieces is observable.

All her work with Dastān suggests her readiness to approve of those innovations which do not violate the essential values of her preferred type of music. Another reason why their collaboration has been successful is that she has full control over the parts that she performs, but never meddles with their parts — as many of the prominent singers do. While working she tries really hard to make a pleasant and friendly atmosphere. (Mozafari D)

Parissa's performances since 2007 however are back in its traditional form. Her performances in Belgium (2007), Italy, Spain and Paris (2008), New York, Spain and Sweden (2009), have two or three instrumentalists.

Improvisation

Any singer or instrumentalist working in classical music needs to be able to improvise. Parissa improvises during the rehearsal sessions and through the performances. 'While I read a poem, its melody comes with it. I mean I imagine the cadences of the poem with that melody in my mind.'(Mozafari D). As noted in Chapter Two, in the mystic approach to performance, improvisation has a central place. It signifies the immersion of the performer in the ecstatic world of music in a form of relationship in which she or he becomes a part of the music that is being created. Within this system, conscious composition is not encouraged because it

enhances the feeling of the individual as being the owner of the piece. The transient beauty that the performer creates in improvisation thus enables him or her to bring that beauty into the world of sense perception without entangling him or her in the claims of ownership.

This mystic conception of improvisation, however, cannot hold true for a most modern performance that is recorded and rehearsed for a concert. Furthermore, many of the people who engaged in improvisation in Iranian performing traditions, including those working in comic theatrical and musical forms and more formal forms of music had nothing to do with mysticism, but were more interested in using their musical skills on the basis of the performing necessities of the moment. As such, improvisation in Iranian music has had different functions. Yet it has often been associated with (1) great performing skills, (2) quick perception, (3) power of association, and an ability to be coherent while creating fresh forms.

In other words, though it has entailed a kind of freedom from control, it has ultimately been linked to producing coherent structures rooted in forms that have been mastered through years of disciplined work. It is thus only a great master who can really improvise in a way that captivates the mind with unpredictable coherence and beauty.¹¹⁵ Though the fact of having rehearsals negates some of the essential requirements of improvisation in the traditional sense, Parissa's statements about improvising as reading a poem is completely within the tradition. Thus improvisation in these settings takes place during the rehearsal as the piece is rapidly prepared for practice and finalized for the performance. Yet as stated above, she also improvises during the performance, in which case, the instrumentalists have to be skilled enough to follow her lead.

¹¹⁵ For more see Nooshin (2003), particularly pages 260-265.

Conclusion

As I was studying Parissa's life and preparing my questions for my interview, a great number of questions came to my mind, some of which I tried to answer in this chapter by referring to my interviews with Parissa and my research on the subject. Being aware of the attitudes of the post-revolutionary government towards musicians, I wanted to know how they treated Parissa who was highly respected as a virtuous female singer. I also wanted to know how it has been possible that a female singer, who works with male musicians and performs without veil outside Iran, can live inside Iran with no problems. The process revealed to me that Parissa's character and reputation gave her some immunity that made such apparent violations less possible, but this conclusion led to my engagement with the position of the male musicians who work with Parissa and face no problems. This gradually provided me with a new insight about the workings of Iranian system, particularly since the 1990s. Thus I concluded that if music is not political the government ignores its transgressions from the Islamic rules, particularly if they happen outside the country. I also wondered what the red lines are and how and to what extent they can be challenged by musicians with impunity.

This provided me with a new mapping tool by which I redrew my assumptions about the cultural redlines of Iranian government. One can see that music, in general, has a liminal position within Iranian political culture, and so far as it does not break its political bounds its transgressions may be tolerated and hushed. The case of female, solo singing inside the country, therefore, seems to be more political than cultural or religious. It seems that for the time being there is no way to legitimize female solo singing within Shi'a jurisprudence. Shi'a jurisprudence has been the major source of providing legitimacy for Iranian government. So anything that goes directly against it is indirectly political. Female solo singing per se is, therefore, political if it is done inside the country because it breaks the aura of religiosity and

the support of the clergy that have given legitimacy to Iranian political system. Nevertheless, the great force of the demands of the middle class people in Iran, which has been changing the patterns of bans since the 1980s is a formidable force that cannot be suppressed, the middle class is to be reckoned as a political force. The government, therefore, has always been keen on finding ways to quell the demands without politicizing them. In the case of solo female-singing, the best way has been to tolerate it when it is done in secret or abroad. Thus if such performances do not pursue any political aim and are performed outside Iran, they are even desirable because they function as safety valves.

The case of dance, however, has been more complicated than this. It has been the most demonized form of art after the revolution, and its practitioners have always been in danger of detention and punishment. Despite these pressures, it has continued to be practiced in different forms inside and outside Iran, in public and private spaces, as part of theatrical performances and as dance per se. In the following chapter, I will trace the fate of dance as a music-related activity in the contemporary history of Iran, focusing on its development and formalization during the Pahlavi period and its demonization and rebirth after the revolution.

Chapter Six

Female Dancers and the Transformation of Dance in Contemporary Iran

Introduction

In the previous chapters I offered a general outline of the histories of female musical activities in Iran, discussed the positions of female instrumentalists and singers in pre- and post-revolutionary musical culture and offered the case studies of Maliheh Saeedi and Fatmeh Vaezi (Parissa) as practitioners involved in these activities. In this chapter, I will extend my study of the changes in musical culture and gender roles in relation with it to dance. As such the chapter offers an overview of major dance genres in Iran and signpost the key areas of their transformation by exploring the cultural, political, religious and artistic attitudes that have influenced dance as an artistic medium since the early twentieth century. In the first section, I will briefly refer to the sources that can be used for studying dance in Iran. Then I will examine the cultural and religious attitudes that have limited the scope of dance as an artistic medium in the contemporary history of Iran. I will then offer an overview of dance in urban areas of Iran since the late nineteenth century, focusing on female-only performances as the scene of the most important dance activities of Iranian women in the pre-modern era and then on the attempts of the Pahlavi government to create 'standard dance forms' for stage performances. This provides the background for my discussion of the places in which people practise popular dance and dance as an art form in Iran, and the forms that dance has developed since 1979. I will also include a section on teaching and learning dance in Iran.

Dance and the Limits of Popular Approval

Although the diversity of dance forms and the frequency of its performance as a communal activity in the urban and rural life of Iran suggest the people's deep-rooted cultural attachment

to it, its presence in urban life as a profession has always been condemned by religious authorities. As Anthony Shay (2001), Sassan Fatemi (2006), and Robert De Warren (2009) also indicate, until quite recently dance has never been respected as a reputable artistic career among Iranian city dwellers. This becomes particularly important if we note that this lack of reputation has also kept it away from the interest of the leading scholars who have written on music. Music scholars working between the ninth and twentieth century produced many treatises and books on music, but only one book on dance. Yet even that one book which reportedly described the different styles of dances performed in the Safavid courts (1501-1724) has been lost. (Khaleghi, 1954: 54)

As a result of this shortage, the bulk of the information, images and samples that we have about dance styles in Iran have reached us through two main sources: (1) the travelogues of foreigners, including ambassadors, merchants and tourists, (2) iconographic sources in the visual arts, (3) the audiovisual recordings of dance performances since the arrival of cinematography in the early 1900s. The situation was aggravated by the fact that dance as an art form became institutionalized only during the latter part of the second Pahlavi (1941-1979) and then became illegal as a public activity after the 1979 revolution. Thus dance as an artistic medium has never had enough time to develop its forms and academic discipline and find a proper place in society.

The ban on dance during the last thirty years has complicated the situation by rendering research on the subject nearly impossible, creating a gap that can hardly be filled by the occasional writings published outside Iran. Dance is one of the subjects that are in need of rapid documentation, specifically in the rural areas where the lack of governmental support and the homogenising impact of the modern media, television and videos poses the danger of major losses in regional forms and styles. The majority of the original forms are gradually vanishing

or transforming and the documentary films of regional dances in the archives of the National Television of Iran are closed to research and renovation.

Dance in the Course of the Contemporary History of Iran

Throughout the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods dance has been performed in Iran in two basic forms: the regional dances in the rural areas which, though include forms for individual or couple dancing, are often characterized by group movements; and the urban dance forms, which, even when done in groups, are characterized by individual or couple movements.

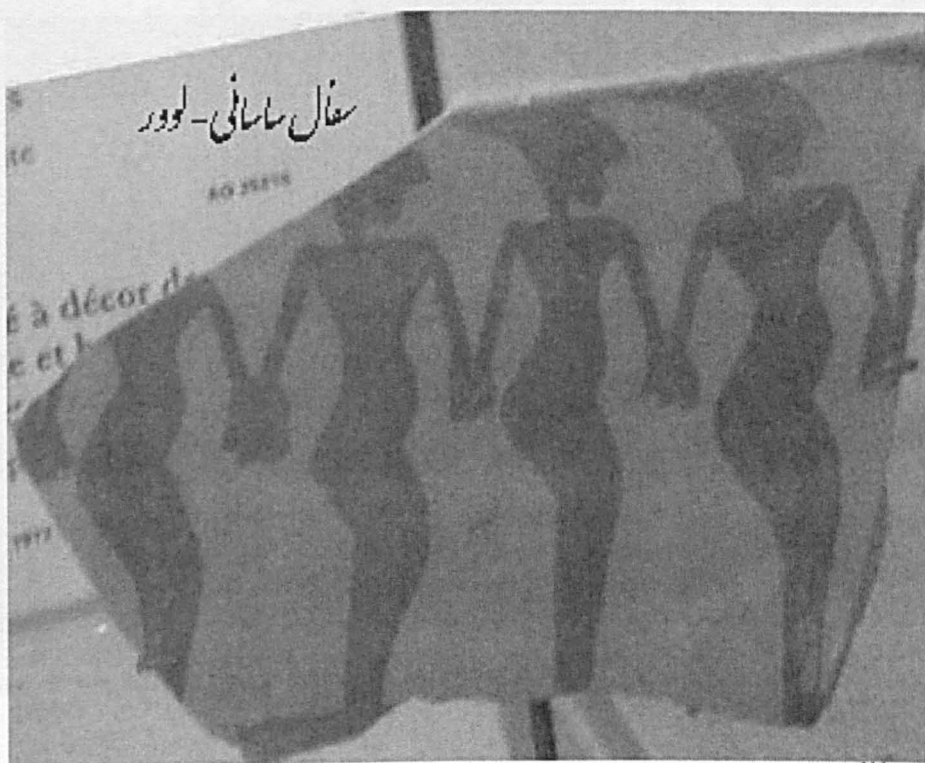


Image of girls dancing together on pottery from Sassanid era (222-651)¹¹⁶

Dance as an art form with forms borrowed from both of these genres was mainly practised in the courts of regional rulers and the kings. It was also a routine practice for travelling and city-bound entertainers who were usually associated with promiscuity and loose morals.¹¹⁷ The urban dance forms of the pre-modern era were usually performed in women-only parties and

¹¹⁶ Picture from 'Iranian Historical Photographs Gallery' in *Fouman.com* at http://www.fouman.com/history/Iran_Historical_Photographs_Gallery.htm

¹¹⁷ For more one dance in Iran, see Zoka (1965) and Matthee, (2000).

the comic musical plays of *ruhowzi* or *taghlid* tradition, in which the typical behaviour and movements of people engaged in different professions or the accents and habits of people from different regions, were humorously depicted.¹¹⁸ While the routines and the basic movements of urban dances have their origins in the individual forms of regional dances; these city forms are characterized by a range of erotic and comic movements of the torso and hips and occasional funny facial and physical gestures, scarcely seen in the rural forms.



Scene of dance and music by court entertainer (17th century Mural in Chehel Sotoon, Isfahan, Iran)¹¹⁹

Some of the courtly dance styles, which were also occasionally performed in wedding celebrations in private homes or rarely in town centres by travelling groups, were similar to rural dances with some touches of acrobatic movements that could also be seen in some rural

¹¹⁸ The favourite dance forms were the roughneck's dance (*Jāheli* or *Bābā karam*) and the baker's dance (*Raqs-e Shāteri*). For Iranian performing traditions, including musical plays, see Farrokh Gaffary (1984).

¹¹⁹ Picture from 'Iranian Historical Photographs Gallery' in *Fouman.com* at http://www.fouman.com/history/Iran_Historical_Photos_Gallery.htm

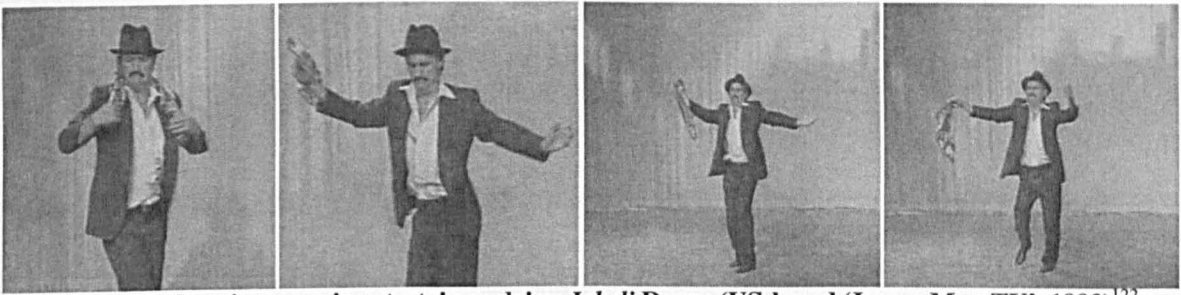
areas. While in some rural areas dance could be performed by men and women in mixed or segregated forms usually in the open, the popular urban dances were usually performed by men in the open and women in enclosed spaces, segregated according to the gender of the dancers. (Shahbazi & Friend 1993) The more erotically or elaborately designed dances were court dancers which were performed either by women or transvestite (*zanpoosh*) boys. Circular movements of the body to emphasize the circle of the skirt and delicate circular movements of fingers, shoulders and hips were essential to these forms. (Ameri 2003, 69)¹²⁰

The dances associated with professions were performed by men, boys and at times by women. For instance, *Jāheli* (Roughneck) dance, which in its present form was developed during the twentieth century, was for men. But since the 1950s, women have regularly used cross-dressing to perform it in a spirit of fun. As seen from the snapshots below, the form emphasizes the use of costume, usually a black hat and a black suit and a handkerchief around the neck or as the dance demands in the hands. The dancer was supposed to imitate the movements of a typical roughneck with the hat and the handkerchief while moving to the rhythm of an appropriate music. The regular movements of the shoulders, chest, arms and neck were designed to suggest masculine presence and strength in rhythmic movements.

Even though these comic dance forms were usually performed by male actors, who represented male and female characters before a mixed audience sitting separately, they also had their women-only types which were performed in the privacy of homes.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Among the very rare published articles in post-revolution Iran this article can be mentioned: Azardokt Ameri, 'Raqs-e Amiyaneh Shahri va Raqs-e mosoom be Kelasic-e Irani' (The City Folk Dance and the So-called Iranian Classical Dance) in *Mahour Music Quarterly* 20, (Summer 2003): 51-74.

¹²¹ Life in pre-modern (1501-1906) Iranian cities was separated into two spheres known as *andaruni* (interior) and *biruni* (exterior). *Andaruni* referred to the families' private sphere protected by the walls as borders between public and private life. Only women and the male members of the immediate family (father, brother, husband son, and son-in-law) were allowed into this enclosed space. In special occasions, by mutual agreement, even men of the family were excluded so that women could have their religious or celebratory gatherings.



Davood Asgharain, a comic entertainer, doing *Jaheli* Dance (US-based 'Iran-e Man TV', 1993)¹²²

These women-only sketches were performed during parties, when some of the wittier and more humorous women entertained the group. Yet major cities, especially from the seventeenth century onward, when itinerant players settled in towns, had professional troupes of musicians, actors and dancers who were invited to parties. These entertainers were called *motreb* (musical entertainers), a term with negative connotations implying loose morals. Thus while people enjoyed their work, the players were never respected. During the *Qajar* period (1792-1925), these troupes became increasingly professional and by the end of the nineteenth century some female players established troupes that were invited to women-only parties in the house of rich families. When there were no female musicians for women-only parties, male musicians were invited and seated behind curtains, accompanying the female performers as requested. The professional female dancers (*raqāseh-hā*) and players (*bāzigar-hā*) were known as prostitutes, even if they did nothing that suggested prostitution.

As Carole Pateman explains, since patriarchal systems function by intensifying the biological difference between men and women, they set up models and forms to deemphasize women's potentials for public and political life. As a result, women are defined as irrational and disorderly, which signifies their inability to fulfil the requirements of public life and their need to be protected from themselves and potential exploiters. Thus 'women, womanhood and

¹²² See 'Tehrani's Dance' *You Tube* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsX4B7xDhz4>> (Accessed on 3/11/10). For the reconstruction of the form by the Iranian female dancer, Jamileh (1946), see 'Jamileh- Jaheli Dance' *You Tube* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhJTjEVUdZE&NR=1&feature=fvwp>> (Accessed on 3/11/10).

women's bodies represent the private' and the publicized female body can be nothing but a threat to society, which should be annulled by the allegation of prostitution. (1989: 4).

Some of the musical plays performed in these privately public spheres were similar to the ones performed by men in public spheres. Most of them, however, were exclusively related to women and reflected the significant issues of women's lives from the viewpoint of a worldly wise woman with a cutting tongue and a hilarious sense of humour. The dialogue, which was mostly improvised around a set of fixed scenarios and was accompanied by demonstrative dance moves and songs, provided the actresses, professional or amateur, with the opportunity to express their untold feelings or cynic beliefs about life, men and society. The image of the woman presented in these plays was one of a patient virtuous trickster who had to find ways to revenge herself on those men and women who tried to suppress her dreams.

In some cases, the values they actually or ironically upheld or encouraged can be judged now, or even at the time they were regularly performed, as reflecting or responding to cultural biases and prejudices rather than resisting them. Yet it is precisely for this reason that they can be considered to be truthful readings of the culture. In terms of education, thus, they prepared younger women for the disillusionments of married life and offered strategies to escape depression and gain calculated advantages. They had two functions: to criticize and warn against overtly unconventional behaviours and to increase flexibility and make some less unconventional acts more acceptable. In terms of entertainment, they provided rhythmic cheerful music, belly laughter and emotional release, stimulation and satisfaction. As a social activity, they created a sense of togetherness among female relatives and friends that compensated for their enclosed lives. But they also functioned as a place for mothers or sisters to find wives for their sons or brothers and for young women to demonstrate their beauty, dancing skills and feminine attractions for potential in-laws.

The plays were in rhymed verse and were accompanied, even in amateur performances, by *dāyereh* or *tombak* (two Iranian percussion instruments). If there were no instruments available, they would use trays, pans or big bowls to keep the rhythm. Audience participation was essential and, due to the entertaining power of the plays, inevitable. In some plays, there were scenes of choreographed, rhythmic questioning and answering to encourage audience participation. There were no manuscripts, but the audience knew the words of the songs by heart and the players improvised the additional dialogue in ways that made it easy to respond. The plays also contained improvised solo or competitive mutual dancing in which the dancers used 'the shoulders, hips, torso, and head, and even nuanced movements of the lips and eyebrows'. (Shay 2001: 878) There were regional variations of the same plays, reflecting the dialects and specific issues exclusive to the region. Yet wherever they were performed; the themes, the mentality and the topics were all similar in being related to women's lives.

With the rise of radio entertainment, western-style theatre performances and then national television; due to official indifference, religious pressure and cultural stereotyping, women *taghlid* plays gradually disappeared, giving their place to dance and song concerts of more formal nature and occasionally finding their ways into feature films or documentaries¹²³.

The cultural renaissance that culminated in the constitutional revolution (1906-9) led to political and social changes that made performing arts, including music and dance more public. Contact with foreign opera and theatre groups during the 1910s played an important role in this. The Russian revolution and the exodus of Armenians from Turkey and the arrival of Armenian and Azari immigrants, theatre and opera groups created a momentum for performing arts. The occupation of Iran by the allied forces from 1941 to 1946 also played an important role in this. Direct contact with non-Iranian soldiers and the forms of entertainment devised to

¹²³ For more, see Anjavi Shirazi (1974). For a detailed study in English, see Safa-Isfahani (1980).

preserve their morale, created a momentum for the development of hybrid and original Iranian performing styles. Yet it was basically due to the cultural policies of the first Pahlavi (1925-1941) and then more extensively and systematically the second Pahlavi (1941-1979) that dance became a regular presence in Iranian public life.¹²⁴

The tendency towards westernized modernization brought the gradual transformation of the downtown pubs into clubs between the 1930s and 1960s. Since the mid 1950s, with the establishment of modern night clubs, the intensity of dance related activities, particularly popular Iranian dance forms increased, and since the 1960s western forms such as 'cha cha', 'twist' and 'rock and roll' became popular in the clubs in the wealthier parts of the city. Mainstream Iranian cinema played an important role in the process. The leading popular dancers and singers of nightclubs began to appear in semi-musical films that focused on the nightlife of Tehran and found its heroes and villains from the people frequenting Tehran's bars and clubs. Dance and stage performances of popular dancers and singers were inevitable parts of these films which popularized dance beyond any single factor in pre-revolution Iran.¹²⁵

Dance as a formal art form, however, was much slower to establish. As it was the case with the reformulation of Iranian dramatic traditions, artists first immersed themselves in already standardized western forms to get ideas for formalizing Iranian forms. This period began with the introduction of ballet into upper class Iranian life, which commenced in 1928 with Madame Cornelli's ballet lessons in Tehran, which were then followed by Madame Yelena Avdessian and Sarkis Djanbazian classes in Tehran and Tabriz and Nilla Cram Cook's ballet group in the 1940s. As Shay also suggests in his overview of the history of ballet and staged dance in Iran, Iranian Armenians played an important role in this early stage. (2005, 14) The growth of the

¹²⁴ For a study of the theatrical activities in the period, see Talajooy (2012).

¹²⁵ For more see Ameri (2003). For a history of Iranian cinema, see Sadr (2002).

circle of ballet continued by the establishment of the Classical Ballet Company in 1958 and the Iranian National Ballet in 1967.

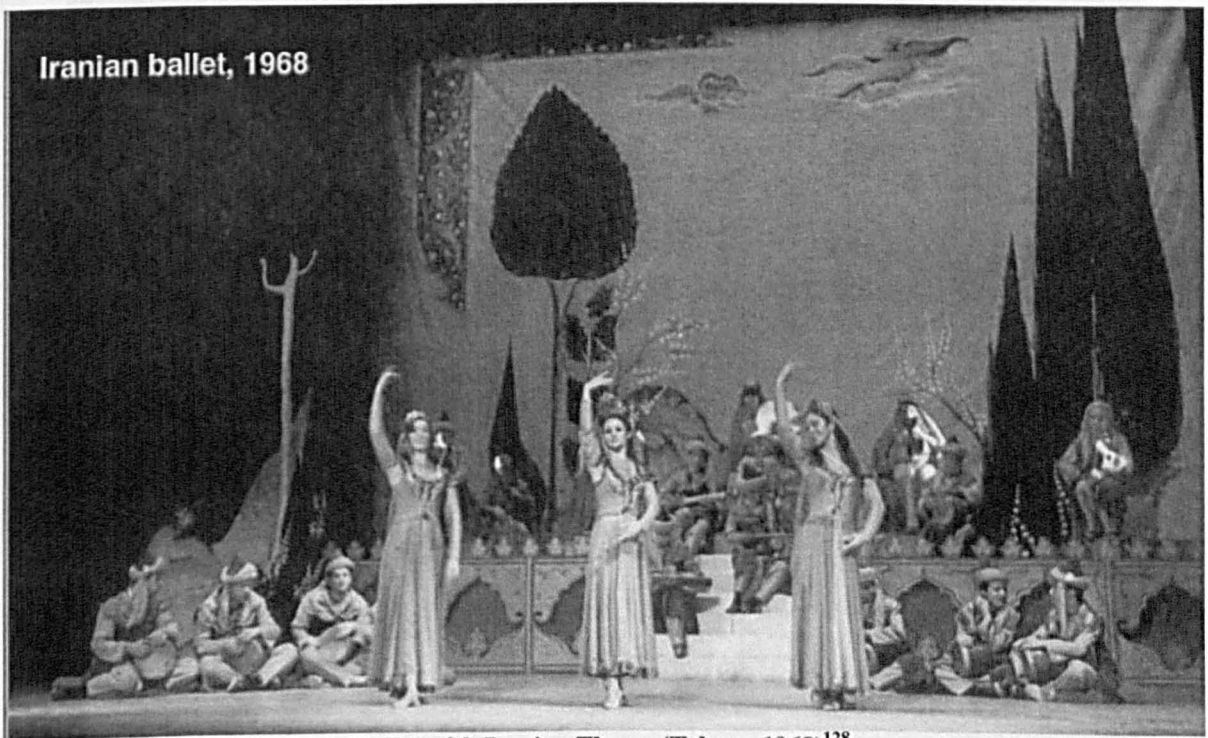
From its earliest stages, as the names of 'Madame Yelena's earliest choreographic works during the 1940s and 1950, such as "Rose of Shiraz," "Golnār," and "Song of the Canary" suggest; Iranian ballet performances were characterized by using Iranian themes and dance movements. (Kiann 2003 and Shay 2005) Since the mid 1950s, however, some scholars and practitioners began researching, gathering and working with Iranian rural and urban dances. Their work led to the establishment of a dance related group in the Ministry of Culture and Art in 1958, which was associated with other National Arts Groups. ¹²⁶

Thus since the late 1950s dance came under the direct support of the government, which used various means to institutionalize it as a reputable art form. Part of this process, of course, involved protecting dancers from the assaults of religious fanatics and implementing programmes and organizing serious performances to increase its stature as an art form. However, these dance centres and institutes were mainly in the capital city, Tehran, and were frequented by the westernized upper and upper middle class people. For ordinary people dance was not a socially respectable art form, but a hobby in private and semi-public spaces or a trivial form performed by 'not so respectable artists' on television or in mainstream films. Thus apart from the bulk of religious people, who usually avoided dancing or even watching it, people liked the dancers as entertainers or occasionally danced for fun, but did not respect dancers as artists and did not really thought of dance as a serious art form.

As I already noted in my writing on Iranian music between 1920s and 1970s, the most important transformation that the process of modernization created in musical life of Iran was

¹²⁶ For more on dance and ballet in Iran see the collection of articles at *Nima Kiann's Eastern Dance Forum* at <<http://www.easterndanceforum.com/>>. See also Ahmadzadeh (2008) and Ramazani (2002).

that it brought art music to the public life of people. Thus the traditional system of a quiet performance in which one singer and one or two instrumentalists performed inside private spaces changed to one in which several performers, singers and instrumentalists performed for large audiences in public spaces.¹²⁷ The same is true about dance. The process that transformed Iranian regional and city dances to the so-called 'national dance forms' or 'artistic dance forms' was in essence one in which these forms were combined with the structural qualities and requirements of ballet to produce standard artistic forms.



Ballet with Iranian Theme (Tehran 1968)¹²⁸

While courtly urban dances had been designed for intimate indoor space, and as a result facial impressions (movements of eyebrows, eyes and lips), horizontal neck movement, the rapid delicate shaking of the shoulders were central to them, modern forms that developed under the direct influence of ballet during the 1960s and 1970 were mostly designed for group dancing on the big stage and for large audiences. Thus in the forms that are usually called artistic dance

¹²⁷ As noted before, some practitioners of Iranian music believed that the process robbed Iranian classical music of some of its 'spiritual' qualities.

¹²⁸ Picture from <<http://www.iranian.com/main/image/39817>>

(*Raqs-e Honari*) performances/art dance, the sensuality and the comicality that characterizes popular, *motrebi* (entertaining) or *ru howzi* (theatrical) forms were reduced to a minimum and their basic movements were combined with the basic movements of ballet. Abrupt comic movements were modified or replaced with smooth ones and moving individually or collectively across the stage became a recurrent feature.



Dancers of the Art School of the National and Regional Dances of Iran (1972)¹²⁹

These forms which were often referred to as national dance (*Raqs-e Melli*) forms were the most important staged production of dance in Iran. The first standardized stage forms were choreographed by western practitioners such as Robert De Warren with the help of Iranian professional practitioners. With the passage of time, however, Iranian choreographers began to

¹²⁹ The picture is from my personal previously collected photograph archive.

reconstruct some of these forms either outside the country by those who had left due to the revolution or inside by those who tried to maintain some form of dance in Iranian public life.

Dance after the 1979 Revolution: Restriction and Transformation

After the revolution, due to governmental bans, the existence of dance as an art form encountered serious setbacks. It faced total annihilation through the closure of dance institutes and the illegalization of its performance. It was also denied any official public presence for nearly two decades after the revolution. Yet during the same decades, dance continued to be practised indoors and in various spaces as a form of leisure activity or family entertainment. This controversial situation continued through a hypocritical attitude towards dance. Thus, for instance, a member of the revolutionary guards, who participated in raiding private parties and arrested them with a number of accusations including dancing, may have participated in the wedding parties of his relatives in which people danced or even negotiated with his colleagues on behalf of his relatives so that everything goes smoothly with the party.

As to dance as an art form, it was not until the presidency of the reformist Mohammad Khatami in the late 1990s that it began to appear. The people's attitudes towards dance and the attempts of certain layers of the establishment to suppress dance had led to a process of negotiation between the artists and the officials. The reformist government made some original decisions that though not completely satisfactory or successful, fulfilled some of the aims of this negotiation within the limits of Islamic jurisprudence. These measures gradually reshaped dance to bring it back to the public life of contemporary Iran.

Dance re-entered the public life of Iranian screen and stage in the form of short scenes in historical films where the aim was to criticise the corrupt lives of kings. Its utilization, therefore, was as a means to depict and condemn the corrupt life style of those who were

obsessed with wine and earthly pleasures. For those who were enthusiastic about dance, however, even these short scenes promised a little space where they could reflect the expressive powers of dance and help its practitioners to practise their skills.¹³⁰ Gradually, however, this little space expanded. Some directors and choreographers put it into innovative use in theatrical performances and organized performances of regional dances. Nevertheless, due to the negative connotations that they carried in the religious texts and among the more religious people, the very terms, 'dance' and 'dancer', were still troublesome and created more problem than the activities themselves.

As a result, when it was to be authorized to enter the post-revolutionary discourse on the artistic and cultural establishment, it had to receive a less problematic title of *Harakāt-e Mozoon* (rhythmic movements). The name was probably first used when some practitioners were trying to establish a society for dance. The foundation of the society in 1999 was itself of great importance as two decades earlier nobody could have even dreamed of it. The name was accepted by the artists and people as it made it possible for dance to be used in public spaces or festivals and be discussed in articles.

Since the focus of my chapter is the forms in which dance has appeared after the revolution; in this section I try to document the presence and the position of various dance forms in the context of urban lower, middle and upper middle classes in post-revolution Iran. As my study is mainly about dance in its socio-political urban context, I will exclude any discussion of sacred 'non-dance' activities — religious or therapeutic forms — and regional dances performed in rural areas of Iran. To clarify the forms through which dance continued to exist in post-revolution Iran and later reappeared in the public sphere, I will discuss them in the order

¹³⁰ The attitude towards dance was comparable to the reaction against 'wearing ties' in public. During the 1980s, wearing ties was forbidden and equated with supporting the previous regime and its values. In films and TV series ties were used to identify anti-revolutionary 'Shah-loving' characters. After a decade, however, it was no longer prohibited, but one was not allowed to wear it in governmental offices.

of appearance in their corresponding spaces since 1979. First I will discuss dance as an illegal leisure activity performed in (1) public-in-private sphere, (2) public sphere outside the country, and (3) private-in-public sphere inside the country. Then I will explore dance as an art form as (1) part of theatrical performances and films and as (2) a performing art per se.

I discuss these forms to provide a map of dance activities in Iran, clarify the position of art dance in relationship to other dance activities and provide a context for my case study. In my study I focus on space because dance-related activities are among the major markers of the divide between the public and private presence of dance in post-revolution Iran. Thus I first examine some aspects of the divide between the public and private lives of people in Iran.

The divide between the public and private lives of people in Iran. The divide between the public and private lives of people has long been an important fact of Iranian life. Apart from religious prohibitions; the inherited autocratic political system and the state controlled economic structure have always forced people into compromising with the rules that they did not believe in, which in turn perpetuated and intensified this split.¹³¹ In Iran, since many laws and regulations are imposed on people rather than made by them, and since individual rights are easily sacrificed for abstract political ideas or ideological beliefs, individual freedom means political rebellion. The state has so much power that it interferes with all aspects of life. Thus if the individual crosses the intrusive, state-made borderlines to assert her/his individual freedom, s/he comes face to face with the government. Under such circumstances, there is a wide gap between the public and private lives of people.

Thus most Iranians are occasionally engaged in different private practices that have been in contrast with their public attitudes and pronouncement. After the revolution, the imposition of the Islamic codes of behaviour and dressing and the revolutionary zeal of some believers

¹³¹ For more on the concept of autocratic despotism see Katouzain (2003). See also Mahrooyan (2002)

whose idea of *Amr-e beh Ma'ruf va Nahi az Monkar* (Encouraging Virtuous Deeds and Discouraging Forbidden Ones)¹³² was to beat people into compromise expanded this gap. In all governmental working spaces a new office entitled *Dafatr-e Gozinesh-e Aghidati* (The Committee of Ideological Selection) was established to investigate the 'political', 'moral' and 'ideological' propriety of job or university applicants who were also required to fill special forms acknowledging their beliefs in the essential tenets of the political establishment. Since the state is the major source of revenue in Iran, this pressure is economic, as well as political and widens the gap between the public and private lives of people. Yet the Iranian government has sometimes shown clear indication of being unsatisfied with this external compromise and intruded into people's private spaces to stop their practices.

In the past, the walls of the house functioned as the border between the private and public spaces of Iranian life. Yet within these walls, which were the special domains of women, they were not passive and silent victims. They wielded special powers and at times, as in the case of female-only celebratory and mourning performances, turned this private space into a public one. The same is true of present day Iran, where because of governmental restrictions; the house is used for various functions, such as female only or mixed house parties and various forms of private tutorials.¹³³ Yet when even the simple act of having a party becomes a transgression, hypocrisy and having double standards become normal practice.

Dance as an Illegal Leisure activity

The total ban on some public practices after the revolution gave back to the house — as a private space — its pre-modern multi-functional role, turning it into a space for holding private tutorials — for such activities as music, dance, sports, sewing — small family parties, wedding

¹³² In Islam the faithful are advised to encourage others to do good and avoid evil.

¹³³ Thus as it was with many nineteenth century masters who taught their students at home, in present Iran, male and female musicians accept students and practise with their colleagues at home.

ceremonies, etc. Among these activities, dance, has had a special place, both in tutorials and in parties. Registering dance as the most demonized art form, the post-revolution Iranian government have demonstrated a constant desire to exclude it from all public places. However, when the proponents of a dominant political or cultural discourse attempt to annihilate an aspect of a people's identity by force, they adhere to it by any means possible. Thus despite all prohibitions, dance remained popular in house parties and tutorials and in those spaces that were away from the direct gaze of officials.

1. Public-in-private spheres. Despite the occasional raids of revolutionary guards into people's mixed parties during the first, second and less frequently the third decades of the revolution; dance remained a central part of all indoor, mixed or segregated, parties. Dance in such parties has been influenced by the video tapes of western popular music, Bollywood films, Iranian pop singers based in Los Angeles, and the dance tutorial of Mohammad Khordadian (b.1957), which had a huge black market in Iran. In his videos, Khordadian introduced and taught some popularized versions of the main forms of Iranian *melli* (national) and *mahali* (regional) dances. Judging on the basis of my memories of the 1980s and 1990s, his work was so popular that in house parties those who had seen and learned from his videos were distinguishable because of the similarity of their movements. My observation, of many home videos of the wedding or normal parties of my friends and relatives during the period, also confirm that particularly since 1985 when video players became prevalent in the houses of middle class and upper middle class people, Khordadian's videos were very influential in shaping dance practices in indoor parties. This, however, does not preclude the lower and lower middle class youth who also regularly used such material.

The impact of western popular music videos, particularly those of Michael Jackson and Madonna and movies such as *Breakin'* (1984) was also considerable. From the late 1980s, with

the end of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) and the relative relaxation of pressures, many young people displayed a passion to practise the acrobatic moves of the dancers in the film and perform them in parties or even in parks (mainly in Tehran) whenever they felt immune from the gaze of the revolutionary guards. For a time doing break and techno dance moves in the parks became one of the regular daredevil practices of young people, particularly boys. However, as it may be expected from the regulating gaze of a surveillance political system which backs its rules by tacit judgement as well as punishment, the main body of dance activities remain indoors and are still influenced by music videos and films rather than artistic tutorials. In my last trip to Iran during July and August of 2009, for instance, I attended two wedding celebrations and a birthday party in Tehran. During these parties I noticed that apart from Iranian dance forms, dance routines from Anne Fletcher's *Step Up* (2006) had become popular, and many young people performed in ways that reflected a lot of practice.

2. Public spheres outside the country. Since the early 1990s, some of the people who normally reside in Iran occasionally visit neighbouring countries — specifically Dubai and Turkey — to participate in the concerts of Los Angeles based Iranian pop stars. As dancing in pop concerts inside Iran is forbidden, people make use of the opportunity to dance in such concerts. The Iranian government has in several occasions cancelled flights to stop people from participating in these events, but they are still well attended. These events are significant in that they have had a marked impact on people's attitude towards dance.

3. Private-in-public spheres inside the country. After the political reforms of the mid 1990s, which legalized some forms of pop music and increased social freedom; people, especially the younger generation, began to use any opportunity to dance in the public. For instance, when people go hiking or go to picnics in woods if they find a place, which is free from the direct gaze of the guards, they may dance. Or in their group trips, they may draw down the bus blinds

and start dancing. In two occasions when Iran's national football team qualified for the world cup in 1998 and 2006 such activities created a challenge for the police. In both cases people came out of their houses to celebrate the occasion by dancing, singing and cheering, but the police who had been taken by surprise did nothing significant. As the process involved impromptu acts of dance by hundreds of people, the guards either did not know how to react or could not react because of the large crowd of the people.¹³⁴

Similar situations may develop during *Chāhārshanbeh Suri* celebrations (the last Wednesday before the Iranian New Year) during which the merry ritual of jumping over the fire is at times accompanied by dancing in alleys or even roundabouts. The same may happen every *Sizdah be Dar* (the thirteenth day of the Iranian New Year) when the festival of spending a day in nature is often made more interesting by people, particularly men playing music, dancing together and singing if the occasion allows.

During popular concerts, it is also possible to see that at times some members of the audience dance on their seats though they know the guards may see and ask them to leave the hall.¹³⁵ Of course, the legal procedures for issuing permits for concerts involves checking the music to make sure that it does not encourage dancing. However in reality, the music does encourage dancing or the performers play a faster version than the one for which they have received their permit. Whatever the case, the desire for dancing in public in young people is intense.

However, if one ignores these furtive, private, occasional or overseas transgressions, dance as an entertainment form is absent from Iranian public life. Dance as an art form, however, has had a different fate. Though it nearly disappeared between 1980 and 1997, during the reform era (1997-2005), it began to carve a little space for itself in the artistic life of Iran.

¹³⁴ The last minutes of Jafar Panahi's feature film, *Offside* contains footage of such a public celebration in 2006.

¹³⁵ For more, see Nooshin (2005).

Dance as an art form

Although dance is an inseparable part of most house parties in Iran, for many it is still considered a cheap hobby which can be enjoyed and cherished as fun but can never be turned into an artistic profession. As Anthony Shay states, 'dance is encouraged for an individual at specific times, but denied to the same individual at other times' (1999, 8) Thus children, boys and girls, may be encouraged to dance in various occasions and praised for the beauty of their movements, but when they grow up they learn to limit their dancing to avoid giving wrong signals. As Martin Stokes argues, 'music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognise identity and places, and the boundaries which separate them'. (1994, 7) Among the music-related activities that function in this way in Iran, dance is the most important marker of what is properly possible within a space. In the cultural semiotics of Iranian life, it also used to judge the dancer's philosophy of life, class, moral and educational background and character potential. The judgements are so quickly and cruelly passed that people in general prefer to be very careful about the way they dance. One should dance in a carefree fun style, not as if he or she is doing something important. As people get older, they should also limit the intensity of their dance activity or risk being called trivial. There are also numerous tacit codes about the movements of the body that may be judged differently depending on the beholders' degree of familiarity with the dancer. Of course, during the last decade, with the general decline of the number of people who prioritize sobriety over fun, the number of people who dance in parties has drastically increased. But even among the middle and upper middle class families the attitude towards dance as an art form has not become so positive to make them encourage their children to pursue a career. These cultural tendencies which have religious and patriarchal roots, account for why dance as an art form has been rather slow to develop in Iran.

1. Dance in films and as part of theatrical performances. Dance re-entered the public life of Iranian cinema in the form of short scenes depicting men or children dancing in regional forms in historical films and television series such as Mohammad Ali Najafi's *Sarbedaran* (1984) or Davoud Mir-Baqeri's *Imam Ali* (1990), and in semi-popular or regional forms in wedding or house parties in contemporary films such as Daryush Mehrjui's *Sara* (1993) or Kioomars Pour Ahmad's *Khāharān-e Gharib* (Unbeknownst Sisters, 1995). The director, however, was to show it as a common trivial practice not as an art form.

As part of theatrical performances, dance first appeared in puppet theatre where moving the puppets to suggest dance movements was for a time the only way to include at least the idea of dancing in the public. The fact that it was okay to use a puppet to create dance movements in funny styles suggest the importance of human body, particularly female body, for registering dance as a transgression. This has also been important in the later developments of dance as a part of theatrical activities, in which women at times may show dance moves in ways that suggest the movements of a puppet or an animal.

The reform movements of the 1990s gradually allowed more space for dance so that some renowned pre-revolution dance practitioners began to hold private tutorials and to apply for permits to revive it in theatrical performances. This new development allowed professional dancers to sublimate their state from victims to surviving challengers. Some began to argue for dance as an art form and apply for permits to perform in female-only performances.

The initial steps became possible by introducing dance not as dance per se but as part of theatrical performances and not under the name of 'dance' but under the new name of *harakāt-e mozoon*, (rhythmic or harmonious movements). The society for rhythmic movements is a subdivision of *Edāreh-ye Tāātr* (The Office of Theatre), which works under

the supervision of the Centre for Performing Arts at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG).

The performers are thus officially known as theatre actors and since theatrical performances need to receive permits from *Daftar-e Gozinesh* (The Selection Office) of MCIG, all their theatrical activities are regulated by the state. As other forbidden art forms, dance has been forced to find new forms to appear in public spaces, new forms that have necessitated creating narrative/dramatic contexts for using dance movements. The process, however, has not been finalized. In 2008, for instance, the new officially selected heads of the Society changed its name from *Anjoman-e Harakāt-e Mozoon* (Society for Rhythmic Movements) to *Anjoman-e Bāzigarān-e Harekāt-e Bi Kalām* (Society for the Actors of the Silent Movements). This name, as Farzaneh Kaboli states, is more suitable for silent mimes, 'for instance, if someone scratches his head [as part of acting] on stage ... but I never do that in my dance ... or if I do, I will do it in a way that creates a beautiful movement Silent movement has nothing to do with dance.' (Mozafari F) However, it seems that under the new government the terms 'rhythmic' and 'movement' are too provocative for the public space.

From a technical point of view, the choreographers and theatre directors use a variety of ways to include dance movements. I noted that there are two major situations in which choreographers include dance moves in theatrical performances. The first is scenes which require the expression of intense emotions such as mourning, separation, delight, and pain. Kaboli, for instance, used 'rhythmic movements' to imply a rape scene in Hadi Marzban's staging of Akbar Radi's *Shab Roo-ye Sangfarsh-e Khis* (Night on the Wet Cobblestone) in 1999. The second is scenes in which animals or supernatural beings are to appear on the stage, particularly observable in Pari Saberi's works. In *Haft Khān-e Rostam* (The Seven Labors of

Rostam),¹³⁶ which was on stage in Rudaki Hall in Tehran during July and August of 2009 the main dance moves were performed by female dancers who acted as Rakhsh (*Rostam's* celebrated horse), a goat, and a witch. Another dance role was performed by a male dancer as *Simorgh* (the mythical bird of wisdom). The witch who supposed to appear as an attractive woman in her first scene of encounter with Rostam danced as a robotic doll. Thus it seems that there is a red line for a performer to dance as a beautiful woman yet dancing as an animal or a robotic doll creates fewer problems. This suggests that the patriarchal conception involved in the process is the one that equates female dance with female body presenting itself for the voyeuristic gaze of the male audience. As such this body has to be de-gendered, dehumanized or turned into an object to avoid tempting the observer.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, the red lines are not as clear as one may suppose. In the same performance, for instance, the female dancer who performed with a fluffy costume as a goat even did a split which I assumed would not be permitted by officials. Therefore as in the case of female singers who disguise their singing voices as children singing children's songs, these women need to be transfigured into something else in order to be released from social control that determines what is religiously possible and what is not. What is significant is that the specifics of the plot and characterization cannot release the director from censor. For instance, though directors can show a man dancing to suggest his frivolity, they cannot show a woman dancing to suggest the same thing. Or while men can act as small children and dance it is not possible for women. However, it is possible to use female actors to dance as animals, and witches. Of course, more than anything these innovative uses of dance are the results of the creativity of the practitioners in their attempt to bring dance back to the Iranian stage, but the results reveal the limits of artistic representation. The female dancing body properly covered and deprived of its delicacy

¹³⁶ Rostam is the main hero in the epic section of Ferdowsi's (940-1020) *Shahnameh* (ca.1000).

¹³⁷ For the working of this patriarchal attitude in an Islamic context, see Nieuwkerk (2006): 141-58.

and sexuality as a woman, and even of its humanity, seems to pose no challenge to the Islamic codes of behavior and its political manifestations that they have been trying to control this sexuality since 1979.

2. Dance per se in semi-public and public spheres. These kinds of performances have faced more obstacles than the other forms. The first occasions of these performances were in women-only, semi-public spheres. One early example was a series of performances in the Italian embassy. Held as part of a charity, these performances continued for three years from 1997 to 1999 (the first year for three nights and the following two years for four nights). Such performances, of course, can not be fully described as public because they were women for women performances and rather than being publicly advertised, the audience had been selected from the luminaries and famous charitable individuals who had been offered to buy the tickets. Thus one may describe such performances as instances of border performances where diplomatic immunity and gender homogeneity creates a space for a selected number of people to participate in a communal activity which is not, otherwise, permitted. Another similar instance was the opening ceremony of 'The Muslim Women Olympic' in Tehran in 2005, choreographed by Farzaneh Kaboli and performed in an enclosed, all-female stadium.

Some practitioners have also attempted to organize actual public performances of dance per se, but have had to go through so many difficult official stages that they have refrained from further attempts. To get permits, the heads of several different offices need to see and authorize the performance, a devastating process, in which what is ignored is the amount of stress and self-censorship that a professional has to undergo to get the approval of a number of officials who mostly do not know anything about the performance they are dealing with. In one occasion that involved the performance of regional dances, while finger snapping is the original form of a part of dance, the choreographer was told that women should not do it but it

was okay for men, so the choreographer decided to change it to clapping for both men and women. But sometimes the process of change continues until the last moments. (Mozafari F)

While in other countries shows are designed for long term performances and may run for several months or years, in Iran a dance performance is like the coming of Halley's Comet. The performers undergo a lot of stress to get official permits — which, nevertheless, does not guarantee a safe performance. In fact, there have been music concerts and dance performances, the permits for which have been cancelled just hours before the performance; or even after the first performance. In one case, the director-choreographer had a permit for ten nights, but on the second night in the middle of the performance, she was informed that she should shorten and finish it. Later all the performers spent a night in detention and the performance was cancelled. (Mozafari F)

There have also been instances in which dance performances have been given permits for semi-public performances for opening or closing ceremonies of important festivals in presence of male and female audience. But the same programs have been denied public permits or been given permits for female-only performances and that under the condition that even in their female only performances the dancers consider the Islamic dress codes.

As to the forms, the major transformation has been implemented to reduce the sensual or comic aspects of these dance forms. If during the pre-revolutionary period, the process of nationalizing Iranian art dance forms meant mingling them with ballet basic movements and reducing their sensual and comic qualities, after the revolution it has come to mean the total removal of these elements. The officials often require that such expressions of happiness as laughing, smiling or finger snapping in the dance be removed from the performance. The imposition of the Islamic dress code has played an important role in this process. Because of the head scarves and the long dresses, the movements of head, neck and the hips have been

reduced to a minimum. The result is a dance which though butchered to become extremely chaste and even sombre is only seen in official performances by limited people.

As one may expect from this situation, most dancers from the pre-revolution era have either left the country or changed their career. For the ones based in Iran, however, another option has been to choreograph for the dancers who perform abroad. For instance, Farzaneh Kaboli who is based in Iran choreographed the *Toranj* dance that was performed by Ida Meftahi in Harbour Front Centre in Toronto (March 2006). She also choreographed some of the dance performances that Vashtoon group performed in Canada during the summer of 2008.

Teaching/Learning Dance

In his *Choreophobia*, Anthony Shay explains that 'Iranian dancers ... overwhelmingly learn their skills in informal settings.' (1999: 36) These informal settings are mostly limited to family parties and informal tutorials delivered by parents, aunties or cousins. In post-revolution Iran, besides these basic forms of learning, the music videos of Los Angeles based singers which include dance performances, and Khordadian's videos, have been very influential. However, with the gradual transformation of the musical culture of the country, since the mid 1990s, it has also become possible to take part in tutorials that teach different forms of dance from Iranian regional dances to ballet and salsa.

When after the revolution, music institutes were closed most musicians and singers who had remained in the country simply switched to private tutoring. But the case of dance was not as straightforward. The main reason, of course, was that during the 1970s, dance was still at its early stages of institutionalization as a public art form and was mainly treated as a form of vulgar entertainment or a private, family based hobby. The middle and upper middle class families, thus, did not show as much eagerness to teach artistic dancing to their children as in

the case of music. Another reason was that most leading dancers left Iran or remained inactive due to the threats of harassment. As a result, serious dance tutorials could not find their ways to houses as immediately as music. Another less obvious, but very powerful reason, was that within the borders of dominant cultural discourse and the unwritten rules of the new government, attending an indoor music lesson was less offensive than joining a dance tutorial. Music had the potential to be turned into 'useful' forms that served the aims of the revolution or encourage religious mystic devotion. According to the orthodox readings of Shi'a Islam, however, there was nothing in dance that could propose it for these purposes. Furthermore, since it had the body as its main means for keeping the rhythm and expressing feelings, it also had a powerful potential to distract attention from the soul to the body so that the individual could become obsessed with displaying her body to other women and men.

Formal dance tutorials, therefore, were rather slow in finding a space in the houses of former dancers. The break came with the end of the war and the reopening of the music institutes after Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* that legalized music. With the reopening of music schools, as the government did not provide enough spaces for music, sewing, flower making, painting, calligraphy and even sports; these activities continued to be taught at homes, but dance also gradually became more popular in house tutorials. This was the continuation of the same processes that had led to the separation of public and private spaces in Iran. The limits set to the number of the public spaces where women could practise music and other activities were intended by the conservative officials to keep women indoors and within covered areas. Yet some women used any opportunity to establish their own transgressing spaces.

During the 1980s, for instance, joining privately owned, all-female, covered sport clubs provided an opportunity for people to practise popular dance forms. These non-governmental, but regulated, spaces provided one of the few forms of activities that gave women the

opportunity to keep themselves healthy and busy. Yet the aerobic classes held in these clubs were also among those few places in which one could hear 'western popular music', albeit with omission of the singer's voice.¹³⁸ Some dance tutorials emerged from inside these aerobic clubs so that nowadays some aerobic clubs for women are in reality spaces for teaching and practising a variety of dance forms. The government is aware of these activities, but does not usually interfere unless there is clear evidence of mixed training or performance.

Since it is forbidden to have dance as part of the curriculum in any institution, the main method to inform others or advertise the opening of a dance class has been through personal connection and word of mouth. In recent years some classes have also used other methods such as cards or even small billboards, which occasionally lead to problems with radicals. One report from a radical newspaper, for instance, states that 'tutorials for teaching *raqāsi* (a pejorative term for dancing) working under the name of "rhythmic movements" have grown fast in Tehran.' The report is there to criticize the existence of dance classes in an Islamic country, but even these kinds of reports at times raise curiosity and interest in readers and encourage them to look for these classes, particularly because the same report also gives the details of the different styles of dance illegally taught in one of these classes: 'Arabic, Iranian, Spanish, Turkish, Techno, Hip Hop, Indian, and Ballet'.¹³⁹

A major problem in these practising spaces is that the difference between artistic dance and dance as entertainment is not clear. Because they do not work under any regulatory bodies, there are not any systems for the evaluation of the teachers and the examination of their capacities for working as dance tutors. These tutorials, as Kaboli mentions, may 'ruin the

¹³⁸ Apparently to Iranian authorities some forms of western popular music are acceptable so far as the words, which may be 'offensive and problematic', are removed.

¹³⁹ 'Amoozesh-e Anva'-e Raqs dar Gheflat-e Masoolan-e Farhangi' [Teaching Different Dance Styles and the Negligence of the Officials], in *Jomhoory-e Eslami* at

<http://www.jomhourieslami.com/1389/13890221/13890221_03_jomhori_islami_akhbar_dakheli_0025.html>
(Accessed on 21/04/ 2010)

attitudes of talented students towards dance. They may become false beginners whose hands and feet movements are wrong and it takes a while to help them get rid of those wrong movements and get ready for the right ones.' (Mozafari F) It is thus very likely that those who have potential to become leading performers of dance as an art form lose their talents through misguided approaches of unqualified teachers. The price for these tutorials may vary between 10 to 25 pounds per hour for group tutorials and up to 100 pounds for private ones.

Since most of the Iranian city dance forms are done by one individual or two people, practising at home does not create any space problem. However, in the case of reconfigurations of the rural or city dance forms, more space is needed. As a result, the tutors usually teach these forms in bigger groups and in bigger spaces in their houses, either in their living rooms if it is big enough or in their basements. The space, therefore, has not resulted in any major transformation in the dance moves, but the general condition of these tutorials have limited the potential for an innovative approach to group dances, particularly because of the limits on the number of the attendees in one session and the freedom of their movements.

Conclusion

While dance, as an entertainment form, maintained its place in post-revolution Iran through house parties and celebrations, its presence as a performing art faced enormous difficulties and disappeared from the public lives of Iranians. Since the early days of the revolution, however, artists and people tried to push the new political boundaries on cultural activities and a tacit process of negotiation began immediately after the imposition of the bans. Thus it became possible for dance as an art form to emerge as a theatrical technique, opening the space for a few performances of dance per se during the last ten years.

The implicit process of negotiation between the artists and the officials still continues. Thus it is likely that the rare performances of dance become more frequent. Yet what is significant in the history of this negotiation is the constant transformation of forms and attitudes which has made the official approach to art more flexible than it seemed possible in the early 1980s.

In this chapter I offered a general overview of the history of dance in Iran since the late nineteenth century. I also offered a general overview of the forms and places in which dance as an illegal activity or as part of theatrical performances may be practised or taught after the revolution. Since the focus was the dance activities of women, I paid more attention to female dance forms and spaces. In the following section, I will examine the career of a leading female dancer who has played an important role in bringing dance back to Iran's public life.

Chapter Seven

Standardization of Dance, Post-Revolution Bans, Transformation and Continuity: A Case Study on Farzaneh Kaboli's Career

Introduction: Catching up with the Memories of Childhood

It was in spring 1978 when I first heard my mother talking about her classmate being on television. It was during the school holidays of Iranian New Year in March. We were watching a group of dancers in colourful costumes performing a beautiful dance on a stage. My mother pointed to one of them, saying, 'the one in front, now in the middle'. That one, that one is Farzaneh'. I then learned that as primary school chums, they did jump ropes and played together. I remember seeing her on television in several other occasions, trying to spot her among the dancers. Such programmes were soon gone with the revolution.

A few years after the revolution, one day as I was watching a film on television, my mother pointed out to one of the actresses asking me if remembered who she was. I had no idea, but found out to my surprise that she was the same lady whom we used to watch dancing in colourful costumes. So for a time, during my high school years in the late 1980s, she was back on the screen not as a leading dancer, but as an actress in supporting roles. A few years later when I was a graduate student, I heard she had been deprived of appearing on films because a home video in which she danced along with some of her students had been pirated.

When I began to work more in Iran and came face to face with some of the challenges that female musicians faced in Iran, I always thought of her and wished to know how she had faced the bans, particularly because I learnt that she had been acting in plays and doing some choreography. In 1999, as my husband was writing for theatre journals in Iran, I learned that

she was playing the main female character in Akbar Radi's (1939-2007) *Shab Roo-ye Sangfarsh-e Khis* (Night on the Wet Cobblestone) in 1999, which had been directed by her husband. To my surprise she used choreographed movements in some parts of the theatre. The act attracted my attention to the possible revival of dance, and made me think of doing a study on the subject.

As I began to think of doing my PhD, I thought a lot about whether to include dance or not. Though dance was not central to my studies of ethnomusicology, I saw a strong case that could be properly linked to my other case studies to offer a more precise picture of the careers of female performers in contemporary Iran. Soon, in winter 2008, I was on the phone talking to her about my project and arranging to meet her during the summer in her flat in Velenjak, an upper middle class district in Tehran.

She was warm and welcoming. After the initial introduction, some Iranian style hospitality, and a brief conversation with her and her husband; we sat in her living room to have the interview, which lasted for about three hours and a half. She sounded very passionate about the subject and filled me in with many interesting details. As I go through her career, I will be using the material from this interview as Mozafari F, along my own knowledge on her life and on dance in Iran as Mozafari G or if I have the source with reference to the source.

In the introduction and the first chapter of this thesis, I examined the related literature on women and music and music in Iran and went through the history of female musicians in Iran. Then in chapters two to five, I presented general overviews of the conditions of female instrumentalists and singers in Iran and studied the careers of Maliheh Saeedi and Fatemeh Vaezi (Parissa) as case studies of a leading composer/instrumentalist and a renowned solo singer. Finally in chapter six I offered an overview of the history of dance in Iran and examined its forms and transformations since the early twentieth century to set the context for the current

chapter in which I will discuss the career of Farzaneh Kaboli, the leading dancer and choreographer of Iranian national dance forms. The chapter thus will go through the problems that Kaboli has faced during her career, focusing on her early life, her training and performances as the leading female dancer of the 1970s, her acting career after the 1979 revolution and the methods that she has used to overcome the bans on dance. I will also touch upon her use of theatre to perform dance and her approach to teaching, performing, choreographing and directing dance performances after the revolution.



Farzaneh Kaboli and I (Tehran August 2008)

Early Life, Learning and Practising /Social and Religious Contexts

Farzaneh Kaboli was born in May 1949 in an art loving family in Tehran. Her talent in dancing was noticed and supported by her parents and relatives from early childhood. As she told me: ‘I remember it, or maybe it is because my mum reminds me of it, that as a baby, I used to hold on to the edge of a table, and rhythmically move myself up and down.’ (Mozafari F) As it is the case with most Iranian families, and, indeed, most other nations, her parents adored her as a

toddler for moving in response to music. Kaboli began to practise dance as a typical Iranian girl. As stated earlier 'Iranian dancers', and any Iranian who dances, as Shay notes, 'overwhelmingly learn their skills in informal settings.' (1999: 36) Kaboli was not an exception. She learned dancing in family parties, from her mother, aunties and cousins. Yet whereas this early learning support does not guarantee later encouragements for professional performance, in her case it did. Her parents, unlike the typical parents of her time did not limit her aspirations in fear of socio-religious ostracizing.

The patriarchal stereotyping in many cultures has often associated female and male dancers with loose morals and promiscuity. Thus in Iran as a culture in transition in which dance as an art form had not yet found its proper place, it was hardly possible for any woman from middle class background to work as a dancer without family support. Thus, as in the case of Parissa and Saeedi, Kaboli was blessed with parental support, which in her case was so affirmative that helped her embrace her career with no reservation. During the 1950s and 1960s, despite the efforts of the government to raise the stature of dance and turn it into a respected art form by founding dance institutes and supporting leading dancers, people in general considered dance a cheap hobby which can be enjoyed but can never be turned into an artistic profession. Ironically, this reaction to dance was fuelled by the overwhelming presence of dance as 'cheap entertainment' in Iranian films and on the stage of cabarets.

In his *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, Martin Stokes states that 'Music does not...simply provide a marker in a prestructured social space, but the means by which this space can be transformed'. (1994: 6) This is potentially true of most social spaces, but if the space is financially predetermined by its customers who only pay for particular forms of entertainment the case becomes complicated. The social space in which the most intense dancing activities of pre-revolution Iran was taking place, however, determined the course of confrontation with

dance during the modernization period in Iran (1920-79). Before the establishment of cabarets in the upper middle class districts of Tehran; the city's lower class and uneducated roughnecks, who frequented downtown nightclubs, determined the nature of the music and entertainment in its public spaces. It was indeed, impossible to transform the space by music or try to educate them to understand different kinds of entertainment. A space can be transformed by music if those who frequent it welcome the transformation. Thus the policies of the Pahlavi government for keeping the urban lower class entertained in night clubs and cinemas reinforced the traditional conception of dance as a cheap activity and thus conflicted with its vision to devise ways to elevate the position of dance as an art form among the middle class families. It was thus only during the late 1960s that the launch of various art festivals, the gradual change in the favourite subject of Iranian cinema and the creation of art oriented music shows in television led to a steady but gradual rise in the status of dance as an art form.

Nevertheless, this steady growth could not really transform all the cultural images that had been carved into the brains of people. Thus though there have always been a great number of girls as talented as Kaboli has been in childhood; one also knows that due to the stigma attached to dance as a profession many of these girls have never been allowed to consider practising dance professionally.¹⁴⁰ Kaboli's success was, therefore, not just due to her talent and hard work but also because of the psychological support of her family, which enabled her to overcome the typical social and religious prohibitions that may make a woman feel guilty about choosing dance as her main career. These prohibitions which extended from the association of dance with promiscuity to the career based pressures that advised the youth to go

¹⁴⁰ The life story of one of my mother's friends, who is the same age as my interviewee, is a revealing case. Mrs. F. K. (b.1950), now a retired teacher of English, had the same passion and talent for dance. As a child, she danced in various occasions and was praised for the beauty of her movements and even where it was not appropriate she 'danced in her mind'. Noticing her talent, her parents registered her to attend the ballet class of Madame Yelena. However, after attending the first session, her grandfather, a religious dervish, forbade her from attending the class. She still regrets the lost opportunity and is critical of the dogmatic turn in her otherwise loving grandfather who prevented her from fulfilling her dreams of becoming a ballerina.

for 'serious' professions such as medicine or engineering had little impact on her parents. She was thus made to feel that dancing can be a valuable profession, a situation that concentrated her creative energy in a field in which she demonstrated a talent.

Her talents in dancing and helping with performances soon put her at the centre of attention in her primary school. The school staff used to ask her to arrange some dance performances for such events as the Mother's Day, Mohammad Reza *Shah's* birthday celebrations or local schools art competitions. She used to design the dresses and make up with the simple things available. For instance, she used charcoal to paint the performers' faces black for one of these events that won the first place in the national competition.¹⁴¹ As she puts it, 'I didn't know what I did was choreography or designing [dance movements], but whenever I was told to do something, I used to say "all right, I will make up a dance of myself".' (Mozafari F) The recurrence of these practices enhanced her creativity in improvisation and choreography. In fact, primary and high school competitions and parties provided her with those unique opportunities that help many leading artists — at least in Iran — to be creative and productive prior to having access to academic or professional knowledge and training.

This form of creativity enhanced her self-confidence and desire for innovation. Kaboli knew what her future would be and in the absence of proper training, she got hold of any training possible while waiting for the opportunity to commence her professional training. Hers was the personality of the thirsty pupil that is described in Iranian music as the ideal learner, the one that is thirsty and should be made thirstier by not being accepted upon her/his first request.¹⁴² She had no access to teachers because during the early 1960s it was not customary to have

¹⁴¹ 'Then, believe me. We bought charcoal. I never forget it. I told everybody to buy black turtle neck blouses. Then to take care of those parts of the body that were out of the blouses, I told everybody to grind the coals and blacken their faces and hands. Those poor girls listened to me and then we just reddened our lips.' (Mozafari A)

¹⁴² I am quoting Master Majid Kiani's (b.1944) comment on master-pupil relationship in Iranian music expressed in a private Santoor tutorial in 2002, Tehran.

dance teachers, but her father's support transformed the situation. Since he liked to provide her with proper training, when he found out about a recently established course in dance, he encouraged her to take the entrance exam, which she successfully passed. The entrance exam opened her way to *Honarestān-e Raqshā-ye Melli va Mahali-ye Iran* (The Art School of National and Regional Dances of Iran) where in 1967 she commenced her training under the supervision of Jacqueline and Robert De Warren (b. 1933).¹⁴³

Kaboli's entrance to the world of formal education occurred when she was thirsty for advanced learning and thoroughly appreciated it.

When I was given a lesson, I went home and practised it till morning. Well, when I say till morning, I truly mean I practised the movements for more than two hundred times [to see] whether they would be more beautiful if my hands moved in one way or the other, this way or that way [She shows the movements with her hands]. (Mozafari F)

Her passion, talent and perseverance made her the best student of the Art School of National and Regional Dances of Iran. The main purpose of the school, which had been founded by the direct order of Mohammad Reza Shah and Empress Farah Diba, was to use dancers and the recordings of city and regional dances to reconstruct them and develop 'standard', 'national' forms for Iranian dances for formal performances inside and outside Iran. (Mozafari F) Thus having selected the best students, the ministry trained them by the help of foreign trainers and the original dancers from the different regions of Iran, refining these forms with the structural qualities of ballet. The best graduates of the school were, then, employed by *Veẓārat-e Farhang va Honar* (the Ministry of Culture and Art) to form a group of 'specialists' in national Iranian dance forms for formal performances. Then the ministry fired the original dancers to present the work of these newly trained professionals as the standard national forms. As Kaboli puts it,

¹⁴³ Jacqueline and Robert De Warren were employed by Pahlavi government from 1965 to 1976 to work as ballet instructors. Later on Robert travelled to different regions of Iran to collect regional dances with the support of the Empress Farah Diba and the King. For more see his website <<http://robertdewarren.org/>>.

Then we were employed and those poor ones were sent to their homes. I mean they wished to kill us, to chop our heads off. But it wasn't our fault. It was the government's decision [that] one specific [educated] group performs the dances ... to have performances abroad and publicise our national and folk dances. (Mozafari F)

The process was similar to many other top-down modernizing processes in Iran of the Pahlavi era. Following the dictates of a militarily autocratic vision, the project worked by an extreme form of centralization that craved for creating the coherent image of a nation by confronting variety. Thus though the process of modernization was usually initiated by the work of a few creative intellectuals, since it needed the financial support of the government, it was soon hijacked by the state's desire for control and a form of homogenising modernization that demanded rapid results. Thus turned into impositions, a desirable process which could easily gather grassroots support by respecting variety would easily go to extreme and create radical reactions among people, who in turn fall into other extremes. In the case of these dancers, the recording of regional dances began as academic research, but the government's radical and rushed changes simply omitted the original dancers and removed possibilities of variation, which could have provided encouragement for other forms of creativity and innovation.

Farzaneh Kaboli's performing skills made her an ever present performer in all national festivals and ceremonies, but before her graduation, she was also assigned by Robert De Warren to teach at the primary levels in the School. Her creativity and relentless approach to practicing were two factors that made her special among all her other colleagues and co-dancers. As she happily reminisces: 'I was the best among girls and boys. Not one of the best. I was the only best student of my teacher.' (Mozafari F) She, thus, functioned as a dancer, a tutor for dancers in the lower grades and an assistant for the foreign teachers. She was also the only person in her group, attending the rehearsals of ballet dancers in The National Ballet School of Iran. Her skills were, of course, not concealed from her teacher, Robert De Warren:

Most of the times, Mr. De Warren choreographed our national dances. I mean, [on] music pieces which were based on our classical/traditional music and is performed with Iranian musical instruments. Whenever he wanted to choreograph on the basis of a piece of music, he brought the tape to the dance hall and said, 'Farzaneh, come forward and dance with this.' Well I danced for him and he took notes of my movements. He took notes while I was dancing. Then later when the dances were performed, while I was standing there and watching the girls that were dancing, each was performing two to three of those movements that I had danced and Mr. De Warren had taken notes of. Then I was thrilled, noticing that the movements were mine. Well, I couldn't talk there. I said [whispers, trying not to move her lips] 'this movement is mine, these are my movements'. I mean I was so happy that I would nearly die of excitement. (Mozafari F)

Here Kaboli is referring to improvisation as one of the most important features of Iranian dance forms. As in the case of Iranian classical music and singing, Iranian dance forms are often characterized by improvisation within a given set of movements and gestures that form the semiotics of Iranian dance. Yet to improvise, the performer, as in the case of other performing arts in Iran, needs to be well-initiated in the form. In other words, authentic improvisation is only possible for a person who has become a master of the form.

In the case of dance for which there was no formal artistic training then, it mostly worked like language acquisition, through a subconscious gathering and practising of the samples that the dancer encountered and practised in her or his life. The general knowledge of dance, in these cases, functions like what Noam Chomsky refers to as linguistic 'competence', the inherent system of linguistic knowledge that an ideal native speaker possesses and can use creatively in her or his linguistic 'performance'. Kaboli was not a master, but in the absence of masters, her inherent competence acquired through exposition and practice was the ideal option for a choreographer of De Warren's capacity who knew the language of ballet, and was rapidly learning the language of Iranian dance forms, but had not complete information on how this language may work in relationship to the individual instances of Iranian music.

Therefore by the time she got employed by the Ministry of Culture and Arts, her role as a leading performer had already been recognized, but her success enhanced this recognition so that soon she was at the centre of all performances in national and international festivals. In the Royal Celebrations of 2500 Years of Monarchy in Iran, which were held in October 1971 with the presence of most of the leaders of the world, she was the only one from the School of National and Regional Dances of Iran who performed a self choreographed solo dance. She was also the only one from the School who performed along the members of the National Ballet School of Iran. Her first overseas performance was with a group of National and Regional dancers in 1972, in Saddler's Wells Theatre in London. This was the first of a series of overseas performances that continued for several years. She had a number of performances in the United States (1974, 1976 and 1977), Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, Germany and France.



The practitioners of Iranian Forum for National and Regional Dances (1970s), Kaboli in front¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Picture from <<http://www.robertdewarren.org/page9.html>>

However, in 1979 when she had established herself as a leading performer and choreographer and was at the height of her career as a professional dancer and trainer, her work was stymied by the new regulations imposed by the Islamic Republic, which outlawed dancing.

The End of an Era: Revolution, Dance and Kaboli's Career

Dance became the most demonized art form in the political system that was established in Iran after the revolution. Many art forms had the chance of surviving if they followed the political and the religious vision of the government or watched the red lines. Dance, however, was forbidden and non-approachable as a practice or a subject of study. As Kaboli puts it, to clerics and religious people dancing was equal to 'presenting one's body', a claim that she strongly disagrees with, stating that at least her version of it, is not 'presenting one's body':

I always try to make my students understand that dance is far from presenting one's body, and I never like my students to be semi-naked or reveal parts of their body because I do not want the audience be trapped by such thoughts as, this one has a good figure, that one has beautiful legs, that one is well shaped. (Mozafari F)

As it is with most performing arts, the spectatorship of dance as an art form is a convention-based process gradually developed through the socio-economic, cultural and political changes that reconfigure the relationship between the performer and the audiences. In the process the spectator is expected to note the differences between dance as vulgar entertainment investing in the revelation of body and dance as an art form that uses the aesthetic qualities of the movements of human body to express human emotion or experience. Most dancers have to be fit and have good figures, but having a good body has nothing to do with presenting it.

The 1970s marks a particular period of the history of dance in Iran in which the more educated members of the middle class, due to their exposure to festivals and to formal performances of artistic dance began to appreciate these differences. With the establishment of the new

government, however, the people who came to power, at least during the first decade of their rule, made no distinction between dance as a refined art form and dance as a vulgar erotic act in bars full of drunken roughnecks.¹⁴⁵ From the original Islamic perspective, it was the latter that had to be banned. However, since the new form was not yet properly established, its potential use was not yet clear to the establishment. The new political establishment, therefore, associated it with the Pahlavi 'westernized extravaganza' and refused to include it in its plans for use of the arts to promote revolutionary values.

If one examines the processes that create such assumptions about dance, one notices the following process: (1) the commercialization of the human body, particularly the female human body, as an object of desire and a commodity pushes economically deprived performers to present their body; (2) the gaze that reduces dance into the presentation of the body creates its own special forms of dance by encouraging them; (3) the clerics who are born within this system see this distorted gaze and its products as the ultimate product and then prohibit it. It is thus impossible for clerics to transcend this voyeuristic gaze and distinguish between the products of harmony and grace and that of sexual gaze.

Confronting the bans through theatre. Whatever the case, Kaboli and her colleagues' positions as artistic dancers were overlooked by a homogenising gaze that saw dance as a form of sexual activity or a sign of 'western corruption'. Dance was announced as forbidden and Kaboli, therefore, stopped dancing. However, like some other male and female dancers who remained in Iran, she began to act in cinema and theatre. Between 1979 and 2009, she acted in more than thirty films and theatrical performances and worked as a choreographer for ten important plays.

¹⁴⁵ My purpose is not, of course, to deny the value of dance as pure, or even erotic, entertainment. Yet in Iran the presence of dance as erotic entertainment in the bars and films was so rife that it had made it very difficult for dance to produce new artistic forms.

She thinks that her insistence on keeping herself on the stage despite all the troubles, risks and failures that it may involve was because she strongly believed in what she was doing. After the revolution, because an Islamic revolutionary country did not need any dancers, all the employees of the Ministry of Culture and Art and other dance centres were banned from dancing. The ones who had remained in Iran and had no particular 'anti-Islamic' record, however, were not fired. Some were transferred to the Office of Theatre and some to other less problematic departments in the ministry.

Kaboli's first performing role after the revolution was in Akbar Zanjanoor's adaptation of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1980), in which she and a group of players were to perform as the wind to break a tree. Yet even the act of embodying the flow of a natural element was not acceptable to the authorities of *Anjoman Eslāmi Tāātr* (the Islamic Association of Theatre), and thus they announced that 'if people want to continue working in the Office of Theatre, they should refrain from taking part in this dance or else they should go back to their homes and forget about returning'. As it may be expected, 'all the people who were supposed to dance panicked and left the role' to her and a male actor 'who decided to resist and dance'. The head of the Office of Theatre attended the rehearsals to check the dance and told her: 'Farzaneh, you are so feminine. I mean it's noticeable that you are a woman'. Her response was 'Well, what shall I do?' Farzaneh and her colleague tried to find ways to modify their costumes, using gloves and masks, to make them look completely alike so that the audience would not understand which one is a woman. But again the head of the office said 'Well, when you do this [makes a gesture with her hand], it's obvious that you are a woman. They [the hardliners] will break in and kill you. ... It's impossible to perform this.' (Mozafari F) Therefore her initial hopes for performing dance moves on the theatre stage came to nothing.

The event, once more, reveals the patriarchal fear of the feminine body as a dangerous force that attracts the gaze and entices the mind. This fear has always been at the centre of the process of the post-revolution projects of Islamization in Iran and the projects for transforming public life in Iran, with compulsory veiling as the most obvious one. In the arts, its most famous instance is in Iranian cinema in which women are not shown in their intimate relationships or in way that may attract attention to their feminine beauty. In the case of dance, however, as seen in the case above, the presence of the body on stage is so strong that nothing can cover it.

Despite this initial failure, Kaboli continued her work with theatre and cinema and in time had the opportunity to choreograph or perform minor or major acting or dancing roles in *Sarbedaran* (1981-2, TV series), *The Second Hand Citizen* (1986, film), *The Swallows* (1988, play) and *The Azure City* (1990, film). She then joined a group of other performers and her husband to establish *Harekat* group in 1991. The group now has more than one hundred dancers. Then she continued her acting career with *The Lucky Fortune* (1993, film), *The Tambur Player* (1993, play), *Tehran's Symphony* (1994, film), *Unbeknownst Sisters*, (1995, film), *Amiz Ghalamdoon* (1997, play), *The Night on the Wet Cobblestone* (1999, play), *The Epic of the Stone Revolution* (1980 & 2003, play), *The Emperor of Love* (2001, play), *Simorgh* (2002, play), *Madness Time* (2004, play), *Below the Passage of Saghā Khāneh* (2006, play) and *The Magnificent Smile of Mr. Gil* (2007 & 2008, play).

As it is clear from above, most of her post-revolution works have taken place in theatre. Since after the revolution dance was forbidden, the only method that allowed its performance was to put it in a narrative context, as a means for telling a part of the story in a stylized fashion. As a result of her experience with these theatrical performances and the fact that it helped receive permits, later during the 1990s when it became possible to negotiate new forms of performance

even in her 'dance only' performances which she choreographed on the basis of regional dance forms, she put her major dance forms in narrative contexts.

As to theatrical performances, if the context is neutral as in *Rudaki*, which depicted the life story of the Iranian poet, Rudaki (858-941), or revolutionary and pre-ordered [*sefāreshi*] as in *The Epic of Stone Revolution* (about the Palestinians' resistance against Israel) getting the permit is much easier than getting it for a scene of rape, as in *The Night on the Wet Cobblestone*. The handling of issues that are sensitive and involve the encounter of a man and a woman has always been problematic for the Iranian officials, even when the scene is very effective as a stylized demonstration of a behaviour. Yet even in the latter cases, the process is still easier than receiving a permit for a performance of Iranian regional dances.



The Epic of Stone Revolution (Tehran 2003)¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Picture from <<http://www.iranian.com/NaderDavoodi/2004/February/Sand/2.html>>

Confronting the bans through teaching. In the early 1980s, to keep fit and active, Kaboli began to work as a trainer in aerobic exercise classes held in the basement of her friend's house. Though it began with training the participants in aerobic exercises, teaching in these classes made a huge impact on her career and helped her find new ways of expression after the revolution. It was through her classes at this private club that she began to teach dance. As she explains, there were five one-hour sessions. At first, during the exercise sessions, whenever the students felt tired, she used Iranian music and dance movements to help them slow down, yet keep up with the workout.¹⁴⁷ But she gradually discovered that some participants preferred to dance rather than exercise. Thus, as she puts it, 'the desire and enthusiasm of those women' made her think of having a dance class. It started with one session a day, but expanded to five sessions. For a while she was teaching ten hours a day, five hours of aerobic and five hours of dance. These long hours exhausted her, but she had to keep the aerobic sessions to continue teaching dance: 'I was nearly dead of exhaustion, but I had so much energy and love for dancing and teaching it that I didn't feel the pressure.' (Mozafari F)

This teaching position satisfied her desire for dance, and as a result, for a time she did not try to include dance movements in the plays and films that she acted in. With the political reforms of the late 1990s; however, she began to think of new ways to practise her profession. Teaching, of course, had already become a major part of her life and though she stopped all the exercise sessions in 1991, she continued the dance sessions in her house. When I interviewed her in 2009, she taught eight or nine forty-five-minute sessions per day.

For her, teaching dance at her house has not been as straightforward a process as it was for singers and musicians. She has to be very careful about choosing her students and 'never

¹⁴⁷ As I mentioned earlier it was and still is customary to use western popular music in such classes.

accepts new students easily'.¹⁴⁸ Family background, education and career seem to be her primary criteria for selecting her students. This is, of course, acceptable and understandable in Iran. She has enough problems with the authorities and does not want to complicate the problems with those who may cause troubles for her or her students. She is meticulous in discovering her students' natural aptitudes and never overlooks wrong dance movements. She insists that her class is not like 'other dance classes' where the learners 'spend their time listening to music and assume they have learned everything in a few sessions.' (Mozafari F)

Since women [in Iran] don't have much recreation facilities besides the sports club, which are mostly boring, they would go to dance classes. Unfortunately, however, as they haven't seen any [elegant] dance, they would be satisfied with such dances and would try to learn them. (Mozafari F)

In such classes the students' 'attitudes towards dance and [their] understanding of it will be ruined'. They become false beginners whose hand and feet [movements] are wrong. It takes a while to help them get rid of those wrong movements so that they can learn the right ones.

Unlike many dance classes in Tehran, which only focus on dancing itself, hers, along with a few others, is like a professional dance school in which the training is serious and involves various exercises for breathing, jumping, whirling, bending, etc to improve the trainees' potential for harmonizing their movements. Furthermore, apart from teaching them how to dance, she tries to provide guidance for her students in their personal and artistic lives.

First Performance and conflicts. In 1997 Kaboli was asked by a charity organization to give a performance, with some of her students, in an all-female space.¹⁴⁹ Kaboli agreed and arranged a dance. As it is customary with charity performances, the ticket price was high, but

¹⁴⁸ The first time I called her home, her mother picked up the phone and anxiously asked who had given me their phone number and who I was. After I mentioned the name of the reference person, however she changed her tone and became very helpful. This constant worry is a major feature of the life of many Iranian artists.

¹⁴⁹ The charity's mission is to help children suffering from cancer. At the time, their plan was to buy some medical equipment that cost about £4, 000.

they danced for free. The event, however, was of great importance because it was the first post-revolution performance of dance per se — not as part of a play or film — for which tickets had been sold. Of course, the performance was not advertised publically but as it was, and still is, the norm, the information was given to a selected number of charitable individuals and was circulated through them to other potential contributors. The performance which was held in the Italian embassy continued for three nights. As it was a success they launched similar charity performances in the same place in 1998 and 1999 for four nights each year.¹⁵⁰

In 1999 some members of *Setād-e Amr-e be Ma'roof va Nahi az Monkar* (the Centre for Encouraging Virtuous Deeds and Discouraging Forbidden Ones)¹⁵¹ went to the gates of the embassy and asked for her because they believed that during the performance wine had been served for the guests. According to Kaboli, they had been apparently watching them with binoculars and had mistaken juice for wine. She was asked to go to the Central Judiciary Office of Tehran the following day, where she received a notice for paying a fine of one million Tomans (then about £1,100) because of her performance for the charity. The director of the programme was required to pay 300,000 Tomans (about £350).

She pleaded to a higher court and during the appeal trial talked to the judge about the philosophy of dance and, what she, as an artist, means by dancing. Convinced by her honesty and her explanations that related dance to harmony as one of God's gifts to mankind and to mystic alliance with God, the judiciary panel reduced her fine to 400,000 Tomans (about £450) under the pretexts that her intentions have been virtuous, but the result has been problematic. The fine was paid by the charity. (Mozafari F)

¹⁵⁰ After the revolution, the cultural attachés of European embassies, particularly those of Italy and Austria have on several occasions provided space for music-related activities, including the screening of opera videos.

¹⁵¹ This is one of the marginal responsibilities of individuals living in an Islamic society, but the post-revolutionary government has created an extended office with employees who stop people in the street to advise them or force them to follow the rules by imposing fines.

During the first year of Mohammad Khatami's presidency, when his proposed reforms faced severe challenge from the radicals, something happened that prevented Kaboli from continuing her film career. She and her students used to record home videos of what they had learned during the year. In 1998, one of these videos slipped out and was circulated in Tehran. In the video she and her students were dancing with their usual performance costumes, which though duly covered, were by the government's standards completely inappropriate for the mixed audience of the parents of the students.

Well, let me tell you how I was in the videos? Ha, ha, like this [points to her dresses and hair], or with my hair down. For instance with one of these leotards, that I explained earlier, collar like this [shows a broad one], skirt up to here [shows a short one] stretch trousers with a leotard. [Ironically] And that God forbid, in the Islamic Republic! (Mozafari F)

She was banned from appearing on Iranian television and cinema and sentenced to spend forty five days in Evin Prison where she was kept in the women's section along with smugglers, thieves and prostitutes.¹⁵² The prison, as she reminisces, was hard, but being banned from appearing on the screen did not disappoint her. It rather gave her more time to concentrate on theatre and the possibilities that it could provide for dance performances. Since the early 1980s after her first attempts to include dance scenes in plays failed, one of her major activities was to work as an actress. In that capacity she had appeared in more than twenty films. Now that she had been deprived of acting in films, she dedicated her love for performance to theatre and to trying to launch female-only performances. This coincided with the flourishing of Iranian theatre under the reformist Ataollah Mohajerani as the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Finding a space that was now more open to the use of dance as an expressive tool, she cooperated with her husband, the director, Hadi Marzban, to include dance in several theatrical performances.

¹⁵² The prison is a notorious one, particularly because it is the major centre for holding political dissidents.

The reformists' launching of new art festivals involving regional music and dance forms, created a better situation. In 2002, she choreographed the regional dances from seven regions of Iran to be performed in Āmin Festival. As it was a success she tried to get a permit for public performance. The permit was not issued, but she was given a permit for a female-only performance for eleven nights. The tickets were sold out in two days. The first night performance was very successful. On the second night, in the middle of the performance, while she was in the dressing room, the stage manager told her that the performance had to be shortened. She called the head of the Vahdat Hall and after a while talked to him in his office:

He said 'don't get upset. Just shorten it, skip some of the dances'. I said 'Why?' he said '... they have come from the judiciary ...' I said 'It's not a problem. We do have a permit from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance...' He said 'Yes, but they say they want to take you with them.' (Mozafari F)

Kaboli and twenty four female dancers were arrested and the rest of the performances were cancelled. All of them were taken to the Central Judiciary in a mini bus ready for them outside the Vahdat Hall. Since the minister himself, his assistant, and the heads of some related centres came to the judiciary to support them, the other dancers were released the following day at three o'clock in the afternoon. After everyone was released, she was told that she would be taken to the Tehran Office of Prosecution, but, instead, once more, she found herself at the gates of the Evin Prison, this time without being sentenced. She was sent to a section of the prison in which women who had killed their husbands were imprisoned. Fortunately, however, the direct intervention of the head of MCIG helped to relieve the pressures on her, and she was freed the following day at three o'clock in the afternoon. (Mozafari F)

Of course, the main difference between her two imprisonments was that in the second one, she had a permit and the more open-minded members of the political structure, President Khatami and his cabinet supported her. The reforms that had been put in place during Khatami's presidency had resulted in a freer cultural atmosphere, which made it possible for her to hold

public performances and face less opposition. However, the major sources of power and control, the judiciary, the military and the police forces were still in the hands of the non-elected radicals who used any opportunity to undermine the activity of reformists by frightening the artists who had been encouraged to work under the reformist system.

Dance Authorization and the Red Lines in Performances. After nearly three decades of encountering various problems and experiencing exhausting processes of rejection, correction and adjustments, Kaboli is wholly aware of red lines and restrictions. While she was choreographing the 'regional dances' that were performed in 1999 Fajr Theatre Festival, she regularly had to adjust the forms to the limits set by the council:

They would come one day and say 'no, no, here, it should not be like this' [snapping her fingers] ... The original dance of *Khorāsān* and *Bojnord* has this move for women [snaps her fingers], but they would say 'no, not this, not for women'. And I would say 'Ok, women would clap [instead of snapping], men also would clap. [But they would say] 'No, for men it [snapping] is all right.' And I would say 'Ok'. Then the following day, they would come again and say 'Madame, this stretching movement here in this part should be omitted' and [I would say] very well then I'll omit it ... and then again the next day they would come with two intelligence officers, asking questions. This went on every day, every day. (Mozafari F)

Then on the night of the same performance, the head of the Centre for Performing Arts and the head of the Security Centre of the hall talked to her.

They took me to a room and closed the door. They had wirelasses. 'Mrs. Kaboli, you should take care that the dancing women do not yell and shout. They shouldn't make sounds.' This was because the dancers were uttering sounds of hei, hei, hoo, hoo [utters the sounds rhythmically], with snapping and clapping. In regional dances these sounds are made quite naturally, 'Ladies shouldn't laugh.' For six months I had told them to show their teeth, laugh, and make noises and now [they said], 'They shouldn't laugh and make noises.' Well, I had no other choice. (Mozafari F)

She explains that it is a real shame that regional dances are gradually disappearing only because of lack of support. Once in a trip for a film, she visited a family in one of the *Bakhtiāri* tribes of *Fārs* province and requested the mother of the family to dance for her.

She took two hankies in hands and started dancing. I was in ecstasy and said to myself, 'it is such a pity'. She said 'we can't usually dance even in weddings. We can't. We fear that they [the revolutionary guards] will come. If they come, they will make trouble.' The dances have been transferred to the next generation through the few chances that the families have to perform, but unfortunately they don't have enough opportunities to practise and proper place to perform. (Mozafari F)

Apart from the problems that she faces while designing regional dances, she also has to overcome restrictions on the theatrical performances of dances. She regrets that Ferdowsi's *Zāl o Roodābeh* could be performed in the USA but not in Iran.¹⁵³

Yes, it was very important for me that Ferdowsi's *Zāl o Roodābeh* was being performed in another country. But it is now five years that I have been suggesting a performance of Nezami's *Leili o Majnoon* [to the council] for five years, and it has been rejected each time for five years.¹⁵⁴ Last year I was told that I am allowed to work on it. And I choreographed and rehearsed one and a quarter of an hour of it. Then they came ... and rejected it. I do wish from the bottom of my heart that this art form will be revived ... and [people] can see live dance performances even on the stage of the theatre [as part of a play]. (Mozafari F)

The situation is aggravated, of course, by the conflicts that exist between the various governmental organizations that determine cultural policies. The conflicts create a chaos that makes the work of artists and cultural activists very insecure. As they are waiting and practising for the rare moments, the 'once in a while' opportunities that they may have for performances, they always worry about the possibility of confronting the opposition of radicals. But even these few performances require a lot of compromise and patience on the part of the artists and organizers. The performers have to undergo a lot of stress to get official permits — which, nevertheless, does not guarantee a safe performance.

In 2001, for instance, Kaboli was allowed to choreograph a thirty-minute work for a festival, yet to get the permit, the heads of several different offices needed to see and authorize the performance. Therefore, they attended a rehearsal to see and decide if they would grant the

¹⁵³ Based on a legend in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (ca. 1000) the ballet was produced by Robert De Warren in 2001.

¹⁵⁴ *Leili o Majnoon* is a poetic love story by the twelfth century Persian poet Nezami Ganjavi (1141-1209).

permission. What is ignored in these kinds of processes, however, is the amount of agonizing stress and at times self-censorship that a professional has to undergo to get the approval of a number of officials who do not know anything about her profession: 'In my way to the place of the preview performance, I was so nervous that it was as if my heart was coming to my mouth/ I was extremely agitated. I felt awful. ... I nearly died [of stress] because ... I thought that they would say no.' (Mozafari F) All this stress, all this checking and rechecking, it is good to know, was just for two nights of performance in a year.

One of the major reasons why she dances in theatrical performances is that in comparison to dance per se performances, which occur very rarely, they give her more opportunities for practising her skills. One surprising turn of events came in 2003, when she was given a two night performance permit for a thirty-minute piece for Fajr International Theatre Festival and later a one-month permit for a series of one-hour evening public performances, which were warmly welcomed by the audience. Yet from the artists' perspectives, such happy turns are rare. In fact, they seem to be always engaged in praying, negotiating and waiting for miracles that may positively influence the opinions of the members of decision making councils. The opportunities are so rare that sometimes they themselves cannot believe what is happening: 'The performance was great, perfect. Sometimes when I see the video, I say to myself 'Dear God, has this happened under the Islamic Republic?!' Yes, it happened.' (Mozafari F)

To keep working in this atmosphere, compromise is essential, yet the pain of this compromise is sometimes so intense that many artists have either kept silent and retired to their homes or, as it has been customary since 1979, have left or are trying to leave the country. For those who are working inside the country, however, it is vital. For instance, after the two-night performances of regional dances in the Fajr Theatre Festival, Kaboli tried to get a permit for a public

performance because she did not want to see her choreography used for such a limited period. She tried hard, but what she finally got was a permit for a female only performance.

They said 'women for women.' I said 'Ah! Women and men were on stage and they performed for men and women. So why women for women?' They said 'Mrs. Kaboli, women for women.' I thought for a while and realized that if I don't do it the way they want it, they won't allow me to perform. Anyway, I started again, because I had to choreograph it again, I mean I had to omit the men's part. (Mozafari F)

Some of these discrepancies, of course, can be explained in term of the desire of the government to impress foreign visitors of the international festivals by including such performances which signify an inclusive approach to art forms and to women's performing practices. Thus the performance can be done in a festival that glorifies the national in the face of the global, but cannot be allowed in the mainstream system of permitted performances which may face the criticism of religious radicals.

Kaboli believes that if she had rejected that performance she would have lost an opportunity, although it meant that she had to change the choreography and omit the men's part. It is interesting that in some dances where men have crucial roles she used women to put on men's dresses and dance men's parts. 'I said to myself "well let's have men, even though fake ones."' Though her approach to the problem was unique, it reminds us of the traditional private performances of women dance and play troupes, who dressed and made up female performers as men. It also reminds us of Kaboli's school days when, since she was designing dance in a girl only school, she sometimes dressed up girls as boys.

When she told officials she intended to dress women as men, they said, it is okay, but, that though the performance was a female-only one, the dancers had to wear their scarves. In response, she reminded them of men's hats and said, 'For the sake of the dance itself, they can't take the hats and scarves off. Theirs is a regional/ folk costume. Everything has to have its original form. It's obvious that they will keep their scarves and hats on.' " (Mozafari F)

Since the late 1990s, therefore, Kaboli has occasionally been allowed to perform and choreograph for festivals and formal ceremonies. For instance, she had dance performances for the closing ceremony of 2002 Āmin Festival and the opening ceremony of The Women's Olympic of Islamic Countries (*Olampik-e Bānovān-e Keshvarhā-ye Eslāmi*) of 2005. She has also had overseas performances and choreographed for other dancers who have performed abroad. Nevertheless, unlike Parissa who performs without the Islamic cover outside Iran; in her overseas programmes, as her five day programme in Canada in 2008, she mostly works as director and choreographer and does not engage in dance.

Choreography. Kaboli does not use any system of dance notation. This reveals the impact of the Iranian system of teaching music through oral transmission, or dance through actual movements, from master to the pupil on modern dance education in Iran. Part of the reason is that before the revolution dance was rather slow to develop as an academic subject and that during the last thirty years it has had no academic life. As a result, the notation system was never widely used. Kaboli's method for choreography is improvisation, which means that that she designs the dancers' movements while they are practising.

I first listen to the music to see if it works for me, if it is good for my purpose. If it is, I don't listen to it anymore. I do the choreography with the dancers, just then. I never listen to a piece of music more than once because when I do so, my mind locks up. I mean, basically I can't work on it anymore. For this reason I just try to do it the first time. When I hear it for the first time it brings many movements to my mind.
(Mozafari F)

When a new movement comes to her mind, she needs to practice it at the moment so that she would not forget it. This was so even when she was at Prison for forty-five days. When a movement came to her mind, she had to practice it and maintain it in her mind.

I lived in a terrible condition for one month and a half. It might be interesting for you, dear Parmis, to know that once in one of those days, suddenly a movement came to my mind. I said [to myself] 'Where shall I go? Where?' Immediately I went — please,

accept my apology — to the loo. I locked the door and started to practice the movement. At that time, there were five loos next to each other all with iron doors. I kept on dancing and dancing not to forget it. I told myself ‘oh God; I should dance it every day until I get out of here. I never want this beautiful movement, which has occurred to me in a moment of inspiration to be lost’. But suddenly I heard someone banging on the door punching and kicking, and, ah, cursing. There [in prison] they use bad language with no trouble.... (Mozafari F)

For Kaboli it is crucial to offer something new in every performance, a tendency which has its roots in her first experiences with choreography when she was at secondary school: ‘I insisted that if this Mother’s Day we had a *Lezgi* dance,¹⁵⁵ next time on another occasion, I would arrange another dance. I mean, everything had to be new for my audiences.’

As she explains, she was once asked to choreograph a scene of mourning in a play, a task that would have become very easy and yet symbolic if she had followed the movements of *āshura* rituals. Yet she wished to transcend the form by doing something new: ‘I thought if I show the same ritual of self flagellation and chest beating that people do every year during *Moharram ta’ziyeh* rituals, it’s worth nothing. So I decided to do something else, a unique performance.¹⁵⁶ Well, the result was indeed different’. She used techno music in combination with religious chants to create the impression of mourning with a hundred dancers on stage.

Apart from using regional music for devising and performing regional dances, Kaboli has also used other types of music. This is mostly because after the revolution her work changed to be a combination of dance and theatre or, better to say, dance at the service of theatre. She has, therefore, used classical traditional or National Iranian music,¹⁵⁷ popular and techno music,

¹⁵⁵ A dance form that is popular in North Western Iran, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.

¹⁵⁶ For more on Moharram mourning ceremonies see Kamran Scot Agahaie, *The Martyres of Karbala: Shi’i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*, (Washington: WUP, 2004).

¹⁵⁷ The term ‘national’ can be used for any kind of Iranian melodies — regional, classical, religious, etc. — arranged for symphonic orchestra and some Iranian musical instruments.

revolutionary songs or even religious chants. For instance, her *Simorgh* (2001), which was on stage for one month, was on the basis of Attar's *Conference of the Birds* (1177) and a well-known symphony piece by Loris Cheknavarian, the Iranian-Armenian composer.

Décor, Dressing and Make Up in Performances. Before the revolution, Kaboli was a professional dance performer and the décor and costume were designed and constructed by the choreographers, stage designers and other members of the staff. Therefore, she had no hand in determining the dress and décor. For regional dances, as she explains, the original village dresses were normally used to design the costumes and for other dances it was the designer's decision. In the performances after the revolution, however, she had to work as both the dancer and the choreographer and, thus, has made key decisions on how to dress up the dancers and design the stage. Of course, this is not unique to Kaboli. Due to the lack of technical facilities during the economic embargos of the 1980s or the absence of governmental support in general, many artists had to learn how to deal with numerous shortcomings and function in various positions to facilitate their work.

As to costume, she believes that the audience should not want to see the dance because of the dancer's body: 'I think that anywhere in the world when a viewer wants to see the body of the dancer, s/he should go and see those kinds of dances [semi-naked or so]'. Her argument originates in the idea that people dance because they have to dance not because they want to show themselves and that dance as an art form is still in the process of existential becoming which involves separating itself from those forms that have developed in response to the sexual gaze of some male spectators. But her argument also has a more complicated origin. Due to the nature of censorship and control in Iran, the practitioners need to condemn most dance forms in order to be able to offer one or two forms as the sublimated artistic forms.

After the revolution, traditional, classical Iranian music became very popular because other types of music were banned. However, after the first decade of the revolution, with the arrival of video players and satellite receivers, and a relatively more open socio-political atmosphere, once more, popular music got the upper hand over traditional, classical Iranian music. But for dance the story was different. As dance was, and still is one of the most popular and at the same time the most forbidden art form after the revolution, unlike traditional music, classical and regional dances did not have the chance of flourishing in the absence of popular forms. Therefore during the 1980s and 1990s, it was the popular dance that through the video cassettes of diaspora artists in the USA and later satellite TV channels filled the indoor lives of Iranians. This means that artistic dance forms faced more problems than the popular ones. The situation was, and to some extent still is, so desperate that despite her positive mentality, she sometimes becomes disappointed about the possibility of institutionalizing dance as an art form in Iran: 'Nobody cares for this art form, and I believe it would gradually disappear and die in this country... I will do my best but it can't be done [without government's support].' (Mozafari F)

As to the décor, she does not like flashy and crowded ones and follows a minimalist approach if possible: 'If we perform an elaborate dance, we won't need any décor and we can even work in front of a dark curtain.' In dance forms other than the regional ones, she is keen on the black leotard that 'makes the body look well shaped without showing it.' This of course is not allowed in mixed performances as the main dress code rule for women after the revolution is that the dress should be long and loose enough to cover the shape of one's body.

In addition to her personal belief that makes her design her dance forms for properly covered bodies, Kaboli also tries not to violate the post-revolution dress codes for women. In an all-female performance for charity where the dancers were supposed to buy their own dresses, one of her dancers could not find a long sleeved leotard, so she asked Kaboli if she could wear

a short sleeved one. 'I said 'no', because some people from the Office of the Supreme Leader or the Office of the President may come to see the program, and I don't want them to think that I let your hands out for the pleasure of the viewers.'

Thus as in the case of Maliheh Saeedi, it is this mixture of inevitable compromise, hard work and bold energy that has helped Kaboli survive under the Islamic republic and transform some of the bans on dance. This flexibility is a critical necessity for any artist who wishes to survive and continue to work under the Islamic republic. Yet Kaboli has strong ideals that have never left her during the last three decades. I will examine these views and psychological tendencies in the context of her relationships with her family.

Ideals, Identity, Personality and Family Support

For Kaboli dance is a means of self expression, a path where she can examine new ways of being and demonstrate her identity and the creative aspects of her personality. 'I am there to give that [message of] determination to the audience and demonstrate the confidence with which the girls/women make the right movements. And the people understand it. They are very intelligent, very clever and they keep saying it to me.' She remembers that once Sima Bina, the famous female singer, who is also a painter, told her that she talks through her dances: 'I watched your dances as if I am looking at a painting. [While you were dancing] I felt that you can talk to me with those movements, because I could understand you. I sometimes speak through my painting, and you do that through your dances.' (Mozafari F)

This desire to communicate through her work and act as a role model for strength is at the heart of Kaboli's work. Her message, as she states, is a message of love and perseverance which despite all the pressures and bans she tries to share with her audience. She insists that:

'In my opinion, dance is the creation and presentation of all those movements that one is not able to or allowed to talk about. I think the creation of those movements is beautiful. I mean this connection I can make with my audience [is beautiful] it's great that I can speak to my audience in different situations [through dance].' (Mozafari F)

Yet Kaboli also states that all of these have become possible due to family support. With the degree of demonization that impacted the lives of professional dancers after revolution, the issue of family support became even more important than the pre-revolution era. The support that the Pahlavi government provided for dance-related activities was now replaced by a total ban and possible prosecution that necessitated family support. Kaboli believes that her husband's support was one of the main factors in her success in continuing her work. She states that her husband consciously included dance scenes in his theatrical performances to provide opportunities for her to demonstrate her skills in this restricted field. Thus Kaboli believes that by including dance scenes in his work, Marzban has been as brave as she has been in challenging the dominant discourse on dance. This is important because the process of negotiation to gain a performance permit for a play would be much more difficult if it includes dance scenes. She also appreciates her husband's support during her imprisonment.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I studied the career of Farzaneh Kaboli, the leading dancer and choreographer, to contemplate her intellectual, professional and emotional response to the bans. The chapter depicted her as a talented, energetic woman who has tried to continue her career through a variety of methods, teaching, acting in theatrical productions and films, choreographing for other dancers and performing in festivals and in female-only performances. The chapter, therefore, depicted the career of a leading practitioner whose approach to the post-revolution problems and bans revealed another form of resistance that has gradually transformed the status of female performers in post-revolution Iran.

Conclusion: Music, Dance and Post-revolution Iran

In my thesis, I went through the history of Iranian music to provide the context for my study of the lives of three practitioners in contemporary music. I selected these practitioners to discuss the multiplicity of intellectual, emotional and professional attitudes that characterizes the response of female musicians towards the problems that they faced during their careers, particularly after the revolution. A major focus of my study throughout the thesis was the process through which Iranian classical music, song and dance were reconstructed during the 1960s and 1970s and how they transformed through the agency of female practitioners after the revolution. Thus it was gradually revealed through the general chapters on instrumental performance, song and dance and the case studies that supported them that many of these forms began to be reconstructed through a top-down development approach that tried to modify them for standardization by any means possible. Yet whereas in the case of music and song the major movement during the period was characterized by a back-to-the-roots approach that released new sets of forces in Iranian music and song; in dance the process was a belated westernized modernization that was derailed after the revolution. In other words, what happened to Iranian music during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century through its encounter with western music began to happen to Iranian dance in the 1960s by its encounter with ballet. Dance, therefore, never went through the return-to-the-roots movements of the other two forms that tried to make them 'authentic' by enhancing the imaginary or real qualities of pre-modern music in them.

Within the same context of transition and transformation, in relationship to Saeedi's work, I focused on her work to turn *ghānoon* into an 'authentic' Iranian instrument by reconstructing it and using it for different types of Iranian music. In Parissa's case, since her approach is characterized by a rather idealistic attachment to the form of music in which she was trained in

CPPTMI I made regular references to the working of the term, 'authentic' and described it in the context of the vision of the people who launched the centre. I emphasized in the case of other people who worked with CPPTMI, rather than creating forms that were similar to the pre-modern forms, the process of reconstruction created new forms of standardization that triggered new forces in Iranian instrumental and song performances. But in the case of Parissa, the vision seemed to limit itself to an ideal that though silenced for a long time was reborn by finding its performance space outside the country.

As to Kaboli, the key term was 'theatre', which gave her the new space in which she could practise her profession. Yet what is significant in her case is that already by the very act of attaching dance to narrative performance, she inadvertently took one step towards making her style of dance more similar to the traditional female only dance practices in which narrative and theatrical games were essential. The same was true about her approach to choreography, which used improvisation and action rather than notation. In other words, though she was concerned with maintaining the type of dance in which she had been trained; her products have come closer to Iranian dance forms as they were possibly practised in pre-modern era.

The common denominator of all the three figures, however, was that they began to teach much more than they may have done before the revolution. As discussed in the chapter on instrumentalist, the sheltering of musicians in relentless teaching was one of the only ways through which they could survive, yet it was this very act of helpless teaching that produced the numerous musicians of the younger generation. In this regard, the roles of these women have been significant because they have produced new forms that did not exist before them, and trained numerous students who are likely to create new forms of their own.

Most of these forms, have, of course, been the result of the bans that forced these practitioners to find new strategies to continue working. Some of them are also doomed to be discontinued if

the bans are relieved and people can produce music in the styles that they wish without prohibitions. Co-singing or female-only gatherings, for instance, are not likely to survive. Yet the same reactions have also created forms that are likely to survive. Using dance in narrative contexts, focusing on instrumental performance rather than glorifying the singers, using a classical instrument in different forms of performances, or singing with instrument-focused groups despite being a major traditionalist singer, are all new developments that are likely to remain valid in the long run.

The major Iranian female performers, therefore, have continued to practise their profession in ways that have transformed the music life of their countries. Whether keeping silent in the country and singing abroad, as Parissa did, or doing everything that one can do by experimenting with new forms within the limits of Iranian music culture, as Saeedi and Kaboli did; the result has turned professional frustration into a formidable force that has helped them survive and transform their environment by teaching and producing new artistic forms and new practitioners whose work deserve attention. I focused on three major masters because I wished to pursue the lives of three major performers who were at the height of their professional career as performers, yet there are many other women who began their works after the revolution and their work deserves attention, particularly because now, unlike the era of Pahlavi modernization, rather than the government, these young practitioners are the ones who determine the course of cultural renovation and change.

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Discography and Filmography

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