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THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN AHL-E HAVÂRITUAL A STUDY IN MUSIC THERAPY

Ahmad Reza ESMAEILI^{1*}, Parichehr KHAJEH²

¹ Music Lecturer, Department of Composition, Tehran University of Art, Tehran, Iran.

² Music Lecturer, Department of Iranian Music, Tehran University of Art, Tehran, Iran.

***Corresponding Author**

Email: esmaeili.ahmadreza@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper is an analytical study in which the phenomenon of music therapy has been examined based on the essential role of music in Ahl-e Havâritual. Apart from the fundamental and general functions of the music, the physiologic and mental effects of music, a concise observation of Ahl-e Havâritual, the emergence of Ahl-e Havâritual in Iran, and the origins and the cultural aspects of this ritual in southern regions of Iran are also reviewed in this paper. The results of this study underscore the role of music in Ahl-e Havâ ritual. The status of music, as well as other constituent elements of this ritual, and the representation of auditory patterns have been considered in the present paper.

Keywords: Music therapy, Ahl-e Havâ ritual, musical culture, fundamental functions, Zâr.

INTRODUCTION

Musical expression and body movements are two fundamental elements in *Ahl-e Havâ* ritual. Scholars believe that these early-day experiences, even in form of songs or music and/or paintings had the functional role of preserving the essential abilities needed for subsistence. Manifestations of the Shamanistic tradition coincided with the stimulus of living in this tradition – a way of perceiving the world that emphasizes on the existence of spirits, ghosts, and gods who interact with men, and inhabit objects.

Today, the issues in music therapy could be observed from two different perspectives. The first viewpoint includes a series of beliefs that have existed since the early ages in various traditions recommending therapy through music. The second perspective includes that of music therapists and psychologists found in several studies and experiments defined on the basis of various effects of music on therapy for mental and physical disabilities – an outlook expanded since the early twentieth century. *Safi al-Din al-Urmavi* suggested a specific type of tunes, sounds and melodies which are in concordance with the mental and physical and/or ethnic moods of the listener. He proposes, for example, if there are wealthy as well as poor people attending a gathering, songs with modulation should be performed.

On the other hand, *Onsor-ol-maâlî* expanded on the self-awareness of the listener, and enumerated the characteristics of a professional musician. He also mentioned the relation between Sanguine, Melancholic, and Phlegmatic dispositions as well as that of the mental moods/states of the listener, and for each of these dispositions, he proposed a type of music

therapy. Based on the literature and studies by the Iranian scholarssuch *asal-Fârâbi*, *al-Biruni*, and *IbnSinâ*, music could be regardedas the art of taking over the world. In this regard, the writings of *Qolâm Hosein Saedi*, particularly his work titled “*Ahl-e Havâ*” [people of the air]is worth mentioning. The researcher has mainlyfocused on what he has observed and heard,and does not focus on the subject as in academic research, or, in other words, the author only provides a brief observation in this field. Another worthwhile source in identifying theregional music in Iran includes the work by *Mohammad-Rezâ Darvishi*, cited several times in this study, where he studies the methods in whichperforming music in *Ahl-e Havâ* ritualispresented and performed.

The main reason why the study and observation of *Ahl-e Havâ* ritual, and the role of music in it, is difficult is the fact that this custom has become almost extinct in the recent decades, and the ritual could be observed only in very rare cases.

Based on some theories, body language has a longer history than the natural language. Undoubtedly, knowing the origin of most human activities, like music, relies on an understanding of the human body. One of the first reactions of an individual after he or she focuses on a piece of music is an increase in excitement. Excitement isthe state of being emotionally aroused and worked up which is at the minimum during sleep,and whenhuman beings experience the intense feelings like agitation, sorrow, or sexual impulse, excitement would be at its maximum. The most intense states of excitement arepainful and undesirable, but, the lesser degrees of excitement are coveted as the strengthening states of living (Astor 2004, 44).

Psychologically, there is a link between creativity and mental disease, but, this does not mean that all creative individuals are mentally ill, whilethe uncommon case of the thoughts of a creative person and those of a mental patient are so similar. The predisposition for the creative thinking relies on the specific mental functions related to the awareness and non-awareness of one’s identity. Despite the things assumed about the excitement and illogical characteristics, the mental function is not only related to the sensory states, but also it is related to the logical and structural patterns.

We may elucidate *Ahl-e Havâ* ritualand its underlying characteristicsbased on the descriptions of spirit possession beliefs and practices on the southern coasts ofIran.

With the increasingpresence of people of African lineage in the Persian gulf and Oman sea coastlines, almost from *Jâsk* port to *Bushehr* port, the culture, beliefs and customs of these people influenced the culture and beliefs of the people who used to livein those quarters. In time, the culture of people dwelling those regions evolved, so that the new culture contained many traditional African characteristics.

MAIN BODY

This study investigates the musical characteristics of *Ahl-e Havâ* ritualand compares it with similar characteristics in music therapy in amodern and traditional form. Also, the influential factors on this phenomenon are studied.For this purpose, a brief description of history of *Ahl-e Havâ* ritual and the emergence of this phenomenon as an appropriate case of music therapy is presented. Finally, an analysis and a comparative study of the sound patterns have been



provided. In terms of methodology, the present paper is a library research while an auditory analysis of the sound patterns in *Ahl-e Havâ* rituals is provided where needed.

In the most traditional paper sheet music, songbooks, and musicbooks in Iran, the therapeutic effects or various moods brought about in humans by tones and tonality are mentioned. Among the effective factors in representing, performing and selecting the music in accordance with the time and local characteristics is the concordance of the music tonality with the meeting session in question. Like many mystical fiction genres, music could transit the traditional values, aesthetics, social, and ethic criteria. Undoubtedly, a culture without music cannot be found today, and music is a fundamental characteristic in the early traditions and customs of Native American, African and Asian tribes. In *Ahl-e Havâ* ritual and tradition, several characteristics of African people combined with the culture of Iranian people and this is believed to be a relatively new phenomenon. The beliefs and attitude of individuals in organizing *Ahl-e Havâ* rituals is comparable to those found in music therapy. Undoubtedly, one of the important structural factors of these traditions is the music therapy. As mentioned previously, the function of music therapy is observed in current era through the lens of various attitudes and thoughts. Undoubtedly, the modern achievements in the creation of music therapy are realized through the consideration of the effects of musical performance and the relevant historical backgrounds. The main question to consider is "For what reasons was music used in different fields?" Inherently, music is an abstract phenomenon with its origin far from the natural reality as shown in visual arts. In fact, the musical experience of humans could present the most effective abstract concepts, and it is this effective aspect that has been used in music therapy.

The diverse characteristics in experiencing excitement show that music is a strong motive in reaching an experience combining multiple senses – a stimulus for the sense of hearing with its changing sounds; a stimulus found in its vibrations; and a visual stimulus that could be found with the presence of a hearer during a live performance. The important point is the mental perception which leads to the understanding of the excitement either intensely or weakly. Most of the processing and perceiving of music occurs in the right hemisphere of the brain; however, the various relevant mental analyses are not concentrated in the same region of the brain. In other words, from a neurological point of view, the total understanding of music in its various aspects needs the interaction of data in both hemispheres of the brain. The main question is "What music activities is a person seeking music therapy involved in?"

These music activities may include singing, playing the musical instruments, listening to the music, composing a song, moving oneself with music, and digesting the poems or characteristics of songs or the combination of the musical instruments that are being played. Hence, not only is not the reaction of the person seeking music therapy neutral, but it is also active and integrated with music skills. In other words, having in mind the diversity of the music activities, selecting a type of activity is interrelated with the specific type of music therapy, and this is a very important issue in this topic. Music therapy is appropriate for mental disorders, visual and auditory vulnerabilities, communicative disorders, orthopedically disabled people, and behavioral and mental disorders in children, youth and adults.

Music therapy

From early on, music has been mainly a collective activity. For instance musicians, traditional music, and video music all appear in a social milieu. Today, most of the social customs and



activities include some form of music. Some of the effects of music in human activities lead to the physiologic and physical reactions in different groups of people, so that during a collective event, all the individuals would reach a hearing experience in the same period of time. This social concord and joint feeling is the main function in the field of music, and this how most of affairs were organized and controlled in the early societies. The other important issue mentioned in the process of formation of music therapy has been the auditory system. The complex auditory system and the function of its various parts play an important role in hearing, and it is also necessary for obtaining the necessary information about the position of the body. The auricle in the inner ear handles the coordination of body with gravity, perceives the decrease and increase in velocity and acceleration, the direction and the angle of rotation, the vertical position, and some other factors that help control the body and its movements. Besides, the physical effects of music on physiologic moods of the body, and introduction of harmonized musical patterns that generate cohesion in people's moods, over time, could help organize the disorganized thoughts and issues in mind. Based on this assumption, music therapists have taken into consideration rhythm and structural order. As mentioned previously, issues in music therapy are defined and depicted in a link between the person who seeks music therapy and the music therapist. Today, a music therapist is familiar with the music and the musician – that is why the music therapist has to be familiar with the psychological techniques as well.

Ahl-e Havâ Ritual

Ahl-e Havâ ritual and traditions in southern regions of Iran emerged with the arrival of immigrants from other territories like Africa, India, and Arabic sheikhdoms. The communications and interactions in these regions by the sea are for economic purposes, but the superstitions, beliefs and customs of Indian and Arabic cultures along with those of the Iranians also intermingled in these regions.

We may illuminate *Ahl-e Havâ* ritual and its underlying characteristics based on the descriptions of spirit possession beliefs and practices on the southern coasts of Iran. The harsh living conditions and the miserable lifestyle of the people living along the southern coastlines are replete with anxiety and fear which facilitate the emergence of mental distresses and disorders. Fatigue and boredom of the monotonous daily life lead these people to isolation. In such conditions the *Ahl-e Havâ* ritual could be helpful by gathering people together and far away from their pains. In *Ahl-e Havâ* ritual, stories and fantasies from various coastline regions are told, with magic, superstition, and slavery, as their main elements. *Ahl-e Havâ* are the ones who are captivated and possessed by the wind. The belief of *Ahl-e Havâ* is a very old belief about possession that has remained from the animistic period. It includes a strong belief in ghosts and demons. In the earliest cultures, possession was considered to be a partial possession rather than a total one. Psychologically, the state of possession is like schizophrenia in most of the cases where the patient's behavior is influenced by a force or thoughts which do not belong to him/her. In most psychological investigations into possession, hysteria characteristics are observed. Karl Jaspers pointed out the long history of possession over the centuries where he stated that the entering of demons and ghosts, and the possessing of the body of a person occurs such that his/hervoice and facial gestures and utterances display the other entity's personality. But, Karl Jaspers has also mentioned that the patient with this condition would feel two different things in two different personalities. The imaginary feeling of the patients of being outside the body is common in the



possession phenomenon in individuals. The mystical signs of these “winds” changed and transformed over time relevant with the geographical location. For instance, *Zâr* model, which transited from Abyssinia (Ethiopia) to the Islamic territories, is known by various names and categories in different Asian and African Islamic estates. In Ethiopia, the name *Zâris* taken from god of the sky in *kosh*’s polytheistic religion whose name was *jar*. In African culture, *Zâr* assumed to be a remedy; in Ethiopia, Muslims and Christians believe that *Zâr* could be taken out from the possessed human body through use of talismans. In *hijâz*, it has been believed that *Zâr* was practiced by Ethiopians slaves. Researchers who have made an effort to find the origins of *Zâr* have concluded that *Zâr* came to the southern coastlines of Iran from the African coastlines. Thirteenth types of *Zâr* with distinctive mysticisms and history have been found in southern Iran. Most of the afflicted individuals are from the slum areas. Most people believe that physicians cannot heal *Zâr* and only the ones who have the knowledge of *Zâr* could heal it. These are the ones who have previously suffered from *Zâr*, so, through exorcism and their sufficient knowledge, they could heal the ones with *Zâr*. A specific ritual and instrumentation is needed for the ones suffering from *Zâr*, and the musical instruments for healing the ones with *Zâr* are totally different. The rituals provided for the ones with mental or physical disorders and it may take hours or days. Patients with a background of hysteria or nervous moods may be healed only in one or in several rituals after which they would be known as *Ahl-e Havâ* [people of the air]. So, several people with nervous moods or psychopathic background could find each other and develop a group. Through this, hysteria and nervous expressions from which the patients suffer could be restrained, and, the patients find in this, a formal place for remedy and solace.

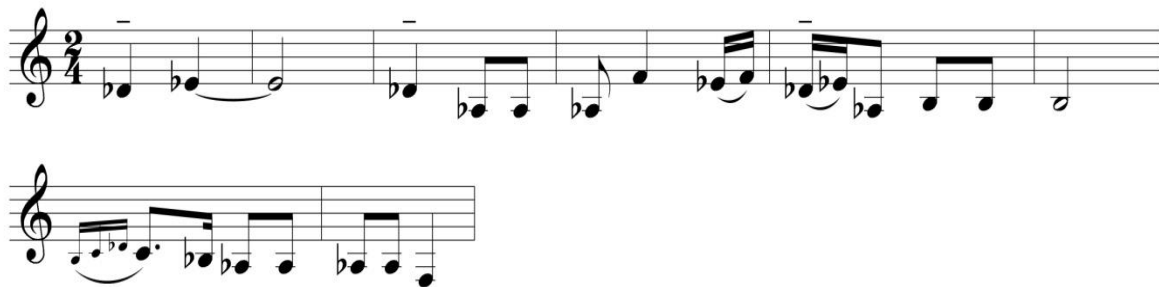
DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Music is the most important element in *Ahl-e Havâ* ritual. Surely, different music types rely on the region in which those music types have grown and developed. Notwithstanding, the African music forms could be found in the southern regions of Iran. In several regions of *Hormozgân* and *Khuzestân* provinces, the musical traces of the Arabic sheikhdoms, and in the eastern regions of *Hormozgân* up to the furthest regions in *Sistân-va-Baluchestan* province, the culture and musical forms of the eastern neighbors like Pakistan and India, could be found. As mentioned previously, the form and type of *Ahl-e Havâ* rituals are different in various regions in the south. This difference can be observed in the performing of the music, the musical instruments, and the spaces for the songs – for instance, in *Gwâtî* ritual in the Iranian *Baluchestan*, the combination of *Ghychak* and *Tamburak* instruments are used along the songs, and with the songs in *Zâr* rituals in *Hormozgân*, and in *Nobâ* rituals in *Qeshm* island a combination of Percussion instruments with *Tambiré* musical instrument are used. Generally, rituals are performed in steps and in each step various forms of excitement for the patient or others present in *Ahl-e Havâ* group could be observed. This trend in *Zâr* rituals starts with the slow beats on drums and as time goes on, *Ahl-e Havâ* group starts chanting poems that mostly include Arabic words with little Persian words, as well as words denoting the geography of the seashore. Little by little the drums gain in momentum and the body movements and dances of the ones in *Ahl-e Havâ* group intensifies as well. At this stage, the atmosphere of the ritual is replete with aroma and smoke, and date fruits are given to the *Ahl-e Havâ* group at the end of the ritual. Also, in the end, a sheep is sacrificed. Mainly, the movements and the stir in the patient is the reason for the trembling of his/her body,

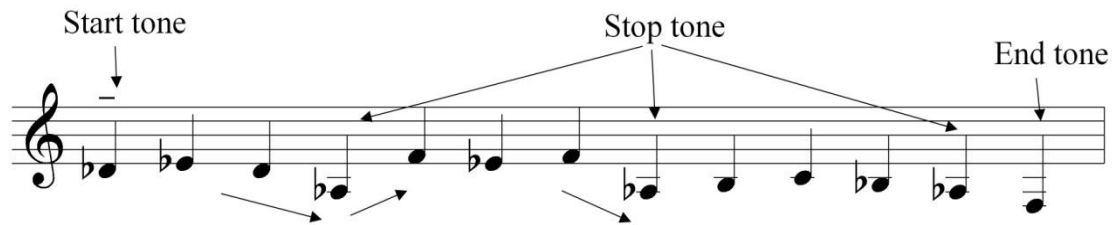


and then physical and mental excitement peaks in the patient. Thereafter in this stage, if the wind is observed to be “restrained” it is a sign of recovery; otherwise the rituals will continue all the night. The main characteristic in most of these rituals is the repetition of melodic and rhythmic patterns and figures. *Gwâti* utterances, *Nobân* and *Zâr* songs and sentences in a continuous cycle with various intensities and weaknesses during the performing would lead to a mood of trance in *Ahl-e Havâ* group which is similar to the chant sung by the *Dervishes*. The observation of the music rituals in these regions show the origins of formation and the gradual changes – for instance, the African music genre influence in *Nobân* song “*Bâbâ Darvish* and *Mâmâ Hanif* (*Ye Bâbâ Allah, Varvara*)” is crystal clear.

Ye Bâbâ Allah, Varvara



The musical intervals and the tune of the song is a distinctive pattern which in terms of melody and figure is not similar to the music in other regions of Iran. This chanting period is repeated singly and in choir, as a response to the solo singer, several times with little modifications.

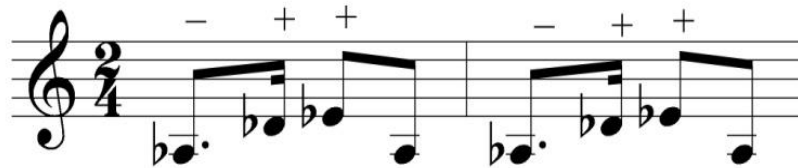


In the other *Zâr* song named *Daykatu* with the sound of “*Mâmâ Hanife*” a more moderate melodic movement and tune, with a distinctive characteristic, is observable:

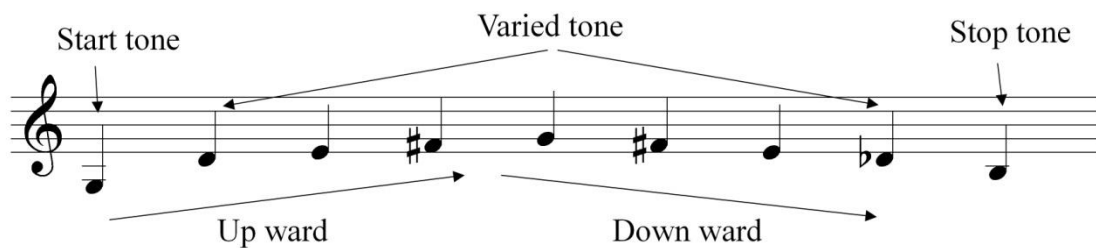
Daykatu



Another African influence in this song is the use of *Tambiré* musical instrument which was imported to Iran simultaneously with the immigration of people of African descent, who regarded it as a sacred instrument. The melodic pattern of *Tambiré* and adjustment of its tune do not rely on the main mode:



This song includes modal changes and two ascending and descending movements as follows:



The *Zâr* Songs by *Qolâm-Ali Mârgiri* is another instance of songs in these rituals. Geographically, songs by *Qolâm-Ali Mârgiri* are performed in east of *Minâb* in *Hormozgân* province. The culture in this region is an intermediary between two cultures in the west of *Baluchestân* and the east of *Hormozgân*. The combination of the two music genres is well demonstrated in *Mast-e Qalandar* piece by *Mârgiri*. The accompanying percussion instrument is *Daf*, also called *Samâ*. The following song is in the form of question and answer between two solo singers:



Daf

Song

Daf

In this section, melody is a reminder of the Passion plays in *Minâb* region which are very similar to the Iranian *dastgâhi* music. The turning points and the progress of the melody are as follows:

Start and Stoptone

First stop

Second stop

Start melody

Peak of melody

Decline

Below, change in the meter and the tempo leads to a modification in the modal mood. The *Baluchistan* influence is more prominent here:

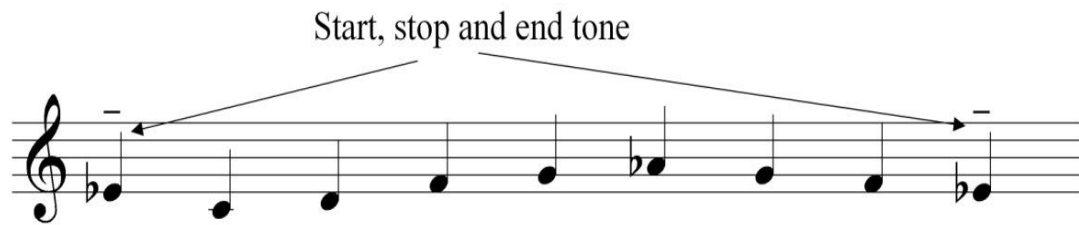
Song

Daf

Song

Daf

In this part, the content of melody progress is as follows:



The finalexample is the prelude preparing the atmosphere for the commencement of *Gwâtīmantra*. This part is played with *Geychak* instrument accompanied by *Tamburak*. The mood, rise, and fall of *Baluchistani* melody are so similar to the music in *Pakistan*, the eastern neighbor.

Geychak

Tamburak

Geychak

Tamburak

Geychak

Tamburak



CONCLUSION

The effect of music on those participating in *Ahl-e Havâ* ritual is marked with the apparent signs of excitement in most of the cases. The continuous repetition of the melodic elements and the rhythmic melodies in rituals in various regions are formed and designed to intensify the trance mood in the individuals. The combination of the cultural beliefs and the early origins of the music of any region are manifested in the musical elements observed that region. Hence, the music is a necessary and inseparable part of *Ahl-e Havâ* ritual. Today, accessing *Ahl-e Havâ* ritual

is difficult for many reasons. This has made it difficult to uncover this ritual, but the evidence show a strong belief of the people in this tradition in the past.

Endnotes

- 1- The negative sign above the note means that the sound of the note is lower than the main sound, and the positive sign shows that the sound of the note is higher than the main note.
- 2- The start tone is a tone with which the music piece starts.
- 3- The stoptone is a tone during the melody where the most emphasis or stopping occurs, or, in other words, it is a tone at the center of various movements of the melody.
- 4- The end tone is a tone with which the piece ends.

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