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Monograph Title:

The Sweetness of Sorrow: Aesthetics, Affect, and Pedagogy in Iranian Classical Music

This monograph explores the aesthetics of sorrow and melancholic expression in the pedagogical traditions of Iranian classical music. Though rarely articulated by musicians, the ethos of *huzn* (sorrow) and melancholic ardor of *suz* (a burning heart) form the aesthetic and emotional core of performance in Iranian music performance and interpretation. These experiences, often framed as *hal* (ecstatic and meditative state), are deeply interwoven with Persian philosophy, classical poetry, and Islamic mysticism, positioning them as foundational elements of Iran's cultural heritage. Through close imitation and master-disciple interaction within the *maktab* (traditional schools of artistry and intellect), performers dedicate years to cultivating the skills necessary for interpreting *hal* and engaging with the poetics embedded in *radif* (classical music repertoire).

Despite its centrality to musical performance, the aesthetic education of sorrow remains largely understudied. Previous studies on *hal* (During 2012; Caton 2008; Zonis 1973) have focused primarily on its mystical dimensions, neglecting its aesthetic pedagogy and affect. My study addresses this gap by examining how musical sorrow is taught and embodied through *maktab* pedagogy and how it has been shaped by Iranian modernity, socio-religious ideologies, and gender norms in the 19th and 20th centuries. Combining ethnography, historical analysis, and interdisciplinary approaches to aesthetics and emotion, this work contributes to Iranian music studies, aesthetic education, and the anthropology of emotion.

The book is organized into five main chapters, each deepening the readers' understanding of the ethos of sorrow in transmitting the complex tradition of Iranian music:

1. Chapter One investigates the discursive concepts of *hal*, *huzn*, *suz*, and their related references of sorrow through an interdisciplinary study, drawing on historical texts (e.g., *Ghabous-nameh*, and treatises by Farabi, Ghazali, Ikhwan-al-Safa), Persian love poetry (e.g., Hafez, Mowlana, Attar, Nezami), mystic philosophy in *'irfan* and Illuminationism, and the musical connections within Iranian culture. This chapter lays the foundation for understanding how these emotional states function within both music and broader cultural expressions.
2. Chapter Two analyzes the history, legacy, and structural system of the *maktab*, emphasizing its aesthetic and ethical framework in the training of *hal*. Through ethnographic examples and autoethnographic narrative drawn from my years of *maktab* education, the chapter traces the transmission of *hal* and aesthetics through master-disciple relationships, listening practices, and pedagogical lineage.
3. Chapter Three offers an analytical study of the *radif* repertoire and its poetic-musical interrelations. It explores how poetic themes, metaphors, rhythm, and interpretation convey sorrow in musical performance. Drawing from archival materials, interviews with music educators, and comparative pedagogical analysis, this chapter highlights how emotional expression is cultivated through music-poetry interplay.
4. Chapter Four explores the socio-historical dimensions of genre formation, social class, and aesthetics in Iranian classical music, with a particular focus on the emergence of female agency and women's musicianship. Based on historical and contemporary case studies, alongside my personal experiences as a female music ensemble leader, this chapter examines how women negotiate agency and embody the ethos of sorrow within a classical genre as a resistance to the stigmatized lower-ranked entertaining genres. A part

of this chapter has been published in *Women's Leadership in Music: Modes, Legacies, Alliances*, Transcript Verlag (2023), 225-238.

5. Chapter Five delves into the division of *maktab* ideologies in mid-20th-century Iran, as the institutionalization and modernization coincided with the rise of traditionalist views and Iranian response to orientalism. This chapter critically examines how these socio-political shifts and multi-faceted cultural revivalism shaped and partly marginalized pedagogical approaches, leading to spiritualization of the aesthetics of sorrow in Iranian music.

As part of the postdoctoral phase, I intend to expand my research by developing an additional chapter on ‘media and affect in Iranian music’ for the monograph. This chapter will examine the pedagogical and aesthetic role of state-sponsored media—particularly the musical legacy of Radio Golha and Shiraz Art Festivals—during the Pahlavi and its changes in the wake of post-1979 Islamic reforms.

Methodology and Research Approach

This project integrates reflective, historical, and ethnographic methodologies. Drawing on fieldwork conducted during my doctoral studies—including interviews, participant observation, and interactive listening—I analyze how *maktab* pedagogy cultivates emotional sensitivity and aesthetic engagement with sorrow in musical performance. As a native scholar, teacher, and performer of Iranian classical music, my personal narrative and insights provide a unique perspective on the intersectional dimensions of Persian music and poetry. The field study is enriched by interviews with master musicians and students across multiple generations, offering a distinctive ethnographic contribution to music studies.

The creative writing—comprising poetry, expressive prose, personal memoirs, and interpretive video descriptions—introduces new narrative forms to extend the boundaries of traditional ethnomusicological writing. Through various writing tones in Persian and English, this research highlights the necessity of poetic writing and metaphoric language in the aesthetic appreciation of musical cultures deeply rooted in poetry. The monograph thereby contributes new approaches to the ethnography of emotion and aesthetics blending with creative research and writing in music and Iranian studies.

Research Interests

Beyond this project, my research interests extend to themes of music and identity in Iran and diaspora, women studies, music education, media, literary theory, emotion, and performance practice, with a focus on Iran and the broader Persianate world and Middle East. My ongoing project, “The Embodiment of Virtual Identities, from Radio Golha to Instagram: Female Voice, Visibility, and Aesthetics in Iranian Classical Music”, explores Iranian women singers’ evolving embodiment of identity and visibility through self-archiving on social media interlinked with the legacy of Radio Golha before 1979 Iranian revolution. Additionally, my forthcoming publications include “The Reincarnation of Iranian Ta‘zieh Rituals and Aesthetics of Sorrow in Persian Classical Music: Religion, Affect, and Aesthetics in Transformation of a Mourning Tradition” article in *MusiCultures, special volume on Music, Grief, and Culture* (2025) and “Singing with ‘Bird of Dawn’: Aesthetics of Sorrow, National Identity, and Musico-Literary Context of Freedom in ‘Morgh-e Sahar’ Song”, chapter in *In Musico-literary Contexts: Signs, Sounds, and Stories* (2026) edited by Barnashree Khasnobis, Brill.