

Classical and Political Symbolism in the Tasnifs of 'Aref-e Qazvini

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Discusses 'Aref's intentions and use of symbols in composing songs
related to the Constitutional Revolution in Iran

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The tasnif is a Persian composed song form. Its traditional form is exemplified by the works of nineteenth century Persian court musicians. The tasnif as composed by these musicians is closely related to classical poetry and music. Poetry in Iran was considered the major vehicle for the expression of Sufi philosophical concepts, using symbols which would convey many possible meanings (Rypka, 229). The lyric ghazal form was used by major poets for expressing love on earthly and divine levels. The entreaties of the enthralled and yearning lover to the capricious and inaccessible beloved is one of the most common themes of the ghazal, another being retreat to wine and the wine tavern, often a reference to gatherings of the Sufi brotherhoods. Common metaphors for the lover and his beloved are the nightingale singing to the rose and the moth drawn to and perishing in the flame. The beloved's beauty is often praised and compared to the moon, a cypress, or a flower. The ghazals of Hāfeẓ, a fourteenth century poet, included amatory, mystical, panegyric, political, anti-social and anti-clerical ideas. His use of symbols and veiled concepts was often a means of escaping direct exposure and censure by the clergy and the rulers. The metric songs in Persian classical music, known as zarbi, are very often sung to the poems of Hāfeẓ. The classical tasnif may be in the ghazal form or may quote from a well-known ghazal. In the fifteenth century, the sung ghazal was actually included as a section of the nobat-e morātab, a four-part tasnif form.

Symbolism in the classical tasnif is similar to the symbols found in the ghazal. The tasnif "Elā Sāqīā" by the nineteenth century tasnif composer 'Alī Akbar Shaydā is an example of the continuity of traditions

from classical poetic imagery:

Oh wine-bearer, for loyalty's sake be more kind to your lover
As a king of benevolence should be merciful to a beggar.

The world again has become like spring,
Walk slowly in the garden, you heartwarmer.
Your countenance became a painting on the grass.

Oh, next to you, the cypress is ashamed;
In the grass when compared to your stature, the cypress
is ashamed, short and ashamed.

Till when will I burn from wanting you.
I burn and should be content.
My dear, my physician, what shall I do?

Shaydā presents the beloved's capriciousness and the lover's longing and yearning for her. Her beauty causes him to burn and to suffer, while he pleads and complains. The beloved in "Elā Sāqīā" is the wine-bearer, the source of transformation and reunion. Springtime, the time of love and rejoicing is the setting for praise of the beloved's beauty, which is compared to the stature and grace of the cypress. Shaydā seeks a crumb of favor as a beggar does from a king. He states that the beloved is the only physician who can assuage his suffering. He desires reunion but also must be content with the will of the beloved, as one is content with the will of God.

While Shaydā represents continuity with the classical tradition, the tasnif composer Abol Qāsem 'Āref-e Qazvini (1882-1934) drew upon the traditions of classical, popular, epic, and religious song to reinforce and prepare his direct political appeals. He puts his country Iran in the place of the beloved and uses traditional themes to arouse patriotic sentiments in his audience. As 'Āref was the most influential tasnif composer and performer of the period of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, his works were learned and repeated and had great

impact upon the sympathies of the people and are still remembered and performed.

'Āref, as one of the most interesting and charismatic figures of the poets and musicians of his time, stands out for his varied and trying life. The period of his childhood and youth in the city of Qazvin provided 'Āref with a basis for developing his later pro-revolutionary tasnifs. He himself refers to the dissension in his own household; pointing to the hypocrisy, corruption and oppression by his clergyman father both in the family and in the city. His feelings of injustice and persecution were compounded when an early and only marriage of his was annulled because of intrigues by the bride's parents. 'Āref's father "forced him into apprenticeship as a rowzeh-khān, a professional narrator-singer of the tragedies of Karbalā, so as to excite weeping and lamentation." (Sorudi, 165). His period of religious and musical training gave 'Āref background in both classical and religious musical and poetic traditions. The religious theme of the opposing forces of good and evil, personified by the struggle between the Imām Hosayn and his enemies Yazid and Shemr at Karbalā in Iraq was used in songs meant to arouse emotion against a corrupt regime. Sorour Sorudi states (61) that during "periods of struggle, especially during the Constitutional Revolution, the king and the ruling class were frequently identified as the wicked Shemr and Yazid, and the struggle against them was considered as the second battle of Karbala." The function of the religious singers was to portray the injustice and oppression of the innocent in such a way that the audience would be overcome with grief and emotion. 'Āref found his background in emotional elicitation and portrayal of oppression and victimization extremely useful in his composition and performance. In his political tasnifs, he went one step further and

after drawing out an emotional response to the injustices of his time exhorted his audience to action against their oppressors.

From his classical music training, 'Āref learned the art of ghazal composition and performance. The ghazal, a lyric poetic form, became popular during the revolutionary period because of its tradition of musical performance and the practice of interspersing lines of social commentary inbetween philosophical and erotic subjects (Sorudi, 220). In addition, its language "could be engaged at its different levels by a great number of people " (273). 'Āref was thus aware of and used the traditional symbols of wine, flower, nightingale, and spring.

Some time after moving to Tehran in 1898, 'Āref joined the supporters of the revolutionary movements. He applied his whole talent and energy to whatever appeared to him to free his countrymen from oppression. At the time of the granting of the Constitution in 1906, 'Āref was not yet writing tasnifs for the revolution. It was the events following where Mohammad 'Ali Shāh succeeded in 1908 with Russian intervention in bombarding and closing the parliament, that precipitated 'Aref's political tasnif writing. In his tasnifs, 'Āref substituted the nation for the beloved and its people as its lovers (Borumand, 1975). In responding to the economic and political events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries 'Āref was joining a number of other poets who used poetry and tasnif as effective political vehicles to mobilize pro-revolutionary sentiment. When revolutionary forces combined and entered Tehran and deposed the shāh in 1909, 'Āref composed his first tasnif with political overtones. He began to sing in demonstrations and in revolutionary meetings, travelling from town to town performing his ghazals and tasnifs.

One of his best-known tasnifs, "Az Khun-e Javanān-e Vāṭan" or "From the Blood of the Youth of the Country," was written during the period of the 2nd Parliament (1909-1911). This particular tasnif is an example of the combination of traditional metaphor, emotional appeal and call to action. It includes five 4-line verses with refrain. The translation reads as follows:

It is the time for wine and the season of flowers and walking in the grass.
The court of spring is empty of ravens and kites.
With its generous clouds, the land of Ray /Tehran/ is the envy of Khotan /in China/
Like me, the caged bird misses his native land.

How crooked you are, oh universe
How wrong you are, oh universe
You are bent on revenge
You have neither religion nor rules, oh universe

From the blood of the youth of the country, tulips have grown.
From mourning their stature, the cypress is bent over.
In the shadow of the flower the nightingale is lying hid.
The flower, also like me in sorrow, tore its garment for them.

The representatives are asleep and the ministers are corrupt.
They stole all the gold and silver of Iran.
They have left to us only a ruined house.
Oh friend, take the rights of the poor from the princes.

From tears, revolutionize everyone in the land.
Even if a fistful of land is in your hand, pour it on your head.
Show a sense of honor, think that what is coming is worse.
In front of the bullet of the enemy use your breast as a shield.

My complaint is from trouble at the hand of the enemy.
Whoever thinks of death is not a man.
Lovers playing with life is not like a game of backgammon.
If you are a man, now is the time of battle.

'Āref, from the very beginning, did not set stock in the material world.
Like Khayyām, except for the wine glass he did not give a hand to anyone,
He did not give his heart but to the hair of the Beloved,
He did not give a 100 unworthy lives for his good name.

As poets before have opened their poems with the exaltation of wine, flowers and springtime, so does 'Āref. However, this springtime, which is the symbol of the time of rejoicing and renewal stands in marked contrast to the actual events and emotions that inhabit 'Āref's Tehran in spring. The image of the caged bird is that of the soul yearning to fly out of its earthly cage and reunite with God. In this case, it is an expression of 'Āref's sadness at the condition of his country. The refrain reiterates that the universe, or present conditions, are unjust, not going right, not based on fairness.

The second verse used the traditional symbols to create a feeling of sympathy and grief over the conditions he explains in the following verses. "From the blood of the youth of the country, red tulips have grown." As an unrequited lover's heart turns to blood so that he weeps tears of blood that fill rivers and stain the earth and as the blood of Hosayn and his followers covered the ground, so also has the blood that the youth have given for the revolution covered the land like a carpet of red flowers. The cypress, a symbol of stateliness and beauty, because of mourning the loss of the cypress-statured youth, is itself bent over with grief. In traditional literature, the cypress is always pictured as tall and straight. That the cypress would be bent over is out of traditional character and shows that a traditional symbol itself is no longer able to maintain its form in the face of the tragic and untimely cutting down of its kinsmen, the cypress-like youth. The eternal lovers, the nightingale and the rose, are next transformed. Not only is the nightingale not able to sing because of its grief, but is actually hiding under the rose, which itself has destroyed its own beauty by tearing its petals, another symbol of mourning.

It is as if the very symbols and foundation of the culture itself are too agitated to maintain their traditional form and are calling people to examine what is happening to their country. 'Āref in these verses is drawing upon the religious tradition of arousing a crowd to crying and grief for the victims of oppression and upon the classical tradition of drawing on the sympathy of the listener to the plight of the lover unable to attain his reunion.

Next, 'Āref very openly says that the rulers have robbed the country and taken the rights from the poor. His response is that through the emotion of mourning (i.e. tears, throwing dirt on the head), that people should be galvanized to fight back. Love of country is not to be trivialized. He concludes with a reference to philosophy that one must be divorced from material desires and seek only the pure spiritual life, or the wine glass, an admonition that people not follow the example of those who rob the country.

'Āref's tasnifs served as news carriers and as an emotional rallying point and successfully captured the sentiments of the people of his time. He drew on traditional themes and forms to relate to his audience and direct them to act in behalf of the revolutionary cause. Machalski (74) states:

His tasnifs sung at public concerts made the audience cry and provoked explosions of patriotic enthusiasm. The work of 'Āref truly enriched the literature of Iran, it participated in reviving patriotism and constituted a true asset to the work of the Iranian revolution of 1906-1911.

'Āref remains a symbol to the Iranians of a nationalist and as such he and his tasnifs are venerated and performed as part of the continuing classical and national tradition of Persian music. During the Pahlavi

regime political criticism was severely repressed inside the country. However, the tasnifs of 'Āref by that time were an honored part of the classical repertoire and were performed publicly as representatives both of Persian classical music and Iranian nationalism. The tasnifs of 'Āref, however, made few direct references to personalities or regimes, but instead point to the conditions of injustice, oppression, corruption, foreign interference, imperialism, and loss of national pride. They were thus in a unique position to serve as vehicles for the expression of frustration and criticism for those who chose to sing them and listen to them.

دالای ساقیا

ابو عطا

الا ساقیا الا ساقیا ز راه و نا
 بشید ای خود بشید ای خود چنانکم نما
 که سلطان لطیف ترحم کند بحال گدا — ترحم کند بحال گدا
 چه اردی بهشت جهان گشته باز تو ای دلنواز
 به بستان خیرام تو ای سرو ناز
 که شد عشق تو جهان را طراز
 که شد عشق تو جهان را طراز
 ای که به پیش قامتت سرو چمن خجل شده
 ای جانم ای بیم وای
 و من و گل به پیش تو بنده منتعل شده
 ای جانم ای طیبم
 تا یکی در نعت بسوزم
 سازم و بسوزم و بسازم
 نسیم و نسیم ز عشقت چه سازم

هنگام می و فصل گل و گشت (جانم گشت و خدا گشت و) چمن شد
دربار بهاری تهی از زاغ و (جانم زاغ و، خدا زاغ و) زغن شد
از ابر کرم خطه ری رشک ختن شد
دلتنک چومن مرغ (جانم مرغ) قفس بهر وطن شد
چه کجرفتاری ایچرخ چه بد کرداری ایچرخ سر کین داری ایچرخ
نه دین داری نه آئین داری (نه آئین داری) ایچرخ

-۲-

(به ترتیب فوق)

از خون جوانان وطن لاله دمیده از ماتم سرو قدشان سرو خمیده
در سایه گل بلبل ازین غصه خزیده گل نیز چومن در غمشان جامه دریده
چه کجرفتاری... الخ

-۳-

(به ترتیب دوره اول)

خوابند و کیلان و خرابند وزیران بردند بسرقت همه سیم وز را ایران
مارا نکذارند بیک خانه ویران یارب بستان داد فقیران زامیران
چه کجرفتاری... الخ

-۴-

(ایضاً)

از اشک همه روی زمین زیر و زبر کن مشتی کورت از خاک و طرحت بسر کن
غیرت کن و اندیشه ایام بتر کن اندر جلو نیر عدو سینه سپر کن
چه کجرفتاری... الخ

-۵-

(ایضاً)

از دست عدو ناله من از سر درد است
اندیشه هر آنکس کند که از مرگ نهمرد است
جانبازی عشاق نه چون بازی نرد است
مردی اکرت هست کنون وقت نبرد است
چه کج رفتاری... الخ

-۶-

(ایضاً)

عارف زازل تکیه بر ایام نداد است جز جام بکس دست چو خیام نداد است
دل جز بر زلف دلارام نداد است صد زندگی تنگه ینک نام نداد است
چه کج رفتاری... الخ

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