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## **Appropriating an Iranian Literary Tradition: Marsiya in the Indian Context**

The history of the evolution of *marsiya*, an Iranian literary tradition, has its own uniqueness in India. With its own roots and sometimes independent of the Persian tradition, *Marsiya* first developed in the Deccan as a form of folk poetry. As an audience-oriented literary tradition it changed in accordance with the social environment and patronage patterns, and in this process absorbed many traits of oral epic rendition. The theatrical arts of Indian and Persian origin also influenced it considerably, and thus *marsiya* represented the synthesis of multiple cultural traditions. As a musical genre it assimilated the traits of both classical canonized forms and folk musical varieties, and developed from *khwanandagi* (chanting) into a most sophisticated musical style - the *soz-khwani*. This paper is a study of the development of *marsiya*, in India in terms of language and idiom, content, literary and musical forms, and social setting.

The term *marsiya* (elegy) is a derivative of the Arabic *risa*, which means praising the dead in a funeral oration, weeping and wailing over the deceased. *Marsiya*, generally speaking, is a poem recited to express sorrow on the death of a person; it is also a poem to commemorate a pathetic event. *Marsiya* is known variously in Persian as *risa*, *sog* and *sognama*.

*Marsiya* as a well defined literary form existed in Arabic literature in pre-Islamic days (*daur-i Jahili*) and many poets such as Muhalhil Taghlabi (c. 531 AD) and Khamsa *shaira* (44 A.H.) contributed to the *risa* poetry. However, this tradition is much older in Iran and may be traced in the literary and musical conventions of pre-Islamic ancient Persia. *Sog-i Siyawash* (mourning of *Siyawash*, Cyrus, the father of Kai Khusrau) and *marg-i Zarir* (the death of *Zarir*, brother of Gushtasp) figure most in the tales (*asatir*) of bygone days. Some stories (*dastan*) and poetic verses are still extant in Pahlawi, reminiscent of the legacy of the ancient Persians. *Sog-i Siyawashan* is a famous melody (*ahang*) of a sad and sombre nature that prompts us to

suggest the existence of *marsiya* as a literary and musical genre in ancient Persia.<sup>1</sup>

*Risa-i Marzaku*, one of the specimens of the old *marsiya* in *Pahlawi-i Ashkani*,<sup>2</sup> is very powerful in expression and presents a mature form of the art of *marsiya* writing. The oldest masterpieces of *marsiya* are, however, found in *Parsi-i dari*, one of the three surviving dialects of the seven spoken in Persia in ancient times, called the language of the court and of paradise.<sup>3</sup> Renowned poets of the genre are Abu Abdullah Ja'far bin Rudaki, Abul Hasan Muradi, and *ustad* Shahid Balkhi. Among the later poets *ustad* Farrukhī Sīstani, Hakim Anwari and Abu Vardi left excellent examples of *marsiya*. Abul Qasim Firdausi, Khaqani Shirvani, Khwaja Shamsuddin Muḥammad Ḥafiz Shirazi, Maulana Nuruddin and Abdul Raḥman Jami also wrote *marsiya* commemorating the death of their friends, children and others.

The form of *marsiya* was standardised by the renowned Persian poet Abul Qasim Firdausi in his famous classic *Shahnama*. He wrote to commemorate the events of the death of Iraj (*marg-i Iraj*), mourning (*sog*) of Tehmasp and Nozar u Isfandyar, and lamentation (*moya*) about Sohrab and Bahram, and so on. Another renowned Persian poet, Sheikh Sa'di, also wrote a *qasida* of mourning (threnody) to commemorate the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols and the cruel murder of the last 'Abbasid Caliph, al Musta'sim bi'llah and his family. It is an excellent example of the *marsiya*, which deals with a pathetic event.<sup>4</sup>

Gradually, *marsiya* came to narrate the event of the martyrdom of *Imam* Husain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad and his kinsmen at Karbala (in Iraq), during *Muharram*, the first month of the Islamic calendar.<sup>5</sup> This event,

<sup>1</sup> See Introduction by Dr. Saiyid Ḥasan Sadat Nasiri, *Tarkib-band-i Maulna Muḥatshim Kashani dar risa u Shahadat-i Saiyid ul Shohda Ḥazrat Ḥusain bin Ali*, mansub ba darvesh Abdul Majid Ṭalqani, az insharat, Anjuman i Khushnawisan-i Iran ba hamkari Wazarat-i Irshad i Islami, calligraphed by Ghulam Ḥusain Amirkhani, 1345 A. H.

<sup>2</sup> *Pahlawi-i Ashkani* is named after the Ashkaniyan, the third dynasty of the Persian kings who ruled after Alexander the Great for about 160 years.

<sup>3</sup> It is said to prevail chiefly in Balkh, Bukhara and Badkhashan (F. Steingass, *Persia-English Dictionary*, p. 516).

<sup>4</sup> It is a poem comprised of 21 *bayts* (couplets). For details see Edward G. Brown, *A Literary History of Persia* (in four Vols.), 1st edition, 1902, Reprint 1951, Cambridge, vol. 1, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> *Imam* Husain was the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, and the son of Fatima and Hazrat 'Ali, the fourth Caliph. A controversy arose between Yazeed ibn-i

which has a great sentimental value for the Shi‘ite sect of the Muslims, provided a tragic panorama of deep human interest, so much so that a literature wholly dedicated to it came into existence. The *Rauzatus-Shohda*,<sup>6</sup> containing elegies on the incidents of Karbala by Husain Waiz Kashafī, a contemporary of Sultan Mirza Baiqara (1469-1506), was an important work in this direction. In Iran, from the time of the Safawi rulers (1524-1722) who observed the Shi‘ite faith, religious poetry found great impetus; every means was employed to stimulate and invoke sentiments of devotion to the House of ‘Ali. The solemn recitations of the *Rauzatus-Shohda* and similar works from the pulpit, known as *Rauza-khwani*, date from this period; *manqabat-goi* (verses rendered in praise of Prophet Muhammad and his companions) and *marsiya-sarayi* (the recital of *marsiya*) also became extremely popular. Since the Safawi kings, Tahmasp and Abbas the Great desired that laudatory poems should be addressed to the Imams rather than to themselves, most professional poets concentrated on religious poetry commemorating the virtues and sufferings of the Imams. Of these poets, who were panegyrists, Muḥatshim Kashani (d.1588) of the court of Shah Tahmasp (1524-76 A.D.), was the most eminent.<sup>7</sup> His *tarkib-band*<sup>8</sup> *Dwazdeh Band* set the mode for *marsiya* compositions in Persian literature.<sup>9</sup>

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Mawawyah (son of Mawawyah, the fifth Caliph) regarding the claim to Caliphate. The enmity reached such a pitch that latter was obliged to leave his native place and take up abode in Kufa and its adjoining territory (in Iraq). Yazeed sent his forces in pursuit and tried all kinds of stratagems to capture and kill him. This at last ended in a regular battle in the field of Karbala, which lasted for ten days during which all relations and followers of Imam Husain were killed. Imam Husain died on the tenth of Muḥarram. The Shi‘a community, all over the world, commemorates the event during the first ten days of Muḥarram. In India many mourning rituals are observed during this period: *tazi‘yas* (the replica of the tombs/shrines of Imām Husain) are taken out in procession, *majlises* (mourning assemblies) are held and *marṣiyas* are recited

<sup>6</sup> The *Rauzatus-Shohda* had an overwhelming sway on the Shi‘a community in India as late as the mid eighteenth century.

<sup>7</sup> For details see Brown, Vol. IV, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> In this class of composition a certain number of verses with the same metre and rhyme are followed by a couplet in the same metre but with a different rhyme. Then the original rhyme is reverted to for a certain number of verses, and is again followed by a fresh couplet with the same metre, but a rhyme differing from both the original rhyme and that of the first interpolated couplet – and so on. This interpolation occurs not more than seven times.

<sup>9</sup> Reza Jadeh Shafiq, *Tarikh-i Adabiyat-i Iran* (Persian), Tehran, 1958, 369-70; For details see, Madhu Trivedi, “Invoking Sorrow: *Marṣiya* in North India”, in Satish

## I

Many Indian elements became evident at the outset in *marsiya* in the Deccan, where it first developed as a distinctive form of Urdu poetry. Among the Deccani states, the Adil Shahis of Bijapur (1490-1686), the Qutub Shahis of Golkunda (1512-1687) and subsequently the Nizam Shahis of Ahmadnagar (1496-1636) patronised *Shi'ism*. It first flowered in the kingdoms of Bijapur and Golkunda during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and thrived in the hands of the great literary figures of the time. Although the *qasida* form (ode) was used by early *marsiya* writers in the Persian tradition,<sup>10</sup> the early *marsiya* were generally short poems and akin to *git* in rhythmic structure. They had *tek*, that is, the recurrence of the initial rhyme at the end of each subsequent stanza found in the *git*. In quite a few cases, the poetic metres are distinctly indigenous. The metric pattern also corresponded to the *chhand-vistar* (metric span) of Braj-bhasha.

Early Deccani *marsiya* were composed in the local dialect, Hindavi, as attested by Ashraf at the beginning of his *Nausirhar*, the oldest known *marsiya* composition in *masnawi* form (a poem in rhyming couplets) and written in 1503 AD.<sup>11</sup> He says:

Wacha kina hindavi mein            qissa-i maqtal-I Shah Husain  
nazm likhi sab mauzuaan        youn main hindavi kar āsan

[I have composed the *qissa* of the martyrdom of Shah Husain in Hindavi. All episodes (of the tragedy) have been related in this *nazm* (poem) in a simple style.]

The title *Nausirhar*, garland of nine heads, itself has an Indian flavour. Thus an Iranian poetic tradition was Indianised in the very early stages, and the *marsiya* developed independently of Persian influence.

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Saberwal & Supriya Verma edited, *Tradition in Motion: Essays for Shereen Ratnagar* (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> Sifarish Husain Rizvi, *Urdu Marsiya*, (Urdu), Delhi, 1965, pp. 17, 29-30, 31, 37; Abul Lais Siddiqi, *Lucknow ka Dabistan-i Sha'iri* (Urdu), Lahore, 1951. pp. 664; Muhammad Sadiq, 1984 (1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1964), *A History of Urdu Literature*, Delhi, O.U.P., p. 204. Ghavasi, Vajahi, Imami and Ghulmi wrote *marsiya* in *qasida* form.

<sup>11</sup> Rizvi, p.17; Mahapandit Rahul Sankrtyayan, *Daccani Hindi Kavyadhara*, Patna, 1959, p. 5.

Hindavi, the dialect used by the early *marsiya* writers in the Deccan, is characteristic of the spoken idiom: it contains elements of popular speech and its basic structure is typically Deccani. Apart from the use of Arabic and Persian words and phrases, which occur frequently, it has a sprinkling of Telugu words, and numerous phrases and expressions from Bhakha (Braj-bhasha). This quality is best illustrated in the poems of Qulli Qutub Shāh (1580-1611) which are among the earliest *marsiya* in the Deccan.<sup>12</sup>

Qulli Qutub Shah versified *rivayat* (narratives based on tradition) for the first time.<sup>13</sup> He borrowed themes such as *baramasa* from Apabhransha and *desi* (folk) poetry and used them to depict the impact of the Karbala episode on flora and fauna. For instance, see these lines:

Phulan hile sab dukh sati	mukh munde bulbul chhuk sati
Koyal Husaina dukh sati	ban ban pukarun vai vai

[O Sati, the flowers are swaying with grief. The nightingale has dropped her head. The koel is grief-stricken because of (the demise of) Ḥusain; (and) I am wandering in despair in the wilderness crying *vai vai*. (Here *vāi vāi* is true to Persian accent, while every other phrase is indigenous.)]

From the seventeenth century onwards, the Deccani *marsiya* began to imbibe Persian influence in respect of language and acquired increasing emphasis on refinement. *Waqi'anigari* (details of incidents, encounters, description of arms) began to be added to it. The *murabba* (a four-line verse), *musallas* (three-line), and *mukhammas* (five-line) verse forms were generally used. Gradually the *masnawi* form (a long poem of rhyming couplets) also became popular as it provided much scope for rapidity and movement of narration, which the *marsiya* of the day sought. Abdullah Qutub Shah, 'Ali Adil Shah Sani Shahi, Nusarati, Shah Quli Shah Shahi, Seva Bijapuri, Nuri and Mir Muḥammad Salah were renowned seventeenth century *marsiya* composers; and Mirza Bijapuri and Qazim were whole-timers. In 1681, Seva Bijapuri translated the Persian *Rauzatus-Shohda* into Deccani. Nuri wrote lengthy *marsiya* and provided a detailed account of the martyrdom and especially of events on the tenth of *Muharram*.<sup>14</sup>

*Marsiya* reached its zenith in the Deccan during the eighteenth century. One notices variety in respect of form as well as technique and details. Almost

<sup>12</sup> Rizvi, pp. 17, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Rizvi, pp. 19, 30.

<sup>14</sup> Rizvi, pp. 39-40, 66; Siddiqi, pp. 665.

every poet of the region composed one. Qasim, Qais, Dargah Quli Khan Dargah, Hashim ‘Ali and ‘Ali Muhammad Khan Burhanpuri were poets of renown. Vali Vellori translated the *Rauzatus-Shohda*, also called *Deh Majlis*, into Deccani about this time. Dargah Quli Khan Dargah wrote his *marsiya* in various verse-forms: *tarkib-band*, *mukhammas*, *murabba-dohraband* (see below), and even *musaddas* (hexameter), though he preferred *murabba*, a four lined verse. A group of poets led by Uzlat started delineating the tragic events of Karbala in a literary perspective. Imami Burhanpuri introduced dialogue into his *marsiya* to produce a dramatic effect; but many wrote *marsiya* in the traditional style as tokens of devotion.<sup>15</sup>

## II

The Persian and vernacular sources of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century say nothing about the evolution of *marsiya* in northern India in the context of the tragedy of Karbala. That littérateurs of the Sultanate period were familiar with this literary form as early as the thirteenth century is attested by the fact that Amir Khusrau Dehalvi, the doyen of Persian poetry, composed two *marsiya* in *tarkib-band* after the death of his patron Prince Muhammad, the son of Sultan Balban (1267-87 A.D.). They can be found in the anthology known as *Ghurratul- Kamal*. According to Badauni, “people used to sing those *tarkib-bands* and used to chant them as threnodies over their dead from house to house.”<sup>16</sup> This may be taken as the earliest and presumably the singular specimen of *marsiya* writing in the north which, however, followed the famous Persian classic, the *Shahnama* of Firdausi.

That *marsiya* does not figure as a musical or literary genre in the Mughal period prior to the eighteenth century, appears strange in view of the strengthening of the Iranian influence at the Mughal court from the time of Humayun, under whom a phase of cordial relationship with the Safawid rulers started. A sizable number of *Shi‘a* soldiers and officers arrived in India from Iran with him, and they settled at Delhi after Humayun regained his empire.<sup>17</sup> Abu’l Fazl gives a list of about fifty Iranian scholars and theologians who arrived in India from Iran and settled in Agra during

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<sup>15</sup> Rizvi, pp. 98, 100-1.

<sup>16</sup> Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab ut Tawarikh*, trans. George S.A. Ranking, Delhi reprint, 1973, Vol. I, pp. 196-97. Badauni has quoted one of those on pp. 197-216.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, Vol., I, p. 468.

Akbar's time.<sup>18</sup> Not only did the Shi'a community experience relief from persecution under the reconciliatory reign of Akbar, they were also allowed freely to observe the rituals of mourning and taking out processions in Agra during *Muharram*. The Dutch factor Palsaert has given a detailed account of such a procession during *Muharram* in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in the reign of Jahangir, who by and large followed the liberal policy of his father.<sup>19</sup> It may be pointed out here that the Shi'a community did not enjoy the same amount of freedom under him, which they had experienced during the reign of Akbar, although the number of Shi'a nobles was quite high at the Mughal court, the family of Nur Jahan enjoyed enormous power, and there was constant cultural contact between the Mughal rulers and the Shi'ite Safawid Iran.

Later on *Muharrum* processions were banned during the reign of Aurangzeb, who was not favourably inclined towards the Shi'as. Gradually the practice of *taqiyya* (to practice dissimulation) became current once again amongst them, which meant that mourning rituals were not performed in public and mourning assemblies were exclusive, meant for a select group.

In their description of musical forms and performing artistes, the authors of *Rag Darpan* and *Tuhfat-al Hind*, the well-known Persian musical treatises of the late seventeenth century, remain silent about *marsiya-khwani* (the tuneful recitation of *marsiya*) and its performers.<sup>20</sup> However, there is evidence of the emergence of an indigenous style of *marsiya* writing around this time in the north with Delhi as its center, which grew more on account of its popularity and cultural vitality rather than due to royal patronage. In the beginning, besides the Deccani, it seems to have been influenced by the Persian tradition. Deccani *marsiya* became popular in northern India around the second half of the seventeenth century, especially when Aurangabad became the centre of Mughal power. The *marsiya* of Mir Muhammad Salah are included in *Marasi-i Rekhta*, a collection of the oldest-known Urdu *marsiya*

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<sup>18</sup> Abu'l Fazl, *The Ain i Akbari by Abul Fazl 'Allami*, vol. I, English trans. by H. Blochmann, Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal; Delhi (reprint), 1965, vol. I, pp. 634-680.

<sup>19</sup> F. Palsaert, "Remonstrantie", trans. W. H. Moreland and P. Geyl as *Jahangir's India*, Delhi reprint, 1972, pp pp. 74-75; Madhu Trivedi, *Imperial Agra as the Cultural Node: late 16<sup>th</sup> to early 17<sup>th</sup> century*, paper presented in a Seminar on Qazi Nurullah Shustari, held on 18<sup>th</sup>- 20th January, 2003 at Agra

<sup>20</sup> Faqirullah Saif Khan, *Rag Darpan*, ed. Nurul Hasan Ansari and Shatrughna Shukla, Delhi, 1981; Mirza Khan ibn-i Fakhru'ddin Muhammad, *Tuhfat al-Hind*, ed. Nurul Hasan Ansari, Tehran, 1950 (in two vols).

of the late seventeenth and the first quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Mir Hasan also mentions in his *Tazkira* that the *marsiya* of Shah Quli Shah Shahi of Bhagnagar (Hyderabad) were brought to Hindustan (north India) by hand.<sup>22</sup>

The earliest known work *Ashurnama* (1110 AH/1698 AD) of Roshan ‘Ali Saharanpuri is on the pattern of the Persian work *Rauzatus-Shohda*, and is in *masnawi* form.<sup>23</sup> A number of *marsiya* of Qasim Dehalvi, Murad, Salah, Hatim and Asim, 113 compositions of twenty one poets in all, are found in *Marasi-i Rekhta* and also follow the Persian style and tradition. Most of these are written in *qasida* form. But what is significant here is the fact that even though they are in *qasida* form, their lines are in segments akin to the *desi kavya* (folk poetry) and echo the *chal* (movement) of *dhrupad*, which suggests that they were rendered in the *dhrupad* style. To quote an instance:

Yaran, kaho bahar-	i khuda mara hai kyon Shabbir kun?
Rota phirun dar Karbala	marra hai kyon Shabbir kun?
Gul is chaman ka kya hua,	chanda gagan ka kya hua,
Bhai Hasan ka kya hua,	marra hai kyon Shabbir kun?

[O friends, tell me for God’s sake why they have killed Shabbir? I roam around wailing in the Karbala; why they have killed Shabbir? What has happened to the flower of this garden? What has happened to the moon of this sky? What has happened to the brother of Hasan? Why they have killed Shabbir?]

The language of these *marsiya* is heavy with Persian phrases, written for the literate and the elite. The events of the Karbala are only hinted at. This is probably one of the reasons why the *qasida* form was preferred and the *masnawi* form is very sparingly used. There are thirty seven *marsiya* in Persian in this collection too, but the larger number is that of Urdu *marsiya*. This shows that although Persian *marsiya* were recited in the mourning assemblies, the vogue was growing for *marsiya* in Urdu, which was called *Rekhta* and Hindi during this period. Qasim Dehalvi, Murad and Salah are

<sup>21</sup> The copy, in the collection of late Prof. Masud Hasan Rizvi Adib, was transcribed about 1738 A. D.

<sup>22</sup> Mir Hasan, *Tazkira-i Mir Hasan* (Persian), ed. Habibur Rehman Khan Sherwani, Aligarh, 1920, p.126.

<sup>23</sup>Rizvi, p. 191.



the representative *marsiya* writers of this period. Qasim Dehalvi is said to have initiated *marsiya* writing in northern India.<sup>24</sup>

The second phase of the evolution of *marsiya* in the north roughly begins and ends with the reign of Muḥammad Shah (1719-48). In the new political setting the Shi‘a nobles became prominent at the Mughal court, especially the Sadat-i Baraha, who attained tremendous political power around this time. This change in the patronage pattern and cultural set-up gave a new lease of life to the Shi‘a community and contributed to the observance of *Muharrum* on a grand scale. It also paved the way for the fruition of the art of *marsiya-khwani* and *marsiya-go‘i* in northern India.

During this phase the *marsiya* was written for the masses and it drew more from Indian literary and folk idioms.<sup>25</sup> The trendsetters were Fazl ‘Ali Fazli, Miskeen and Miyan Sikandar. The language became appropriately simple and elements of folk poetry and folk metre were used liberally. While the *qasida* form continued to remain in vogue, the *murabba*, which was destined to supersede all forms in the near future, had started gaining ground. The dominating trend of this phase was to produce and present *marsiya* in a popular manner. Miyan Sikandar’s enthusiasm for the spoken dialect of his time supports this view.<sup>26</sup>

Fazl ‘Ali Fazli and Miyan Sikandar borrowed extensively from indigenous folk traditions. Fazli’s *Karbal-katha* depicts the impact of the oral epic rendition, *katha*, on this tradition. However, it remained a singular instance and did not attract the new crop of *marsiya* writers, who now concentrated on refining the form as well as the language of the *marsiya* and awarding it a literary status. Miyan Sikandar’s style, however, earned a great appeal among the masses.

Miyan Sikandar was highly accomplished in classical and folk music. The choice of *mutdarik* metre, which in fact is his favourite, shows the impact of the oral epic, *Alha* of Jagnik *kavi*. In view of the growing popularity of the *marsiya* with a larger audience, he composed *marsiya* in Marwari, Punjabi

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<sup>24</sup>Rizvi, p. 190.

<sup>25</sup> Rizvi, p. 191; for details see Trivedi, “Invoking Sorrow: *Marsiya* in North India”.

<sup>26</sup> Shaikh Ghulam Hamadani Musahfi, *Tazkira-i Hindi goyan*, Persian Manuscript, Raza Library, 1209 AH/ 1794-95, p. 80; Saiyid Insha Allah Khan Insha, *Dariya-i Lafafat*, Persian, Murshidabad, 1266 AH/ 1849-50. p. 60

and Purbi dialects, and the folk metre that he used has been identified in India as *bahar-i Mutadarik*. His famous Purbi *marsiya* opens with this line:

ban karbal mei bano biṭiya naina neer bahavat hai

The Marwari *marsiya* begins as follows:

kain kahi ab mhako shahan ghaṇi katak charh chhai chhin

Many of the compositions of this phase have a sprinkling of *savaiyya*, *doha* and *chhand*, which shows the persistence of the *Riti* tradition of Braj-bhasha poetry as well as the fondness for this literary language, which had remained the dominant medium of poetry and music. In these *marsiya* the *murabba-dohraband* form is used: the four lines of a quatrain in uniform rhyme are followed by a *doha* of Braj-bhasha, and in some cases followed again by two lines of *tazmīn* (inclusion/insertion) of some well known verse in Persian. This style came to be known as *murabba-tazminband*. Later on, in Delhi *murabba*, *murabba-dohraband* and *mukhammas* became the popular verse forms. Among these, the first two follow the style of Indian classical musical forms, which shows that these compositions were set to melodies. It appears that at the popular level, in assemblies of mourning, various episodes of the tragedy of Karbala were described which used to be based on the Persian work, *Rauzatus-Shohda*. *Marsiyas* in *doha*, *savaiyya* and *chhand* forms were tunefully recited and these were generally based on *dhun*. The tradition followed even when Rekhta became current as a poetic medium.

This was a phase of great innovation in the art of the performance of *marsiya*. With the increasing emphasis on rendering a spectacular effect on the audience, comprised of mourners (*arbab-i ta'ziyah*), it came to acquire the effect of *Ta'ziyah* and *Shabih-khwani*, the two representative dramatic art forms of the Shi'ite people of Iran (*Ta'ziyah-gardani* and *Shabih-khwani sunnat-i hunari u numayish-i ahal-tashaiyu*).<sup>27</sup> The elements of recitational forms of drama: song, narration and intonation, the characteristics of the folk varieties of oral epics like *Alha* and *pandavni* as well as *qissa-khwani*, were

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<sup>27</sup>See for details Jabir 'Anaṣari (ustad-i Numayishhai ayini), *Numayish u Nyayish dar Iran*, Intasharat-i Waḥid Fauq Bar Nama Bakhsh-i Farhangi Daftar-i Marqaz- i Jahaddanishgah, Tehran, 1366 A. H., pp.83-108. I am greatly obliged to Mr. Ali Zahir Naqvi and Dr Kalim of Iran Culture House for drawing my attention to this important monograph.

also used by Miyan Sikandar in *marṣiya-khwani* wherein he excelled as a professional as *qissa-khwan*.<sup>28</sup>

The way *Ta'ziyah-gardani* and *Shabih-khwani* have integrated the subtleties (*daqa'iq*) and the elegance (*zara'if*) of theatrical art (*hunar-i numayish*) and the socio-religious rites (*ayin-i maazhabi*) is superb.<sup>29</sup> *Ta'ziyah* is “one of the most characteristic dramatic arts in the Iranian people’s traditions” which is focused on mourning (*sog*) for Imam Husain and his companions.<sup>30</sup> These heart-moving plays are enacted annually in every Persian town and colony to crowds of weeping spectators during the months of *Muharram* and *Safar* in the *Takyeh* (mosques used as a place for both praying and mourning), and sometimes as street plays by the hereditary *Ta'ziyah* performers. In its original form, *Ta'ziyah* relied heavily on speech roles in the form of monologues or dialogues and less on action or acting roles. Actors representing religious figures appeared on the stage wearing masks, which led some scholars to believe that Iranian *Ta'ziyah* is a “popular and ideological play”, more akin to oratory than drama. The *Ta'ziyah* performers, it should be noted, are trained orators.

*Shabih-khwani* was a proper play which relied heavily on the delivery of dialogues. It is held that these eloquent performers, who have great expertise in prosody (*funun- i fasila-guzari*) and entrancing an assembly (*majlis-arai*), have retained the traits of the language of the olden days in their phraseology.

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<sup>28</sup> Musahfī, p. 80.

<sup>29</sup> *Numayish u Nyayish dar Iran*, p. 85.

<sup>30</sup> The art of *Ta'ziyeh* was well founded in Iran (*Numayish u Nyayish dar Iran*, p. 85), and historical surveys have traced it back in the dramatic conventions of pre-Islamic religions of ancient Persia, including Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism. There are three types of *Ta'ziyeh*: the first type is of the religious nature, dealing in particular the tragedy of Ashoora, secondly, there are *ta'ziyehs* which concern non-religious figures such as the *Ta'ziyeh* of Rostam and Sohrab, and the *Ta'ziyeh* of King Haserodin of the Ghajar dynasty. The first two are tragic and pathetic and depict grievous events; the third type of *Ta'ziyeh*, however, is comical and entertaining. However, the most important subject of *ta'ziyeh* is Imam Hossein’s tragic martyrdom in Karbala. See for details, Peter Chelkowski, *Ta'ziyeh: The native and progressive Art of Iran* as cited in “*Ta'ziyeh: the religious dramatic convention of Iran*”, *Contemporary Iranian art & The Islamic World*, (ed.) Zahra Rahnavard, published by Al-Zahara University, Tehran, 2002, pp. 175-6.

A sequence may be traced in the ancient elegy *sog-i Syawash* and *'Urüs-i Qasim* which is still performed today.<sup>31</sup>

Up to this period there was not a clear distinction between the literary and musical compositions, and all compositions were meant for musical rendering. Dargah Quli Khan, who visited Delhi during the reign of Muhammad Shah, devotes an entire section of his travelogue, *Muraqqa'-i Dehli* (1739 A.D.), to the description of those *marsiya-khwan* of Delhi who were accomplished musicians and renowned composers. Besides, he also infers that there were many professional performers who tried hard to obtain some of the couplets of Mir Miskeen, Mir Lutf 'Ali, Nadim and other distinguished composers, in order to enhance their own prestige amongst their peers. This prompts us to suggest that *marsiya-khwani* existed as an indigenous musical and literary genre prior to the eighteenth century as well, although it had not yet attained classical status. Apparently, it was categorised as one of the several forms of *khwanandagi*: like *rauza-khwani* (an eulogy of the dead), *manqabat-khwani* (rendition of verses in the praise of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions), *maulud-khwani* (poetry chanted at the time of the celebration of the anniversary of Prophet Muhammad's birth) and so on. Dargah Quli Khan provides a vivid description of some of these forms. For instance, he writes about *manqabat-khwan* "rendering in loud, piercing and melancholic tones the *manqabats* and *qasidas* to attain the mandate of salvation" on the thirteenth day of *Muharram* in the *chauki-khana* of the *Qadamgah*, an enclosure containing the footprint of Hazrat 'Ali.<sup>32</sup>

The Persian work *Rauzatus-Shohda* appears to have had a great sanctity for people. Dargah Quli Khan mentions professional *ravi* (narrators) in a market place, Chowk Sa'adullah Khan, narrating it in full before an attentive audience, which included the congregation as well as "aimless folk", till late at night during the month of *Muharram*.<sup>33</sup>

Dargah Quli Khan's description gives many interesting details regarding *marsiya-khwani* and *marsiya-go'i*. The most important aspect of the *marsiya-khwani* was that it retained an emphasis on creating an atmosphere of sorrow and affliction. His comments are worth quoting in this respect: "listeners are mesmerised by the compositions of Muhammad Nadim, which

<sup>31</sup> *Numayish u Nyayish dar Iran*, p. 86.

<sup>32</sup> Dargāh Qulī Khān, *Muraqqa'-i Dehlī* (Persian), ed. Nurul Hasan Ansari, Delhi, 1982, *Muraqqa'-i Dehli*, 23, 58.

<sup>33</sup> Dargāh Qulī Khān., p. 38.

are replete with sad words. People are crest-fallen by his recitation”.<sup>34</sup> The recitals of Mir Darvesh Hasan cause ““a cacophony of wails among people and these are highly appreciated”; the recitation of Jani Hajjam ““pierces the heart like a razor” and his *sada (alap)* ““creates tumult in the hearts of the listeners”. The impact of his rendition is so powerful and haunting that ““people are unable to bear the force of it for more than once”.<sup>35</sup> “People become grief-stricken and start wailing and lamenting, the moment Shaikh Sultan starts rendering the *marsiya*. Whichever *Ashur-khana* he visits, he creates an atmosphere of grief over there.”<sup>36</sup> The style (*tarz*) of recitation of Mir Abu Turab stunned the people into melancholic silence. He had an overpowering impact on the mourners (*arbab-i ta'ziya*) due to his great skill in music.<sup>37</sup> The doleful sounds of the rendition of Mirza Ibrahim melted the heart and brought tears to the eyes of the listeners. The wordings of his *marsiya* were laden with pathos and had such an appeal that some people went into trance.<sup>38</sup> Concerning a certain Mir Abdullah, Dargah Quli Khan says that he recited the *marsiya* of Hazin and Nadim in such a doleful voice that the moment he started, the laments and the wails of the mourners attained a high pitch. His *tamhid* had a soul-wrecking impact and caused lamentation even when he had not yet finished half a line (*misra*).<sup>39</sup>

The *marsiya* of Miskeen, Hazin and Ghamin in Rekhta had a mass appeal and moved the mourners so much that even listening to *Rauzatus-Shohda* and *Waq'a-i Muqbil* did not invoke such a depth of emotion. They concentrated on writing *manqabat*, which were popular all over Delhi. Mir Lutf 'Ali's talent was so superior that Dargah Quli Khan eulogised him as a Muhateshim and the Maulana Hasan Kashani of his age. He found the *manqabat* of Mir Lutf 'Ali in Rekhta to be magnificent. The compositions (*mazāmin*) of Muhammad Nadim in Rekhta were better than those of the great poets of Persia. Nadim was good at *tazmin* and he particularly quoted from the poetry of Wahshi, a renowned Persian poet (d. 1582 A.D.). All these observations bring out the fact that although Persian *marsiya* poetry was highly esteemed and *Rauzatus-Shohda* had an overwhelming sway among the Shi'a community, Rekhta compositions were gaining currency in Delhi. These were compared with the compositions of the renowned Persian poets and even considered superior.

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<sup>34</sup> Dargāh Qulī *Khān*, p. 80.

<sup>35</sup> Dargāh Qulī *Khān*, pp.78, 79.

<sup>36</sup> Dargāh Qulī *Khān*, p.78.

<sup>37</sup> Dargāh Qulī *Khān*,

<sup>38</sup> Dargāh Qulī *Khān*,

<sup>39</sup> Dargāh Qulī *Khān*, 76-7.

Rekhta was not just “macaronic Persian-Urdu”, as it has been glossed by a modern scholar, Darryl N. MacLean. It was a blend of *desi*, the spoken dialect of Delhi region, Bhakha (Braj-bhasha) and *Urdu-i mua‘alla*, the dialect spoken by the gentry, the Mughal official class and the people in and around the Lal Qila that was weighted with Persian words and phrases. Bhakha, it may be added here, was greatly influenced by this time by Persian, to the extent that sometimes it is referred to as *sahaj parsi* by contemporary poets.

The shift to Rekhta was not solely because it had developed as a regular language around this time, it was also due to change in the patronage pattern following a decline in the fortunes of the Mughal emperor and the traditional nobility, for a variety of reasons. There is an emergence of the new patrons, those who had come to prominence in the changed social and political conditions. The percolation downwards of court culture and the elevation of popular culture were thus important factors contributing to the cultural setting in which poetry as well as music developed during the early eighteenth century.<sup>40</sup> Many noted Persian poets adopted Rekhta as a medium of poetry under the inspiration of Sirajuddin ‘Ali Khan Arzu (b. 1690), a distinguished poet-linguist-scholar, and the poet-philosopher Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan (b. 1700), who was the foremost to give currency to *Urdu-i mu‘alla* in his poetry.<sup>41</sup>

The development of the *marsiya* as a literary genre occurred at a time when Rekhta was in the process of acquiring literary status and Bhakha still retained a prominent place in the realm of music. The *marsiya* of the early eighteenth century reflected both trends: it retained the touch of the spoken dialect and borrowed freely from various forms of Hindavi. It also retained the impact of Bhakha, which was not restricted to the use of words and phrases only, but in many cases to the inclusion of doha. The metric span too in many cases corresponded with Bhakha. However, these traits could not persist for long and were eliminated in the wake of the purification movement when *marsiya* thrived in the hands of leading *ghazal* writers such as Hatim (1699-1781), Mir Taqi Mir (1722-1810), Khwaja Mir Dard (1719-85) and Mirza Rafi Sauda (1713-80), who provided Rekhta with a Persian veneer and consciously avoided *Bhakhapan*. Great care was taken by these poets to eliminate the usage of the language of the masses.

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<sup>40</sup>For details see Trivedi, “An Appraisal of the

<sup>41</sup>Sadiq, pp. 108, 128, 134, 138.

While the Urdu *ghazal* met all these literary standards, and conformed fully to the prescribed usage, spelling or pronunciation of Persian and Arabic words, *marsiya* remained spontaneous primarily because it addressed the populace directly and was meant for musical rendering. The popular saying “*bigra shair marsiyago aur bigra gavaiyya marsiya-khwan*”, that an unaccomplished poet turns into a *marsiya* writer and an unskilled musician becomes a *marsiya-khwan*,<sup>42</sup> probably refers to the trait of spontaneity in *marsiya* compositions in which folk tunes and folk metres were extensively applied, and indicates that it had a popular base. The entire focus of the composer or the singer remained on creating an atmosphere of pathos and affliction and not on displaying of his literary or musical prowess. In fact, this saying is a pointer to the fact that the *marsiya* was still considered a form of *khwanandagi* and not a full-fledged musical or literary style.

Dargah Quli Khan provides an altogether different picture. According to him almost all noted *marsiya-khwan* were talented musicians. They allotted melodies to their compositions in accordance with the Indian *rag-ragini* system, as may be seen in the *bayaz* (anthology) of Miskeen in the collection of the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad. In it, the names of the respective *rag* are also mentioned along with his *marsiya* compositions. Dargah Quli Khan makes it a point to mention whether a *marsiya-khwan* was trained or not. He pointedly mentions that amongst the *marsiya-khwan* only Shaikh\_Sultan “lacked formal training in music and yet he outshone others.” Dargah Quli Khan has all praise for Mir Abdullah, about whom all the *ustad* of the time were unanimous in their opinion that a superior elegist/artist with a rhythmic voice like his was never heard before. Even *kalawant* and *qawwal* gathered at the residence of Mir Abdullah to imbibe the art of reciting the elegies. The crowds (*khalaq*) used to assemble and wait for him long before his arrival.<sup>43</sup>

Towards the middle of the eighteenth century an effort was made to bring the *marsiya* on a par with other forms of literary expression. The credit goes to Sauda, who set new standards for *marsiya* writing and lent a literary colour to his *marsiya* compositions.<sup>44</sup> He was of the opinion that a single piece of imagination may be depicted in a thousand colours even in this branch of

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<sup>42</sup> Muḥammad Husain Azad, *Ab-i Hayat* (Urdu), Lucknow, 1982, p. 101; Abdul Halim Sharar, *Guzishta Lucknow: Mashriqi Tamaddun ka Akhiri Namuna* (Urdu), (ed.) Shamim Anwar, Lucknow, 1965, p. 304.

<sup>43</sup> Dargāh Quli Khān, 76-7.

<sup>44</sup> Rizvi, p. 195.

poetry.<sup>45</sup> Due to the efforts of Sauda some components of *marsiya* came to be recognised as essential, such as the *tamhid* (an introduction), which came to be known as *chehra* at Lucknow, imbibed from the *qasida*. It became an essential feature of *marsiya* writing. He concluded his *marsiya* on *bain*, a Persian word meaning separation, and borrowed in its present connotation in *marsiya* from Punjabi folk poetry and *tappa* songs, which were woven around the theme of love and vexation caused by the memory of the departed beloved. Sikandar and Sauda, who hailed from Punjab, introduced it into their *marsiya* and gradually, with certain variations, it became a fixed point in the *marsiya* poetry at Lucknow.

In respect of form, the experiments were carried much further. *Mukhammas* gained ground at the hands of Sauda. He was the first to write *marsiya* in *musaddas* metre.<sup>46</sup> Qasida form also continued. However, Sauda's favourite metres were *murabba*, *murabba-dohraband* and *mutadarik*. His intimacy with Braj-bhasha lent further colour to the *murabba-dohraband* style. He was a skilled musician and allotted tunes and rhythm to his *marsiya* and *salam*.<sup>47</sup> The use of the *mutadarik* metre is a pointer to the fact that his compositions were rendered in the *dhrupad* form, and that folk poetry metres still remained current.

Even though the traditional concept of invoking sorrow remained intact in the compositions of Sauda: *khud rove aur dusron ko rulave*, his style was apparently not liked by the people. Their main criticism was that his compositions lacked the essence of pathos (*marsiyat*) and were mere poetry, which prompts us to suggest that there was a controversy in this period regarding the literary status of *marsiya*.<sup>48</sup> However, it soon began to develop in accordance with the standards set by Sauda.

### III

Under the patronage of the Shi'ite rulers of Awadh, *marsiya* rose to unprecedented heights as a literary as well as a musical genre. There was a large-scale exodus of poets from Delhi to Awadh, which included luminaries

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<sup>45</sup> See for details, Madhu Trivedi, *The Cultural History of the Kingdom of Awadh*, Ph.D. thesis, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, 1977 (unpublished), p. 77.

<sup>46</sup> Rizvi, p. 191; Siddiqi, pp. 668-69

<sup>47</sup> Mir Hasan, p. 126; Qudaratullah Shauq Barellawi, *Tabaqatus Shu'ara* (Persian), 1205 AH, ed, Nisar Ahmad Farruqi, in *Tin Tazkire*, Delhi, undatd, p. 8; Musahfi p. 78.

<sup>48</sup> See for details, Trivedi, *The Cultural History of the Kingdom of Awadh*, p. 10.



such as Sirajuddin ‘Ali Khan Arzoo, Sauda, Mir, Insha and Musahfi. Sirajuddin ‘Ali Khan Arzoo laid the foundation of Urdu poetry and expert knowledge of language in Lucknow. However, the poetic art in Lucknow was distinct from the very beginning, as it laid emphasis on the externalia of language. It was more ornate as compared to Delhi, as here the demand was overwhelmingly for play on words and rhetorical devices. The Lucknow poets were conscious of their exclusive diction, which led to the Persianisation of Urdu by a careful elimination of Apabhhransha, Braj bhasha, Sanskrit and archaic words, and the increased use of *izafat* instead of *ka, ki, ke*.<sup>49</sup> *Marsiya* came to reflect all these traits, though in some respects it retained its folk basis.

A distinct style of *marsiya-khwani* and *marsiya-go’i* evolved in Lucknow during the late eighteenth century. Traditionalists such as Afsurdah, Gada and Nazim Lucknawi, who popularised the art of *marsiya-khwani*, stressed the element of pathos, and this paved the way to the refinement of the *marsiya* as a musical genre. The art became standardised with its own rules and came to be known as *soz-khwani* during the nineteenth century. It included the full-fledged rendering of *marsiya*, *salam* (verses rendered as compliments or bidding farewell) and *ruba’i* (a verse of four half-lines) and came as a prelude to the mourning assembly. *Ruba’i*, it may be noted, is the most ancient Persian verse form.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand *salam* in the context of *marsiya* is an Indian innovation, and appears to be a variant of *stuti*, as the lyrics of some of the eighteenth century compositions reflect.

This style of performance owes its origin to Khwaja Hasan Maududi and Saiyid Mir ‘Ali *soz-khwan dhrupadiya*.<sup>51</sup> The *soz-khwani* still today is rendered largely in the style evolved by Saiyid Mir ‘Ali. In it an effort is made to conceal the musicality (*ragdari*) of the melody: *layakari* (execution of rhythmic variations and patterns) is not as such maintained. The musical phrases employed in *soz-khwani* adhere to a unique cadence. The *bandish* (rhythmical compositions) do not conform to any rhythmic pattern although the *bol banao* (improvisation of rhythmic passages) and *tan taraf* (melodic turns for creating a cacophony of wails) move in *khayal* and *thumri* style.

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<sup>49</sup> Madhu Trivedi, *Cultural History of the Kingdom of Awadh*, p. 28-30.

<sup>50</sup> Brown, *A literary history of Persia*, Vol. I, p. 472.

<sup>51</sup> Muhammad Karam Imam Khan Unnami, *Ma’dan al-Musiqi* (in Urdu, 1856), Lucknow, 1925, p. 37; Azmat ‘Ali, *Muraqqa’-i Khusravi*, Urdu MS (written in 1869), Tagore Library, University of Lucknow, fol. 226a; *Ghuzishta Lucknow: Mashriqi Tamaddun ka akhira namuna*, p. 304

The *soz* compositions have two segments: *sthayi* (the first line or verse of the song) and *antara* (the verse that follows *sthayi* employing higher notes of the musical scale). In larger compositions there is a *laghu-antara* (smaller *antara*), also called *dehur*, and sometimes a *tar-antara* called *tip*. This term is derived from the Sanskrit word *tipi* which means rendition in the notes of high register. The *soz* compositions are set in those *rags* that evoke pathos and are sung from morning to midnight. Although, in *soz-khwani*, the *khayal* style prevailed, it incorporated the characteristics of *dhrupad*, *tappa* and *thumri* also. Its high-pitched vigorous tonal pronunciations were derived from the *dhrupad*; the *zawaid* or the glosses of *tan-palta* (intricate rhythmic turns) from the *khayal*; *zamzama* and *tahrir* (swift zigzag melodic turns employed in Persian music) from the *tappa*. The techniques of *bol-banao* (improvisation of rhythmic passages) and *ras-bhav* (evoking a sentiment) are taken from the *thumri*. Thus, *soz* assimilated the characteristics of all musical styles then current in Awadh, especially the *khayal*, *tappa* and *thumri*.<sup>52</sup> It is interesting to note that Saiyid Mir ‘Ali was a renowned *tappa-baz* and a pupil of the legendary Miyan Shori.<sup>53</sup>

*Soz-khwani* was rendered in Persian tradition by an ensemble of at least three performers who used to sit in a squatting position. The main performer was called *sar* and he was flanked by two supportive singers known *bazu* and *sarbazu*. Sometimes there were two additional singers also, *as* and *bas*. The, *as* provided drone, as instruments do not accompany *soz-khwani*, while *bas* created the tonal varieties by sounding the accordant note involved in the particular *rag* performed by the *soz-khwan*.<sup>54</sup> In present times the famous *dhrupad* singers Dagar brothers, as well as the *shahnai* player Bismillah Khan, who also perform *soz-khwani* by way of devotion, represent two distinct performance traditions, the traditional *dhrupad* style and *khayal* style as they developed at Lucknow and Benaras respectively.

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<sup>52</sup> Madhu Trivedi, “Hindustani Music and Dance: An Examination of some texts in the Indo-Persian Tradition”, in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, eds. Muzaffar Alam, Françoise “Nalini” Delvoye and Marc Gaborieau, New Delhi, 2000: 281-306; and also, Madhu Trivedi, “Tradition and Transition: The Performing Arts in Medieval North India”, in *The Medieval History Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1999: 73-110.

<sup>53</sup> *Ma’dan al-Musiqi*, pp. 23, 30; *Tappa* was an intricate musical genre evolved by Ghulam Nabi Shori. It was a unique blend of indigenous classical and folk traditions with techniques used in Persian *muqam* (i.e. *rag*).

<sup>54</sup> Information by courtesy of (Late) Mr. Shahab Sarmadee, who was a famous musicologist.

*Soz-khwani* became so popular that it did not remain confined to professional singers, and began to be learnt (with all its rules and techniques) by many, even women.<sup>55</sup> It was learnt and performed as a mark of reverence by them. There were professional women *soz-khwan* too. Amongst these the class of *domni* used to perform exclusively in the *zanana majlis*. Some of the courtesans of Lucknow such as Haideri Begam, Muhammadi Begam and Nanhi Begam were outstanding in the art of *soz-khwani*. King Wājid ‘Ali Shah also trained a group of performing women who were known as *marsiya waliyan*.<sup>56</sup> One may notice a break from tradition here; Deccan and Delhi sources do not mention women *marsiya-khwan*.

Due to the efforts of those who cared for literary excellence, the *marsiya* as a newly graded item of poetry heralded a new era in Urdu literature. It was the time when Shi‘a rituals connected with *Muharram* (in the Indian context) were taking shape and a kind of social exclusiveness and sect consciousness was gaining ground amongst the Shi‘as. The audience for *marsiya* by now extended from the capital towns to the tiny villages. In this process, many new customs and rituals became associated with ‘*aza’dari* (mourning), which was performed with great pomp and show, to the extent that *Muharram* became the living symbol of the Shi‘a culture. It attained the colourfulness of the *Dussehra* festival.

*Marsiya* took shape in accordance with these developments in language, musical form and Shi‘a ritual, and came to reflect all aspects of the culture of Awadh. It became thematic and predominantly descriptive and increased in size. *Marsiyas*, invariably written in *musaddas* form, used to be recited from the *mimber* (pulpit) in the mourning assemblies, which awarded a hallowed significance to the *marsiya* composer. The recital of these compositions was in the manner of poetry (*tahatu’l lafz*), but the *marsiya* retained some of the traits of oral epic rendition especially the intonation and to certain extent the histrionics as well. What is more significant here is the fact that these mourning assemblies of Lucknow had the essence of the *musha‘ira* (the literary gatherings), where poetic talents were also judged. It meant that from now onwards pathos did not remain the keynote in the *marsiya* composition and literary overtones became dominant.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Sharar: 305-6.

<sup>56</sup> Najmul Ghani Khan, *Tarikh -i Awadh*, Urdu, 1919, Vol.v: 54.

<sup>57</sup>For details see Trivedi, *Cultural History of the kingdom of Awadh*, pp. 11-12; Trivedi, “Invoking Sorrow: *Marsiya* in North India”; Trivedi, “A genre of composite creativity: *marsiya* and its performance in Awadh”, paper presented in an

With this the quality of *marsiya* writing underwent a remarkable change. Its form was standardised as a literary genre and it became variegated in technique, widening the scope of Urdu poetry, which till now had been confined to erotic themes. Also, this form did not remain confined to the Muslim community: Hindu poets contributed greatly to *marsiya* poetry.

There were also structural changes in the technique of *marsiya* writing. Previously, apart from the *tamhid* (introduction), which was initiated by Sauda, the *marsiya* contained *vaqyat* (the events), *rivayat* (incidents and anecdotes), *jang* (the war) and *bain*. Now, the components of *marsiya* were rather the *chehra* (introduction), *rukhsat* (bidding farewell to the hero by his kith and kin), *amad* (the arrival of the hero in the battlefield), *sarapa* (the description of the limbs of the hero from tip to toe), *rajaz* (verses read at the battlefield to arouse martial spirit), *majra* (events), *rudad* (an account of the circumstances), *makalimah* (dialogues), *ghore aur talwar ki ta'rif* (description of the horse and sword of the hero), *jang* (the war), *shahadat* (martyrdom), and *bain* (mourning).

Many leading *ghazal* writers of Lucknow adopted the *marsiya* as the sole medium of poetry on account of the vista of literary expression it offered and the respectability a *marsiya* writer enjoyed at that time. The names of Mir Zamir (1791-1855 AD) and Mir Khaliq (1774-1814 AD), Dilgir (1781-1846 AD) and Fasih (b. 1780) are foremost amongst those who greatly enriched the art of *marsiya* composition in Lucknow. Zamir brought about changes in the technique of *marsiya* and, together with Khaliq, evolved a new pattern. They standardised the form of *marsiya*.<sup>58</sup>

Zamir, a pupil of a noted *ghazal* writer Musahfi, seems to have been the single successful poet after Sauda to make a conscious effort in raising *marsiya* to the status of *adab-ul-marsiya* and evolving a new style (*tarz-i navi*) of its rendition.

*age to ye andaz sune the na kisi ke ab sab ye muqallid huye es tarz-i  
navi ke.*

Zamir is correct to a great extent as his style was followed later on. He added *chehra* (introduction) to his *marsiya* as a permanent feature and introduced

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<sup>58</sup> Rizvi, pp. 285-87; Siddiqi, p. 676.

many new themes such as *sarapa* (the demeanour) of the hero, which was common practice in many Indian poetical forms and oral traditions, for instance the *raso*, *Alha* and *man*. However, he does not restrict himself to describing the hero's physical strength; he is virtually devoted to describing every limb of his hero from top to toe. He proclaims it as one of his innovations:

*Tarz ye marsiya ki thaharai ke sarapa ho aur saf- arai*

Zamir also added vividness and colorfulness to *jang* (battles) by introducing *ghore aur talwar ki ta'rif* (the description of the horse and the arms), a trait that he probably borrowed from the *charan* (bard) tradition.

Mir Khaliq specialised in describing assemblies (*bazmiya mazamin*), leave-taking, martyrdom and *bain*. These themes he treated like supple clay in his hand and presented them in a novel manner. For instance, he introduced the element of dialogue at the time of *rukhsat* (leave-taking).

Dilgir, a pupil of a noted *ghazal* writer Nasikh, also claims to have introduced a new style (*naya andaz*) of *marsiya* writing. For instance, he does not open his *marsiya* with *chehra* but rather with some moral theme. He sets up the atmosphere for some dramatic event on the fateful day of martyrdom, with details of preparations and evocation of the sense of chivalry. His choice of poetical metres indicates his knowledge of well-developed musical airs. According to Munshi Nawal Kishor, the *soz-khwani* and *khwanandagi* of Saiyid Mir 'Ali, Sultan 'Ali and many other renowned *soz-khwan* was mostly based upon the *marsiya* and *salam* of Dilgir.<sup>59</sup>

In his early *marsiya* Fasih (b. 1780 AD) upholds the mannerism of Delhi. The use of lengthy metres is another peculiar characteristic of Fasih's *marsiya* as he is still writing not for recital from the pulpit but for the mourning processions. This reminds one of the old *marsiya* of the Deccan and Delhi days.<sup>60</sup>

#### IV

The various components of *marsiya* assumed new proportions in response to new aesthetic urges in the poetry of Mir Anis (1802-74 AD) and Mirza Dabir

<sup>59</sup> Munshi Nawal Kishor, *Ibarat-i Khatima-i Kulliat-i Marsiya-i Dilgir*, Lucknow, 1897: 496.

<sup>60</sup> Rizvi, pp. 285-87; Siddiqi, p. 676

(1803-75 AD). They popularised and perfected the trends set by Zamir and Khaliq and their contemporaries and accorded this branch of poetry such a high poetic standard that it was considered by some as the finest in the poetic art. Their poetry has all the grandeur of *qasida*.<sup>61</sup>

Anis and Dabir did not introduce new forms, but widened the scope of every ingredient of *marsiya*. Their *marsiya* represented the Awadh of their time, the dictates of the society they lived in and the socio-cultural norms they had full faith in. The characters involved in the tragedy now and then talk and behave like the gentry (*shurfa*) of Awadh society.

Both Anis and Dabir greatly emphasised the literary aspect of *marsiya*. Anis echoed Sauda when he proclaimed that he is capable of presenting a theme in variegated manner:

*guldasta-i ma'ani ko naye dhang se bandhun  
ek phul ka mazmun ho to sau dhang se bandhun*<sup>62</sup>

Dabir consciously made efforts to use *marsiya* as a medium for the display of his literary skill. One of his *marsiya* opens with the line:

*'aye dabadaba-i nazm, do 'alam ko hila de*<sup>63</sup>

As is evident from the compositions in the Deccan and Delhi, earlier on *marsiya* expressed the emotions of a sect of mourners with immense faith in Imam Husain. Other sentiments were almost excluded. Zamir emphasised the sentiment of bravery and chivalry in the tradition of Raso poetry. Anis and Dabir widened the scope of the portrayal of other sentiments too, especially Anis, in whose poetry it is not difficult to recognise the nine *ras* of Braj-Bhasha poetry. It may be noted here that Anis represented a long-standing tradition of learning nurtured in medieval north India whereby knowledge of Indian literary traditions was deemed as essential as that of Arabic and Persian. He had great expertise in Braj-Bhasha poetry. Some of the characteristics of *Riti* poetry remained ingrained in the work of these poets. To quote one of the examples where in Anis is praising the sword of Imam Husain:

<sup>61</sup> Azad, p. 101; Mirza Muḥammad Taqī, *Tā'rikh-i aḡtab-i Awadh*, Urdu MS (written in 1874), Tagore Library, University of Lucknow, f. 8; Sharar: 84.

<sup>62</sup> *Anis ke Marsiye*, (ed.) Saleha Husain, Trraqqi- i Urdu Board, Delhi, 1977, p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> *Intikhab-i Maraṣi-i Mirza Dabir*, (ed.) Akbar Hyderi, Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy, Lucknow, 1980, p. 86/ verse (*band*) 1.

*mojud thi har ghaul mei aur sab se juda thi  
dam kham bhi, lagavaṭ bhi, safai bhi, ada bhi  
ik ghat pe thi ag bhi, pani bhi hawa bhi  
amrit bhi, halahal bhi, Masiha bhi, qaza bhi.*<sup>64</sup>

Anis and Dabir have enriched the language and endowed it with vigour in their characteristic style. Anis was conscious of his exclusive diction and ways of expression, as one finds him proclaiming that he has used the *rozmarrahi*, the spoken dialect of the gentry of Lucknow. But Dabir went a step further and chose his diction in accordance with the scholarly tradition of his period. In this way he echoed Nasikh, one of the prominent *ghazal* writers of Lucknow who favoured a language weighted with high-flown Arabic and Persian words.

Interestingly, the *marsiya* of Anis and Dabir have many traits of theatre. *Rukhsat* is dealt with by them in a manner that brings the dramatic content of *marsiya* to the fore and encourages emotion, dialogues, intonation and histrionics at the time of recitation. One is prompted to suggest that besides the *Ta'ziyehs*, the element of *makalimah* was inspired by the *samvads* of *Ramlila* and other theatrical representations of folk origin as well as the *sawal u jawab* of urban theatre, which was coming to the fore around this period. Dabir has also devised dialogues in a manner that reminds us of theatrical representations. In the battlefield the Imam observes all those courtesies (*tehzib -i akhlaq*) for which Lucknow is famous. In another *marsiya*, Dabir relates the episode in the same way as a *sutradhar* (anchor person), who prepares ground for the entry of the actor on the stage. Some of the *marsiya* of Dabir even have the traits of *qissa*.

Another interesting phenomenon found in these *marsiya* is that Husain and his family members hear the voices of departed souls, especially Hazrat 'Ali and Janab Fatima, his parents. Like Indian gods they remain invisible and make announcements, a sort of *Dev-bani*, by way of warning or appreciation. This feature, which assigns divinity to Imam's family, is certainly borrowed from Indian mythology and indigenous theatre.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Anis ke Marsiye*, p. 84/ verse (*band*) 14.

<sup>65</sup> For details see Trivedi, "A genre of composite creativity: *marsiya* and its performance in Awadh".

The above details sufficiently illustrate that *marsiya* followed its own course of development in India in many ways. The verse-forms were borrowed for the most part from Persian poetry; the language also acquired a Persian veneer and it had inspiration from Iranian dramatic arts. However, it retained the resilience of Indian literary and musical traditions. From solitary verses and songs of wails and laments it came to acquire the characteristics of Indian epics and heralded a new era in Urdu poetry. It thrived on religious ritualism and in this process came to integrate the ceremonies and rituals of Indian origin as well. It portrayed the ethics typical of the Indian way of life and presented the cultural canvas of northern India. And thus the significance of *marsiya* is much more than religious, and its study is essential for the study of the musical culture of north India from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century.

### ***Discussion***

MT - I request Dr. Ranade to render at least two lines of *rivayat*.

AR - When I was researching Marathi folklore, I came across a reference to a form called '*rivayat*' written by Garib Abdul in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. *Rivayat* is a song of sorrow. In this particular text, he makes mention of Ashghar, perhaps his own child, and has superimposed image of Krishna on him. The child has died inspiring Garib Abdul to write this song. The whole imagery, the form, the concept is a standing example of how cultures have come together without conscious deliberate activity. The song has a quality usually associated with women's songs characterized by the lack of rhythm as well as instrumentation. It has a minute tender mixture of *ragas Gaud sarang* and *Pilu*. Incidentally, the *marsiya* tradition accentuates *ragas Gaud sarang* and *Bhairavi*. One realizes that this is how performers exchange ideas without any common programme or without any research grant!