



## KUČA-BĀĠI

**KUČA-BĀĠI** (also referred to as *ġazal-k̄vāni*), a vocal measure-free singing of poems in various meters without instrumental accompaniment, a kind of popular singing done in Tehran and Ray by amateur singers from a certain social stratum. The status of this kind of singing in the official musical culture of Iran is largely influenced by the social position of its performers, which is often associated with almost deep traditional tendencies, but with certain questionable characteristics in regards of customary social ethics; a class of individuals that now can be found in the southern part of present-day Tehran. Individuals of this particular part of the society, who are referred to by various terms such as *dāš* (gallant), *dāš mašdi*, *gardan-koloft* (roughneck), *jāhel* (lit. ignorant), etc., have often been exemplifications of the two antithetical qualities of chivalry and rascality. Depending on the activation of which quality, one would attract the respect of the community or its mistrust and repulsion.

Similar to the case of many other kinds of folk music, it is almost impossible to estimate the source and the age of *kuča-bāġi* or, more correctly, *ġazal-k̄vāni*, which is also known by other terms such as *lāti*, *laši*, *bābā-šamali* (Aḥmadi, p. 81), and *karābāti*. It is, however, reasonable to be sure that this genre of Persian music has been prevalent at least from the final years of the Qajar period. In the past, in Tehran, occasionally a session would be arranged in a coffee house (*qahwa-kāna*) for a competition between the *ġazalk̄vān* of a city quarter and the one invited from another city quarter. The competition was carried out with special formality. The *ġazalk̄vān*, acting as the host, would



lead the guest to his own seat on the platform, the foremost point of the area. The manager, holding a battle-axe (*tabarzin*) with two hands, would place it down in front of the guest as the indication of his request that the guest start singing, which he would do after picking and kissing the battle-axe (Šahri, 1988, I, p. 402, II, p. 159, VI, pp. 467-68).

*Ġazal-k̄vāni* is often performed in Segāh and occasionally in *Dašti* (q.v.) or other modes. While singing, the *ġazalk̄vān* raises the tone to upper tetrachords (e.g., to *mokālef* in Segāh) and returns to the original at the end. *Ġazal-k̄vāni* music, although it generally follows the system of Iranian classical music, is notable for its special simplicity, which is due to its lack of instrumental accompaniment, its limited melodic development, and avoidance of the complex melisma of classic mode of singing.

The content and the type of the poem are factors quite significant in the identification of *ġazal-k̄vāni*. Contrary to the literal meaning of the term, the poems used in *ġazal-k̄vāni* were not limited to *ġazal*. It can reasonably be said that stanzaic poems, particularly *mokāmmas*, were the ones more often used (for a discussion about the popularity of *mokāmmas* and other kinds of stanzaic poems in urban vocal folk music in Iranian culture, see Fatemi, 2005, pp. 329-30 or Fatemi 2014, p. 353). Points contained in these poems provide a wide spectrum of subject matters, including religious and mystic questions as well as advice, particularly points attributed to a prisoner regretting his past misdeeds and wasting property and respect in pursuit of transitory desires. The main poem, usually a *ġazal* or *mokāmmas* (rarely a *maṭnawi*) is preceded by one or two couplets and ends with one, often a *robā'i*. The introductory two couplets may contain the expression *bessmellāh* (q.v.) in at least one of the hemistiches, or the initial letter of the first word in each hemistich will be from the Arabic term *salām* (s, l, a, m) in the order used in the term. The conclusive couplet may contain the prophet's name or the use of *šalawāt* (a phrase invoking divine blessing on the prophet) for urging the audience to repeat the *šalawāt*. This form is comparable to the pattern of *ġazal-k̄vāni* in the tradition of reciting poetry (*soḡanvari*, *sardam-k̄vāni*), which is referred to by reciters (*soḡanvar*) as *dastgāh* (Maḡjub, p. 779). It can also be compared with humorous *zarbi-k̄vāni* done by festivity musicians (*moṭreb*) of Tehran, in which poems of four hemistiches are recounted prior to and at the end of reciting the main poem. These poems, however, are not used for the implication of expressions "*bessmellāh*," "*salām*," and "*šalawāt*" (Fatemi, 2005, pp. 143-44 or Fatemi 2014, pp. 173-174). It is noteworthy that the *ġazalk̄vān* usually at the

beginning or end of the poem, or at the end of hemistiches, uses additional expressions such as “*ey dust*,” “*maḥbub-e man*,” “*maḥbub-e hame ‘āšeqān*, ‘*Ali*,” “*‘Ali Jān*,” and the like. Besides, as he is singing, one of the auditors may state “Utter *ṣalawāt* to reward the mouth of ... (singer’s name)” in order to stimulate the reciter. Poems used are chosen from the works of celebrated poets such as Ḥāfez, Sa’di, Shaikh Bahā’i, Šahriār, Parvin E’tesāmi, as well as little-known poets like Ḥosayn Bābā Meškin, Šokuhi, Rezā Āgahi, Ṭolu’i, etc.

*Ġazal-k̄vāni* is performed on various occasions and in different places. At coffee houses, it is done particularly in the evening in Ramažān after breaking the fast (*eftār*) and while playing *tornā-bāzi* (for a description of this game, see Hasandust). In such cases, if the loser of the game is known for his pleasant voice he would be asked to do the *ġazal-k̄vāni*. In wagering situations concerning pigeon-flyers getting together for laying bets on their pigeons, those with pleasant voices do *ġazal-k̄vāni* in turn. Similar event also would take place in traditional gymnasiums (*zur-kāna*) by exercisers in the gymnasium-pit during the breaks between actions; in taverns and assemblies for using hemp (*bang*) and cannabis resin (*ḥašiš*); in religious ceremonies during Moḥarram, usually before or after reciting mourning songs (*nawḥa-k̄vāni*); and also in the assembly of friends as well as in private assembly.

The fact that *ġazal-k̄vāni* is performed in sometimes contradictory situations in regard to social and ethical norms is the reflection of the contradictory character of its performers. In fact, one can draw the situations mentioned above (pigeon-fancying, coffee houses, religious circumstances, etc.) on a continuum of social-ethical values to define the place of each one in terms of their social acceptability. Moving from the right end of this continuum, which belongs to religious circumstances (e.g., ceremonies in Moḥarram, etc.) to the other end on the left, which includes taverns, and passing *zur-kāna*, which is located between the two extremes with tendency towards the right side (for *zur-kāna* and its double status, see Rochard, 2002), socio-ethical values diminish causing decline in the social acceptability. Meanwhile most of the *ġazalk̄vāns* belong to the class of *dāšes*, *gardan-kolofts*, athletes (*pahlavān*), or those claiming these titles, who form a layer of the society with double dispositions, as rogues (*awbāš*) or chivalrous ones (*javānmard*; see [AYYĀR](#); Zarrinkub, p. 355; Cahen; Fatemi, 2002); a class of people whose members can be credited for organizing the mourning rites of Moḥarram (or participating in them) and, at the same time, be distinct in *zur-kāna*, frequent coffee houses, and be interested in pigeon-fancying. Thus the presence of this social class



throughout the continuum explains the presence of *gāza-k̄vāni* and *gāzalk̄vāns* in this large spectrum of situations; a presence that is facilitated by the double character (religious/non religious) of *gāzal-k̄vāni*'s poems.

Following is a selected number of past and contemporary famous *gāzalk̄vāns*: Ebrāhim Ġazalk̄vān, Esmā'il Tanhā, Ḥosayn-ʿAli Ćarvādār (Šahri, V, p. 622), Akbar Ġazalk̄vān, Ġolām Ġazalk̄vān, Mortazā Ġazalk̄vān (Šahri, VI, p. 469), Reżā Bābāšamali, Ašġar-e Nana, Ḥosayn Kabābi (Aḥmadi, p. 82), Ḥasan Šahrestāni (popularly known as Ḥasan Keštak), Reżā Kad-Ķodā'i, Reżā Ķošnevis (popularly known as Reżā Ķarmohra), Darviš ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn, ʿAli Gāvi, Moḥammad Moʿaddeni (popularly known as Moḥammad Ķorusi), and ʿAbbās Qorbānipur (popularly known as ʿAbbās-e Dāyi Mad [Moḥammad] Āqā).

Later on, the term *gāzal-k̄vāni* was replaced in official milieu by the term “Bayāt-e Tehran” (Badiʿzāda, pp. 224, 227; Aḥmadi, p. 81) and a number of vocalists, on the radio (e.g., Badiʿzāda, ʿAbd-al-ʿAli Homāyun, Ḥosayn Ķvāja-Amiri [Iraq]) as well as in cafés of southern part of Tehran (e.g., Qāsem Jebelli, Jawād Yasāri) started using it. However, the performances of these kinds, in official and semi-official milieus, are not, neither musically or socially, loyal to this musical tradition. Concentration on popular elements for attracting listeners has turned the mediatic performances an instrument for pleasing the new audience, who, with roots in traditional culture, tries to conform with the official culture propagated by the mass media.

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