

## 1. The *dastgāh* and *radīf* concepts

Persian classical music is a complex expressive art form based on multi-sectional modal structures and melody-types, incorporating improvisation within a range of compositional genres. It is a philosophical and mystical type of music, and thus, instead of focusing on mere notation and sounds, in the teaching and learning process there is a need to foster a holistic approach. The Persian classical musician Kourosh Taghavi compared the necessary approach to reading a book that requires a high level of attention and imagination, stating: “It is the sort of music in which one would want to be fully immersed within in order to fully appreciate it” quoted in (Kelly, 2006, p. para. 1). In this section, in the form of a selective overview, a number of issues relating to Persian classical music history and theory are presented, in preparation for the discussion of music transmission.

Iranian (Persian) classical music transmission is based on a master-disciple relationship. Learning occurs through imitation, memorisation and repetition of certain melodic forms within a model repertory called the *radīf*. The *radīf* is a large collection of flexible melodies called *gūsheh*. These melodies have been meticulously learnt and preserved orally by master-musicians over some centuries. Mastering the plethora of skills to become a mature improviser and composer in Persian classical music takes many years (Blum, 1988, pp. 143-144).

A crucial part of a Persian classical music education is understanding the *radīf* and *dastgāh* concept. Persian classical music is based on the *dastgāh* system, which evolved over centuries from a pre-existing *maqām* system (Hooman Asadi, 2001, pp. 2-3). To fully comprehend the foundation of Persian classical music and the concepts of the *radīf* and *dastgāh*, the learner must study the music’s origin and subsequent development. To this end, I will begin by outlining some recent investigations into the historical emergence of Persian classical music.

## 2. From *maqām* to *dastgāh*

A major question in the history of Persian music has been that of the origin of the *dastgāh-radīf* concept and the process through which the *maqām* system was transformed into the *dastgāh* system. Hooman Asadi was among the first scholars to shed new light on this issue through his doctoral study of ancient Persian music manuscripts (Hooman Asadi, 2006, pp. 2-6). More recently, a thorough investigation has been undertaken by Amir Hosein Pourjavady on the way long-established *maqām* modulatory schemes evolved into a set of seven or twelve

*dastgāhs* as large-scale performance formats (Pourjavady, 2019). Pourjavady draws attention to various influential sociocultural forces that have impacted this development. His sources include musical treatises, song-text collections, court chronicles, travel accounts, biographies, paintings, nineteenth-century photographic albums and 78 rpm records.

*Maqām* is the basis of the traditional music of many regions in Near East, Middle East and Anatolia (YÖRe, 2012). The use of the *maqām* system was first mentioned in Iranian manuscripts in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (*Dorratottaj Laqratodabaj*) by Quotbeddīn Shirazī (Hooman Asadi, 2001, p. 11). Twelve *maqāms* can be identified in historical manuscripts, which share the same names as some secondary modal systems (*Esfahān* and *navā*) and *gūsheh-ha* (*oshāq*, *būslik*, *arāq* and *zangūleh*) of the current *radīf* system. According to many sources, the *dastgāh* and the current version of the *radīf* were introduced to Persian music during *Qājār* epoch (1787-1925) (see for example (Binesh, 1995, pp. 139-141; Farhat, 1990b, pp. 19-20; Kianī, 1998, p. 32; Mahshhūn, 1994, pp. 366-367; Talaī, 1993, p. 12).

As noted, until relatively recently, the origins of *dastgāh* and *radīf* had been speculated upon, since little attention had been paid to the primary Persian musical manuscripts (Hooman Asadi, 2006, p. 2). The word *dastgāh* is mentioned in ancient manuscripts and it refers to certain coherent and cyclic formal structures. The cyclic structure here refers to opening and closing a musical composition in the same mode but with modulation to other modes during the course of the performance (Hooman Asadi, 2000, p. 10; Hooman Asadi, 2014, p. 171; Markoff, 2000, pp. 52-53).

Asadi presumes that a distinction was made on the basis of the cyclic or compound structure of some *maqām* used in the mid-*Safavid* dynasty (1501–1722). There have also been some references to melodic or modal transformation under the name *namūd*, which is currently used in the Uzbek-Tajik musical system and signifies the modulation of one *maqām* to another (Karomatov & Radjabov, 1981).

## **2.1. Formation of the dastgāh system**

In an anonymous mid-18<sup>th</sup> century paper, “Treatise on the Science of Music”, there are indications of the formation of four-*dastgāh* systems, namely: *chahārgāh*, *navā*, *rāst*, and *rohāb-e dāvudi*. The formation of the twelve-*dastgāh* system – *rastpandjgāh*, *navā-neyshābūr*, *homāyun*, *māhūr*, *rohāb*, *shūl* (*shūr*)-*o-shahnāz*, *chāhārgāh-mokhālef*, *segāh*, *dogāh*, *zābol*, *ashirān* and *neyriz* – was possibly introduced by Aqā Bābā Makhmūr Esfahāni during the reign

of the second *Qājār* emperor of Iran, Fath-Ali-Shāh (1797-1835). This is recorded in a treatise entitled *Kulliat-e Yūsofi* by *Dia al Din Yūsof* (Hooman Asadi, 1999; Mohammadi, 2012). There is some indication, albeit vague, of the existence of different synchronically formed *dastgāhs* during this time.

## 2.2. Qājār dynasty – a turning point in the history of Persian classical music

The *Qājār* period was an important era in the development of Iranian music. Following several centuries of neglect of many art forms, the music emerged prominently within the *Qājār* court. Although there are limited written records of the musical culture of that era, different manuscripts reveal that *Qājār* governors pursued the tradition left by their forebears and made music an integral part of their lifestyle. Musicians and composers, mostly male but also a small number of female musicians (Figure 1), were highly respected and allowed to perform for the king and his guests (Youssefzadeh, 2008).



*Figure 1. Musicians at the Qajar court in the late nineteenth century.*

*Source: Antoin Sevruguin / Collection of Azita Bina and Elmar W. Seibel (Chi, 2015-2016).*

Beginning with Nasir al Din-Shah's reign, *ta'zieh* (passion play or theatrical work) played an important part in preserving and transferring Iranian traditional music. *Ta'zieh* had traditionally been accompanied by music and poetry. A different version of Iranian classical music called *tasnif* emerged towards the end of the *Qājār* period and rapidly gained attention. Ali Akbar Sheida and Aref Qazvini were among the eminent composers of the period. In the late *Qājār* epoch music was actively promoted and it regained its importance within Iranian culture (Youssefzadeh, 2008).

It is believed that in this period the twelve-*dastgāh* system underwent a reformation and became close to what is currently called Persian classical music. Forsat al-Dwālā Shirāzī (1855-1920, Figure 2) mentioned in *Bohūr al-Alhān* that some *dastgāhs* were added, removed or had their names changed (Shirāzī, 1988, pp. 18-19). He believed that the music scholars of the time modified the old twelve-*dastgāh* system and eventually formed the seven-*dastgāh*/five-*āvāz* system. This contradicts the common view held by some musicologists including Talaī, Kiani regarding *dastgāh* formation. The book in *Bohūr al-Alhān* sheds light into the possible presence of the *dastgāh* concept before this era and that it has just undergone an internal reformulation around 1914 (Hooman Asadi, 2006, p. 6).



Figure 2. Forsat al-Dwālā Shirāzī (b. Shiraz, November 1854, d. 23 October 1920), pen name of the poet, scholar, and artist also known as Mīrzā Āqā and Mīrzā-ye Forṣat. Forṣat was among the first Persian scholars of modern times to entertain a serious interest in the language and history of ancient Persia. He is presumed to be the first Iranian to learn the basics of cuneiform script. He was one of the first to advocate the use of notation for Persian music (Kasheff, 1999, pp. 29-32). He devised a Western-based notation system for Persian music and used it in *Bohūr al-alhān*.

### 2.3. Formulation of the *radīf*

Many musicologists, including Nettl (1993, p. 4) and Talaī (1993, p. 8) propose that the *radīf* was consolidated as a fixed collection of traditional modal melodies early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They suggest that *radīf* formulation occurred after Iranian musicians became familiar with Western repertoires, which served as a model for traditional music education. Others have proposed that royal court musicians formulated the *radīf* in order to preserve Persian traditional music from deterioration and disappearance. They made a significant effort to reconcile and categorise the existing unorganised melodies based on their modal affinities and formulate the *radīf* to facilitate its transmission across the generations through oral tradition.

In her dissertation, *Music of A Thousand Years*, Ann Lucas describes the efforts of Qajar musicians in the early twentieth century to preserve the newly uncovered ancient Persian melodies within the unique structure of the *dastgāh* (2019). This led to the reorganisation of the *dastgāh* for an improved alignment with the previous systematic modality concepts. Lucas describes the formation of the *radīf* as:

The reimagining of the *radīf-dastgāh* tradition as a dual system of pitch modalities (*dastgāh/āwāz-dastgāh*) and interconnected repertoire of melodies (*radīf*) ultimately related to an ongoing manipulation of an indigenous approach to musical procedures within the radically changing sociopolitical landscape of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The interpretive qualities of procedural models for music performance that gained standing in the eighteenth century provided an active, malleable basis for Iranians to imagine and reimagine a unique national history via music's repertoire, structure, and performance practice. Ongoing renegotiating of ideas about Iran's national Persian history affected change in music from the Qajar court even as the united nation of Iran fully replaced all trappings of polyglot dynastic reality. (Lucas, 2019, p. 131)

Some musicologists credit the codification and compilation of the Persian classical repertory into the *radīf* to the Farāhānī family of musicians in the late *Qājār* era (Talaī, 1993, pp. 12-13). Aqā Ali Akbar Farāhānī (1820-1858) arranged the basis of the earliest version of the *radīf* for the long-necked lutes, the *setār* and *tār*. He passed this on orally to his sons Mīrzā Abdollāh (1843-1918) and Aqā Hossein Qolī (1854-1916, Figure 3), through his nephew Aqā Gholām Hossein (Karbasi, 2014). The *radīf* that was consolidated and transmitted by Mīrzā Abdollāh became increasingly central, likely due to the musicians' favoured positions at the court together with the dissemination of this *radīf* through the large number of pupils Abdollāh trained. This *radīf* became the main reference for the existing transcribed version (Khaleqi, 2002, p. 58; Nooshin, 2015, pp. 141-142). From this time on, music education became more

centralised and standardised until the early Pahlavi dynasty, when *radīf* came to be considered the most prestigious and authentic version of Persian classical repertoire (Nooshin, 2015, p. 59).



Figure 3. (Left to right) *Aqā Ali Akbar Farāhānī*, the renowned masterperformers of Nasser-al-Din Shah's court, *Mīrzā Abdollāh* and *Aqā Hossein Qolī*.

Mīrzā Abdollāh never documented the original *radīf*, however, his students preserved it, first in notation form and later through sound recording. One of the earliest records of *radīf* through notation was made by Mehdī Qolī Hedāyat (1863–1955, Figure 4), who transcribed Mīrzā Abdollāh's version of the *radīf* based on the playing of Mehdī Montazem al-Hokamā, one of Mīrzā Abdollāh's most accomplished pupils (Pourghanad, 2013). This old version of the *radīf* has recently been published (Solhi, 2013).

Later, Ali Naqi Vaziri who had studied with both Mīrzā Abdollāh and Aqā Hossein Qolī, Mūsā Marūfī, Abolhasan Sabā and more master musicians developed several versions of the *radīf* for different instruments or vocals. Some of these versions were transcribed into music notations (During, 2003, p. 127; Nettl, 1993, p. 5). For example, Mohammad Taqi Masoudieh (1927-1999) transcribed one of the best versions of *radīf*. He precisely performed a 'non-metric transcription' based on the vocal *radīf* narrated by Mahmud Karimi (1927-1984) (Massoudieh, 2003). In this version, he invented several different symbols, such as short graphic lines representing the melismata employed in Persian classical singing, and grace-note gestures to emphasise notes without accent or decrescendo-ending tones (Darvishi, 1995).



Figure 4. *Mehdī Qolī Hedāyat (Mokhber-ol Saltaneh, 37<sup>th</sup> prime minister of Iran, 1863–1955) authored several books on Iranian music, modern education, poetry, current affairs and a memoir covering his political tenure under the last six kings of Iran.*

The ethnomusicologist Jean During (b. 1947) studied Persian music with Noor Ali Boroumand (1906-1976) at the Centre for the Preservation and Propagation of Iranian Music. During resided in Persia for nine years and in 1972 transcribed Mīrzā Abdollāh's version of *radīf* based on Boroumand's recordings. In his most recent edition, During used the latest pertinent approaches in transcribing non-metric music (During, 2006). Later, Dariush Talaī (b.1953) presented a novel transcription version based on the instrumental *radīf* narrated by Noor Ali Boroumand (Talaī, 2000).

Although the *radīf* of Mīrzā Abdollāh became the central repertoire of Persian classical music, in the opinion of some scholars this *radīf* represents the music of Farāhān province alone, not that of the entire country. For instance, Zonis observed in the early 1970s that “the *radīf* of Mīrzā Abdollāh... does not represent the entire maqam tradition in Iran by merely one of its major branches” (Zonis, 1973, p. 67). Tsuge listed four primary sources of the *radīf*: 1) *radīf* of Mīrzā Abdollāh and Aqā Hossein Qolī; 2) the *radīf* for santūr taught by Soma Hozur and his son Habib Somai; 3) the *radīf* sung by ta'zieh (religious passion plays) singers; 4) the *radīf* used in Esfahan, recognised as *maktab-e* (School) *Esfahān*, which was mainly used for the ney (Persian flute) (Tsuge, 1974, pp. 29-30). Of these four, only the first version of *radīf* has been documented in different forms and thus survived.

The musicologist and linguist Sāsān Sepantā (1936-2014) wrote about musical traditions in Shiraz and Kerman contemporaneous with the period during which Mīrzā Abdollāh's *radīf* gained prominence. He raised concerns regarding the possibility of the marginalisation of other



equally valuable repertoires (Sepanta, 1963). Massoudieh also refers to other schools in Qazvin and Shiraz as well as Esfahan and Tehran (Masoudieh, 1986, p. 16).

In summary, the evolution of Persian classical music from *maqām* to *dastgāh* and the formation of the *radīf* purportedly occurred, over time, in five stages (Figure 5). Moreover, against conventional wisdom it appears that the concept of *dastgāh* and the formation of the *radīf* were introduced in different periods. The appearance of the term *dastgāh* dates back to manuscripts of the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century as a potential factor within the *maqām* system, bearing the cyclic features of certain *maqāms*. In subsequent stages, the *dastgāh* concept was gradually established as the main criterion according to which the musical system was organised. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the newly developed twelve-*dastgāh* system internally reformulated to result in the development of primary and secondary *dastgāhs*. According to Walter Feldman, after the Mongolian invasion Iranians adopted a form of vocal music, while Turkish music moved towards more instrumental music. Furthermore, he mentioned that around the 17<sup>th</sup> century Persian music started shaping a hierarchical system towards the formation of the *radīf*, while Turkish music chose to use a *maqām* system (Feldman & Markoff, 2000, p. 428).

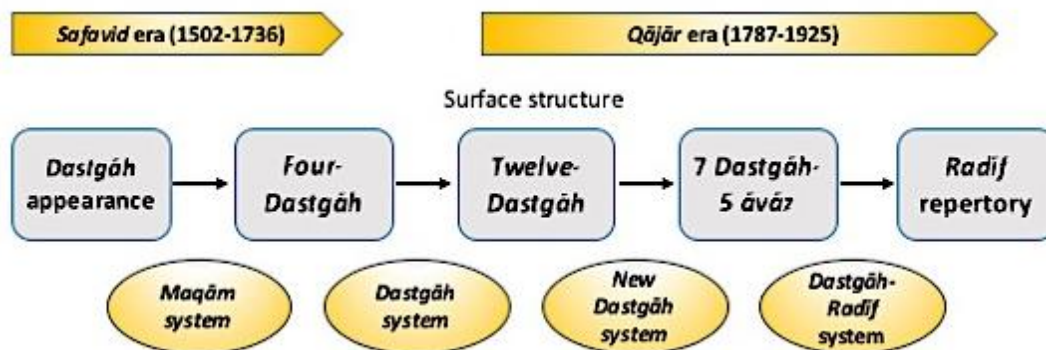


Figure 5. The evolution of the *dastgāh* as a multi-modal cycle from the *maqām* tradition.

Some other documents collected by Hooman Asadi mention that the idea of the *radīf* became manifested as a prescribed sequence of melodic modes encompassing a series of *gūshehs* collected into seven *dastgāhs* and five *āvāzes*. The current *radīf* serves as the main pedagogical repertory and a model for improvisatory performances (Hooman Asadi, 2006, pp. 1-2).