

# MUSIC IN MOURNING CEREMONIES AMONG THE ISMAILI MUSLIMS IN TAJIK BADAKHSHAN\*

Tacik Badakhshan'da İsmaili Müslümanları Yas Törenlerinde Müzik

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## Abstract

The paper discusses musical performances used at mourning ceremonies by the Ismaili Muslims in the mountainous Gorno-Badakhshan province of Tajikistan (hereafter GBAO). The Shi'a Ismailis make up most of the population in this province, compared to a majority Sunni Muslim population in the rest of Tajikistan. These Ismailis have lived in this remote mountainous province for centuries and therefore have evolved their own unique culture that is different from the rest of Tajikistan.

The objective of the article is to contextualize the mediatory role of unique forms of local musical performances and their integration in the mourning ceremonies in GBAO.

The data for the research presented here was obtained partly through a field study, involving tours of certain major areas in Wakhan and other regions of the GBAO to carry out qualitative research interviews, either in private with individuals, or at social or religious events. The interviews were not in a standardized format with one set of questions but were open-ended interviews where the interviewees could recount their knowledge on the subject of death, their own experiences of attending funerals, and provide personal anecdotes. Among the interviewees were local religious leaders (*khalīfas*), musical performers, lamenters and elders of the community who render important services at mourning ceremonies, and members of the community who had personal experiences of family bereavements to narrate. The data garnered from these extensive interviews, and other published sources were used to compile and contextualize the musical performances at mourning ceremonies in this region of Tajikistan.

**Keywords:** Mourning Ceremonies, Badakhshan Tajikistan, Ismaili, Music, Lament, Wakhan.

## Öz

Makale, Tacikistan'ın dağlık Gorno-Badakhshan eyaletinde (bundan böyle GBAO olarak anılacaktır) İsmaili Müslümanlar tarafından yas törenlerinde kullanılan müzik performanslarını tartışmaktadır. Şii İsmaililer, Tacikistan'ın geri kalanındaki çoğunluk Sünni Müslüman nüfusa kıyasla, bu eyaletteki nüfusun çoğunu oluşturuyor. Bu İsmaililer yüzyıllardır bu uzak dağlık eyalette yaşamışlardır ve bu nedenle Tacikistan'ın geri kalanından farklı olan kendi benzersiz kültürlerini geliştirmişlerdir.

Makalenin amacı, yerel müzik performanslarının benzersiz biçimlerinin aracı rolünü ve bunların GBAO'daki yas törenlerine entegrasyonunu bağlamsallaştırmaktır.

Burada sunulan araştırmanın verileri kısmen, bireylerle özel olarak veya sosyal veya dini etkinliklerde nitel araştırma görüşmeler yapmak için Wakhan'daki ve GBAO'nun diğer bölgelerindeki belirli ana bölgelere yapılan turları içeren bir saha çalışması yoluyla elde edilmiştir. Mülakatlar, bir dizi sorudan oluşan standart bir formatta değildi, ancak görüşülen kişilerin ölüm konusundaki bilgilerini, cenazelere katılma deneyimlerini anlatabilecekleri ve kişisel anekdotlar sunabilecekleri açık uçlu görüşmelerdi. Görüşülen kişiler arasında yerel dini liderler (halifeler), müzik icracıları, yas törenlerinde önemli hizmetler yapan cemaatin ağıtları ve yaşlıları ve aile yaslarını kişisel olarak deneyimlemiş topluluk üyeleri vardı. Bu kapsamlı röportajlardan ve diğer yayınlanmış kaynaklardan elde edilen veriler, Tacikistan'ın bu bölgesindeki yas törenlerindeki müzik performanslarını derlemek ve bağlamsallaştırmak için kullanıldı.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yas Törenleri, Badakhshan Tacikistan, İsmaili, Müzik, Ağıt, Vakhan.

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**Introduction**

The GBAO is a mountainous province situated in the eastern part of Tajikistan, borders Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China, with a population of more than 200,000 people (Hasanzoda, *et al.*, 2015). The region received its official name and autonomy in 1925 during the Soviet Union. The vast majority of the population in GBAO are Shī'a Ismaili Muslims, followers of the present Nizari Ismaili Imam, the Aga Khan IV, residing in seven districts in the region, speaking various languages.



**Figure 1:** Map of the GBAO region of Tajikistan. Source: <http://www.pamirs.org/maps.htm> Accessed. 30 January 2017.

The GBAO is a place of plurality, people speak several languages, and have various cultural practices. Many cultural practices of the Ismaili Muslims in the GBAO are closely connected with their religion. This connection is reflected through expressive culture such as musical performances. In this paper, I will discuss the musical performances in the mourning ceremonies, that have a strong connection to the Ismaili Muslims’ belief system.

**1. Islam and Ismailism**

To better appreciate the uniqueness of the culture and traditions of the Pamiri Ismaili Muslim community, it is important to present a brief account of Ismailism and how the Pamiri Ismailis fit into the larger Muslim community. Following the death of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) in 632 C.E, the Muslim community divided into two main branches of Islam, the Shī'a and the Sunni. Both these branches adhere to the Prophet Muhammad’s divinely-ordained teachings but the followers of the Shī'a Islam recognized ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib and the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-

law, as their first religious leader, or Imam. Recognized as the second-largest branch of Islam, the Shī'a Islam split into two main branches, and the Shī'a Ismailis went on to found the Fatimid Caliphate (descendants of Fātima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad) in the 10th century which controlled almost the whole of North Africa, including Egypt which became the center of the Caliphate (Daftary, 1990). This Ismaili dynasty lasted for about two and a half centuries. Although Ismailism has Arab origins, today the majority of the worldwide population of Ismailis is of non-Arab origin. Ismailism spread to other countries by visiting missionaries sent from the Fatimid Empire and soon found footholds in some parts of Central, Middle, and East Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. The Shī'a Ismaili Muslims are today dispersed around the world and make a united community of ethnically and culturally diverse peoples, who adhere to their allegiance to His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan, the 49th hereditary Imam, commonly referred to as Mawlana Hazar Imam by the followers.

The Shī'a Ismaili Muslims living in the GBAO, until recently in the former Soviet Union, were cut off from contact with their Imam and the Ismaili community in the rest of the world (Niyozov, 2002 ; Zimmermann, 2008). It is remarkable that Ismailis in these regions managed to preserve their beliefs after suffering severe religious repression, initially by local Sunni rulers in the 19th century, and later in the 20th century under the rule of the Soviets over so many decades. In fact, not only did they stay true to their beliefs, but they also managed to transmit these beliefs from generation to generation (Iloiev, 2008 ; Beben, 2018 ; Karmali, 2011).

One of the significant ways that helped the Ismailis in GBAO to maintain their faith, social and cultural cohesion was the sonic and musical performances, which served as a protective cultural sphere.

## 2. Musical Performances

Musical performances are integral to social gatherings in the GBAO with their various distinct genres and styles compared to other regions of Tajikistan. The most popular are laments and devotional singing performed at various life cycle events such as welcoming a visitor, blessing a house, birthdays, marriages, funeral ceremonies, and celebrating religious holidays, as well as on an occasion when a member of the community passes away. Through these events, characteristic features such as patterns of communal activities and sociability of the Ismailis in the Pamirs are on display. These performances generate an important social milieu, allowing people to meet and share great happiness and festivities, and also wretchedness and grievance in the event of a death in the community.

One of the musical performances that is part of mourning ceremonies in the GBAO is called *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī*. This musical performance has distinct names in particular regions of GBAO. Referred to as *qasoidkhonī* in the Wakhan valley and known as *madokhonī* in the Shughnan and Rushan districts of GBAO. The music performance incorporates various genres of classical Persian poetry, which has a connection to pre-Islamic Arabia and is sung to local music. The poetic form was initially developed in pre-Islamic Arabia, where the *qaṣīdas* were transmitted orally

for 200 to 300 years before the appearance of written records in the early Islamic period. It was at this stage that *qaşidas* were integrated into the rituals of the new and developing religion of Islam in Arabia (Sells, 1989 ; Abdeljelil, 2009). As Islam spread to other regions, *qaşidas* were transmitted to Central Asia, and then east to the Indian subcontinent *via* Persian poets and Sufis, new forms evolved, and this poetic form underwent a further transformation when adopted into the culture and traditions of the newly converted local populations.

An interesting point made by Rasmussen (2010) in the preface of her book requires quoting in full since it very clearly summarizes how the culture and traditions of the new converts in other countries lead to slightly altered forms of the practice of any new religion, compared to that in the originator country. This has happened with all major religions in the world. Perhaps this accounts for the evolution of the *qaşidas* after their transmission to other countries from Arabia, although in her book Rasmussen is only referring to Indonesia:

Part of the reasons for the many and continuously evolving localized cultural expressions of Islam is that the Muslim traders who first introduced Islamic ideas were themselves a multicultural collective who brought an Islam that “varied” due to its “multi origins”. (Rasmussen, 2010, XVI)

As a genre of Arabic poetry, the *qaşida* retains a single meter and rhyme through the whole of the poem. The main theme of the *qaşida* poetry is often dedicated to the praise of nature, Kings, the Prophets, and religious leaders. This poetic genre with the incorporation of local music has been recognized as a musical genre now among the Ismailis in the GBAO with its distinct styles and names in various districts of the region. For instance, as was mentioned earlier they are made known as *mado* or *madokhonī* in the Shughnan and Rushan districts and referred to as *qsoidkhonī* and *madokhonī* in the Wakhan valley (Goibnazarov, 2016, 485), and *qasoidkhonī* amongst the people in Ishkashim and the Gharan Valley, who speak Tajik/Dari. We can also observe other local names for this genre in the GBAO. For example, among the Ismailis in the Darwaz district, it is known as *haidarī* and in the local scholarly literature, it is called *madhiya* (Tavakkalov, 2016).

The *qaşida* as a classical genre of Islamic Arabic poetry, rooted in pre-Islamic Arabia, spread to Persia and from the 10th century onward, developed in Central Asia by extending its influence on other languages of the Muslim world (Sperl and Shackle, 1996). For example, the poets in Persia evolved new forms of the *qaşida*, such as *bahāriya*, the praise of spring, *khamriya*, the praise of wine, *khazāniya*, the praise of autumn, *tardiya* dedicated to hunting and *madhiya*, the eulogy poetry. In Central Asia, it was popularized with new compositions and styles with local characteristic features. For instance, the panegyric *madh*, which has an etymological root of *maddāh* (eulogist), was brought to Central Asia as part of the Sufi and Ismaili spiritual traditions and missions (Abibov, 1974) developed as *maddo* and *qasoid* in the GBAO.

In their performance nature, these musical practices have some tenuous links to *Sufism*, known as *tasawwuf* in Arabic, a form of Islamic mysticism that emphasizes internalization and closeness to God. One practice of the Sufi called *Mevlevi Sama*

*Ceremony* in Turkey involves musical performances and dance as a means of altering the state of consciousness, achieving a state of ecstasy, and thereby achieving closeness to God (Lewisohn, 1997). The *qaşidas* as part of the local musical performance *qasoidkhoni* or *madokhoni* are not recited in the GBAO, but they are usually sung and their performance oftentimes involves more than the singing of *qaşidas*: it is generally a performative event, where primarily men sing various genres of poetry adjusted to various tunes and accompanied by local musical instruments. This performative event rooted in an old tradition among the Pamiri Ismaili Muslims represents an indigenous local and unique form of religious and music practice now has a great significance in the mourning ceremonies in GBAO.

### 3. Mourning Ceremonies

Humans in different cultures worldwide developed their own beliefs in life and death and ways of disposal of the dead. Most cultures began to believe in the continued existence of the soul after death and therefore carried out proper interments to ease the passage of the dead into a peaceful ‘afterlife’. The most common method of dealing with the dead is a ground burial (sometimes sea burials), but cremation has been an ancient practice in many parts of Central and East Asian countries. (Crubezy *et al.*, 2006). These cultures believe that disposing of the body by burning results in ‘cleansing or purification of the soul of the deceased, thereby smoothing its way into the afterlife. Some ancient cultures exposed their dead, either on the ground or trees or in tall purpose-built towers (Towers of Silence) so that the body is disposed of by feeding animals or birds (vultures) (Boyce, 1996).

The actual funeral ceremonies depend on cultures, traditions, and any religious beliefs of the deceased. Universally, in all major religions, interments involve some sort of preparation of the body (cleansing, embalming, etc.), wrapping or dressing of the body, placement in a coffin, transportation of the body to a sanctified cemetery, and burial or cremation, all steps usually accompanied by recitation of prayers (and sometimes chanting, singing devotional songs, etc.). All Islamic burials essentially follow the same procedures, but the details vary between Muslims, depending on geographical location and local customs and traditions of any particular country. There are also some variations between other denominations within the Sunni and the Shī’a communities. For instance, *Moharram* ceremonies among the Shī’a Muslims, although common in Sunni tradition to a lesser extent, are accompanied by extreme expressions of grief, wearing of mourning apparel, abstinence, and the tolerating of other hardships. (Calmard, 2004). The Shī’a Ismaili Muslims’ mourning ceremonies in the GBAO in Tajikistan, and to a certain extent in the northeastern region of Badakhshan in Afghanistan, are unique, both in the use of certain religious rituals and in the use of music.

Mourning ceremonies vary in terms of customs, rites, and names in different sub-regions in the GBAO, and are marked by the convergence of people from different parts of the region, including close family and friends of the deceased. A mourning ceremony in Shughnan region is usually referred to as *dawat* [invitation], whereas in Wakhan and some other sub-regions of the Ishkashim district it is known as *marka* or *maraka* [gathering]. The use of these different names and variety of

practices concerning mourning ceremonies in the GBAO is most likely connected to the varying languages or dialects spoken in its seven districts or may be connected to previous religious practices and traditions from Zoroastrian days, or ancient local customs at the time pre-dating the arrival of Ismailism in the 11th century.

It is commonly assumed that in the early days of the arrival of Ismailism, mourning events were used at an opportune time and place to preach Ismaili doctrine. The spread of Ismailism in the GBAO was the outcome of the activeness of the Ismaili institution – the *da'wa* (mission), an organized and effective system for the propagation of the Ismaili understanding of Islam. These activities are strongly connected with the name of Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d.1080), a Persian poet, philosopher, theologian, and who was imbued with the Shī'a Ismaili doctrines practiced in the Fatimid Empire during his long stay in Egypt. He is believed to be the founder of Ismailism in Badakhshan (Iliiev, 2008a ; Beben, 2018). He is respected by the Ismaili Muslims in the Pamirs as *pir* (a religious guide, or a missionary). The Ismaili Muslims in the GBAO refer to Nāṣir-i Khusraw's mission as the *da'wat-i Nosir* [mission of Nosir], or *sunnat-i Nosir* [tradition of Nosir]. As a consequence, the term *dawat* is employed by the Ismailis in Shughnan, whereas Ismailis in Wakhan refer to mourning ceremonies as *marka* or *maraka*. Most of the traditional elements and activities related to the mourning ceremonies in the GBAO are connected with Nāṣir-i Khusraw's influence. These activities include the musical performance of the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī*, and the ritual of Chiragh-i-Rawshan (or *Charogh-Rawshan*) [luminous lamp], offered on the second day of the mourning ceremonies (Elnazarov, 2015).

Almost all the people in the community render important services at the mourning ceremonies and share a moment of sorrow with the family of the deceased. The community members are engaged in various tasks, with the duties divided jointly by members. During the mourning ceremonies, those present include the relatives of the deceased, neighbors, the *khalīfa*, the local religious leader who monitors the entire mourning ceremony, and the *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons*, musicians, and singers of the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī*. In villages of the Wakhan, the community members divide tasks among themselves, some cook and provide food, and others are responsible for serving those present at the home of the bereaved. All members of the community offer their support according to the degree of their capacity, and the *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons* extend their respects by contributing their talents to the singing and performance of their unique musical repertoire.

In contrast to other performance events, attending mourning ceremonies is restricted. Not all members of the community are allowed to be present in the mourning ceremonies and observe *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* during the event. For example, only adults are allowed to attend, with young, unmarried people not expected to attend. In an interview in October 2011, Muborakqadamov, a leading singer of *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* in mourning ceremonies in Wakhan asserted that

This kind of music is not for entertaining. It is music for reflection. Therefore, young members of the community still are not mature enough to comprehend this. (Goibnazarov, 2011)

However, the restriction imposed on the young unmarried members of the community does not affect the musical performances during the mourning ceremonies. They are usually attended by a huge number of people. On many occasions in this situation, the social status of the deceased also plays a significant role. If the deceased was a prominent individual in the community, people from all places of the region will come and offer their respect. In this case, several *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons* attend the mourning ceremonies and take turns to play music and sing, or on the occasion perform in groups the whole night. Throughout the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performance, normally, five to six musicians sit side by side with crossed legs, facing one another or in a row. The musicians as a sign of respect cover their heads and wear ordinary clothes and remain sitting in a place specifically specified for their performance. The number of performers depends on how many *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons* are present during the funeral. After finishing their performance, the participants say loudly “*Yo ‘Alī Haq, [Oh Ali, The Truth] Guyo Boshed,*” [be always sound] and “*salomat boshed*” [be healthy] to appreciate the musicians’ work.

In the GBAO, *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* is performed, starting from the day of the death, and then throughout the ceremony. In some parts of the GBAO, in Bartang, for instance, the close relatives of the deceased, including men and women play music and dance before the coffin, when taking the body to the grave. In case there is not a *qasoidkhon* or *madokhon* in the village, a person from the village will be asked to invite a *qasoidkhon* or *madokhon* from elsewhere and perform during the mourning ceremonies. The musicians, who attend and perform at the mourning ceremonies, usually, carry on their work voluntarily. These musicians consider their work as a form of respect for the bereaved family and the deceased person.

After the burial, the people return to the house of the bereaved family and participate in the Qur’an recitation ceremony, mainly conducted by the *khalīfa* with all the visitors and family members participating. The recitation process continues until the evening as people from other villages and regions come to offer their condolences. In the evening the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performance restarts and extends the whole night up till the next day. People are expected to stay awake the whole night, and in the Wakhan that night is referred to as the *shab-i nakhusp* meaning a ‘sleepless night’. The people who are attending in the house are not supposed to sleep. Karimov, another leading *qasoidkhon* from Wakhan explained that

When a person passes away, his soul stays in the house for a day. Therefore, we perform *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* and *charogh-rawshan*. They help the soul to leave the house peacefully. (Goibnazarov, 2011)

The ritual of *charogh-rawshan* is usually performed on the second day after death and is recognized as a compulsory rite for the Ismaili Muslims in the GBAO. The rites begin with a liturgy in the Tajik/Persian language known as the *charoghnoma* by the community. The liturgy is comprised of Qur’anic verses, narrations about the prophets and Imams, supplications, which are also connected to Nāšir-i Khusraw (Shohkhumorov, 2003 ; Bertels, 1959 ; Shohzodamhammad, 2005 ; Shahzade-Mohammad, 2006 ; Mamadshierzodshoev, 2009). As the recitation begins, the *khalīfa* makes the cotton wool lamp wick known as *pilta*. The wick is soaked in oil and lit, and

members of the bereaved family place their hands over the flame and their faces. They do this three times and pray for the departed soul. Karimov interpreted the significance of this custom and its relation to the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performance along these lines:

We, in the Wakhan believe that when a person passes away, his or her soul remains for a day in the air in the house. This is because the soul is still not clean. We all make mistakes and have sinned. Therefore, we perform *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* to purify the soul, and *charoghrawshan* rite is performed so the light can help to clean the way ahead for the departed soul. (Goibnazarov, 2011)

In this context, *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* and *charoghrawshan* are conventional and dignified ways to bring peace and harmony to the soul. The practitioners of these rituals believe that the soul of humans comes to this world ‘clean’ but becomes ‘unclean’ because of certain deeds in their lifetime. Upon death, the soul must be purified before it connects with its origin. The Pamiris, like almost all other cultures in the world, also believe in the veneration of the souls (*arwoparastī*) of the deceased relatives (Iloiev, 2008b, 64). All of these activities are conducted so that individuals are capable to fulfill their responsibility to the dead with dignity and allow the departure of the soul from this world to the next in peace, and not stay behind to bother the living relatives. The entire family and the community assure themselves that they have followed all the customs and rites related to mourning ceremonies faithfully with an anticipation that they will not encounter any troubles. It is commonly believed that if the mourning ceremonies procedures are not followed, some harm may come to those who actively participated in and contributed to the mourning ceremonies. These harms usually occur through sickness and calamities (see, e.g., Kalandarov & Shoinbekov, 2008, 67-81). After the performance of *charoghrawshan*, participants are served food before the resumption of performances of *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī*, which again continue throughout the night. There is an interlude during the night to allow the men to rest, during which the women begin singing elegy, known as *beparvo falak* in Shughnan, and *sifat* and *nawagarī* in Wakhan. These songs of lament are mostly improvised by female members of the community combining Persian and local languages and singing the praise, the good deeds, dignity, and noble character of the deceased. The singers of these laments are usually the close relatives of the deceased, who express their state of mind. Apart from expressing their grief, this mourning singing rite is also communal respect for the soul of the deceased and the perpetuation of social relations.

#### 4. The Musical Performance Of *Qasoidkhonī* or *Madokhonī*

The musical performance of the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* in mourning ceremonies has its specific features. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the performance is the texts chosen for singing. The musicians and singers choose various poetic genres to perform during the ceremony, these include some narratives and prayers as well. (See, e.g., Berg, [2004] for more details of the poetic songs that are sung in Badakhshan). They are often lengthy, with heavy religious content, most focusing on the wondrous deeds of Imam ‘Alī and his kindness. A good example of this is the *Panj Kishtī* (Five Ships) story that describes the miraculous actions of ‘Alī. *Panj Kishtī* (Five Ships) is part of Muborakqadamov’s repertoire that he sings only at

mourning ceremonies. Such stories are important during mourning ceremonies, both from a doctrinal point of view for the Ismailis in the Pamirs as well as to support the family of the deceased. Muborakqadamov emphasized that

Story as such is sung in the house of the bereaved family, to express sympathy to the grieving family as well as the community being present in the house. The story tells us that we should not feel upset or uneasy since our Imam is there, who is ever-present to save us. The *Panj Kishī* story inspires us to be hopeful and boosts our encouragement to endure our extreme unhappiness, as Imam ‘Alī is there, who will save us from any calamity. As the story continues, the five ships and the people survived since Imam ‘Alī saved them. He will take care of us as well and protects us from any unfortunate circumstances. If our *imon* [faith] is strong we can bear any difficulties. (Goibnazarov, 2011)

These allegorical stories, therefore, appear to uphold consciously and unconsciously the religious worldview of the Pamirī Ismailis. The hidden (*botinī*) implication of the texts and customs grants the listeners a valuable understanding of mourning ceremonies, and especially the deeper meaning of the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī*. As reported by Muborakqadamov:

It is not appropriate to sing these *qasoids*<sup>1</sup> on stage. They must be sung in mourning ceremonies or religious events because they have unique meaning and importance at the time of mourning ceremonies. When performed on stage, people might misunderstand their meanings. (Goibnazarov, 2011)

Deriving out of the interviews with Muborakqadamov and Karimov, two leading performers of the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī*, one understands that the texts of songs are carefully selected, bearing in mind the context of mourning ceremonies, where they are performed. These songs illustrate how people perceive their religion and religious practices and utilize these songs as a means to control sorrow and grief. For this reason, the musicians recognize these sung poetries as *matnho-yi makhsūs* (special texts) that should not be sung anywhere else, except in mourning ceremonies and other events that have religious significance. Karimov noted that

if a singer performs these ‘special texts’ in a concert hall, it seems that he has misunderstood, and that is unforgivable. They are not songs for enjoyment. These texts are intended to understand religion. (Goibnazarov, 2011)

Alowatov, a singer of *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī*, who largely performs in big stage concerts, has an identical understanding of the texts performed in mourning ceremonies. He pointed out:

There are many texts such as the Five Brothers (*Panj Ikhvon*), the Rotted Skull (*Kala-yi Pusida*), Five Ships, and others that are approved by the community as “special texts”. These song texts should not be sung anywhere else, except at mourning ceremonies and events with religious significance. Since they are long

1. Any poem sung during *qasoid-khonī* is called *qasoid* or *mado* regardless of the specific genre of poetry to which it corresponds. The same poems that are sung during *qasoid-khonī* may be sung outside of that context, for instance at wedding ceremonies; in this latter case, the poems are called *bayd* or *soz*, and not *qasoid* or *mado*.

in terms of duration and have religious content, to sing them in concerts makes no sense. (Goibnazarov, 2011)

The distinction that *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons* put on the texts of songs concerning the location of the performance is evident from the deep recognition of their faith and the rites associated with it. These song texts help to enunciate, as pointed out by Spinetti

regional internalized icons encode associations with the places, the experience of communal social life, and the belief systems that could be perceived as cultural authenticities. (Spinetti, 2014, 202)

The lyrics of the *qasoidkhoni* or *madokhoni* vocalize the “internal icons” and the locations where these devotional texts are sung and performed. The significance of the texts is related to the context and place, where they are sung. The song texts used for the performances consist of an assorted category of poetry put together from interrelated classical Persian literature. They are available as a written set in the possession of *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons*, and defined as *bayoz*. Thus, the *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons* assert that they perform the songs in conformity with the *bayoz* (*az rūyi bayoz*).

## 5. The Bayoz

The term *bayoz*, in academic writings, is characterized variously in response to its utilization in a different context. In the context of Urdu literature, for instance, Pritchett views *bayoz* as

the ubiquitous little notebook that lovers of poetry carried around with them for recording verses that caught their fancy. (Pritchett, 1994, 66)

Even supposing *bayoz* stands for a notebook maintained by minstrels, poets, writers, and calligraphers for recording notes in various contexts (Becka, 2011), in Central Asia, the *bayoz* most recurrently denotes a collection that consists of poetry with religious or semi-religious meanings, which usually are sung or chanted. Also, it oftentimes comprises verses from the Qur’an, and mystical poems (Sultanova, 2011, 138). Similarly, Van den Berg (2004, 33) indicates that the *bayoz* in the context of minstrels’ tradition in Tajikistan, is a collection, which contains poems written in the Persian-Arabic and/or the modern Tajik script, i.e. Cyrillic of various poets. Within the context of the *qasoidkhoni* or *madokhoni* tradition, *bayoz* refers to the collection of song texts with religious content the *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons* possess and perform during mourning ceremonies and other religious events. However, the singers and musicians who serve in happy occasions such as wedding ceremonies or concerts do not regard their collection of songs as *bayoz*. The term *bayoz*, among the Pamiri Ismailis, is, therefore, exclusively meant to be the collection of songs performed at *qasoidkhoni* or *madokhoni* performances.

Being preserved in the form of handwritten collections, the song text exists in either the Persian or Cyrillic script, generally including various genres of Persian poetry. They present multiple topics and subjects, and the prominent themes of the song texts are theological, educational, didactical, and mystical. The collection of

the texts is usually handwritten and has been copied and recopied by the singers from books or their predecessors' collections. Some handwritten collections in the possession of the musicians have been transcribed from audiocassette recordings. These days we can find collections of the songs disseminated on audiotapes, CDs, and DVDs, which the musicians also call *bayoz*, and one may simply refer to them as "digital *bayoz*". Some of the handwritten *bayoz* are beautifully decorated, with the possessor or collector decorating them with Persian paintings, pen crafts, or other decorative elements. As of today, the performers handle their *bayoz* with the utmost respect and considerable attention, valuing the collections as "divine remnant." For this reason, the musicians keep them in an inaccessible place where only the possessor is allowed to access.

### 6. Duration and Quality of *Qasoidkhonī* and *Madokhonī* at Mourning Ceremonies

Another unique characteristic of *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performances at the house of the bereaved is the time of continuation of the performance. Commonly, a *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performance is lengthened, starting on the day of death, and lasting the whole night, with a short intermission for women to sing laments. Since *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performance is performed at regular intervals, the shortest performance at the funeral ceremony lasts for 25 to 30 minutes per round. Many rounds of singing happen during the whole night and the singers take turns to sing in every round either individually or together. The continuity of the performance manifests the significance of the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* at the time of mourning ceremonies. The lengthy performance is highly appreciated and acknowledged by the participants. In case the performance does not continue for long, it is usually considered a failure on the side of the *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons* and perceived as impudent to the performers and disrespectful to the soul of the deceased and the bereaved family. The *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons* themselves agree that they should always guarantee their preparedness when serving at the mourning ceremonies. A mourning ceremony is a social event and the community expects the performers to be uniquely competent so to engage the gathering. Additionally, they must behave in a socially acceptable manner. This involves not dressing fashionably, avoiding smoking and drinking alcohol, and much other unacceptable behavior. Another important characteristic related to the action of the *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons* is that they should memorize many poems to be able to respond to the expectations of the community. Kholmamadov, a *qasoidkhon* or *madokhon* from Shughnan, reaffirmed this aspect in our interview:

Whenever we [*qasoidkhons* or *madokhons*] visit to serve at a mourning ceremony we must be prepared. We need to understand that we have to play music and sing for a long night. Therefore, we must memorize so many poems as to respond to the expectation of the community. (Goibnazarov, 2012)

Thus, the performers must be fully ready if they are invited to mourning ceremonies. It is anticipated that they should acquire excellent memory, musical skills and knowledge of the history and culture before to perform in mourning ceremonies.

## 7. Musical Instruments During *Qasoidkhonī* or *Madokhonī* at Mourning Ceremonies

The additional distinctive characteristic of the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performance at a funeral is the use of musical instruments. Although different musical instruments are used, the preference for instruments is limited. The musicians employ specifically the *rubob*, *tanbur*, *balandzikom*, stringed instruments, and the frame drum, known in the GBAO as *daf*. All these instruments have different animal parts in their construction. For instance, the skin from sheep and calf is used to make the percussion instruments, and the guts are prepared to make strings for the lutes. In large parts of the GBAO, the sheep is generally considered an animal that possesses “sacred” attributes and therefore is slaughtered on numerous occasions related to religious holidays such as Qurbon (*ʿĪd al-Adḥā*) as well as during the construction of a new Pamirī house, in particular when the primary pillars are installed in. In addition, the sheep are sacrificed, when a bride arrives and enters her new home for the first time. Concerning the mourning ceremonies, the sheep is sacrificed at the ritual of *charoghrawshan*.

The musical instruments that have strings made from the sheep gut are viewed as “instruments of heaven” (*bihishtī*), and the musical instruments that are with metal strings are classified as “instruments of hell” (*duzakhī*) (Nurjanov and Karomatov, 1978, 11-12). For this reason, metal-stringed instruments are normally not played during mourning ceremonies and are viewed as inappropriate for the context. Nurjanov and Karomatov’s fieldwork in the 1970s, reports that

The Ismaili Muslims in the Pamirs believe that the sound of musical instruments with metal string is the groaning of sinful people in hell, correspondingly these musical instruments expected to be played less (Nurjanov and Karomatov, 1978, 12).

This belief is widespread in the elderly community of the *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons*, those performers who lived and were born in the late 1920s and 1950s. However, the younger generation of performers being raised and matured at the time of electronic music and modern musical instruments have generated distinct values that incorporated equally traditional indigenous and varied modern, globally recognized musical instruments. On this account, the current generation of musicians is not completely informed about such descriptions and is not fully concerned about such implications.

Except for the *rubob* and *daf*, the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performance at the grieving ceremonies, excludes any dancing, clapping, shouting, or the use of microphones. By comparison with *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performances at mourning ceremonies, this music performed at joyous occasions including Ismaili religious events involves musical ensembles synthesizing traditional musical instruments such as the *pamirī rubob*, *ghizhak*, *balandzikom*, and *daf* with electric guitars, keyboards, and synthesizers. Young musicians’ involvement in combining different musical instruments and blending various genres in their performance during other joyous religious ceremonies is acceptable, but such blending is viewed as incompetent for the mourning contexts by traditionalists.

## 8. Community Reception of the Music

Many observers of the performance of *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* at mourning ceremonies accept that these performances function as a means for them to control their emotions, overcome their bitter feelings, and conserve their physical energy. Mamadsafoeva, a young woman, who unluckily lost her young brother, shared her feelings

During the mourning ceremonies, the one thing that alleviated my pain and elevated my mood was the sound of the *rubob* and the singing of the *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons*. It somehow penetrated my soul and made me feel consoled (*orom*). (Goibnazarov, 2012)

The music and singing practice are effective psychological means for comforting the mourning family members and easing their pain as well as reiterating their social connections. The music performed at mourning ceremonies has its peculiarities and traditions that must be maintained to accommodate the demands of the community. The *qasoidkhons* or *madokhons* are expected to create an atmosphere that not just provides support for the bereaved family but also rejuvenates, enlightens, and strengthens the religious faith of the community present in the house. During the extended duration of *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performance, the musicians maintain the various category of people simultaneously: mournful people who are there for consolation and emotional help, people looking for a diversion, and foremost to pray for the soul of the dead. The musicians with their music and singing extend their ultimate respects to the spirit of the deceased. Through their musical performance, they likewise help to channel sensations of grief and sorrow and prevent their emotions from turning physically uncontrollable. Funerals in the GBAO oftentimes turn into an overpowering experience for participants, and many people hurt themselves physically. They scream, scratch their faces, pull their hair, or some people even beat their heads against walls. This uncontrolled physical mourning and weeping harm may develop into a form of self-abuse. In this context, the musical performance enables the bereaved family to peacefully release their grief and its connected emotions.

The further objective of these musical performances is to underline connections to a shared past as a way of circulating and enlightening the community about their faith and religion. The death of a community member becomes a platform of opportunity for a collective congregation, and the mourning ceremony offers a space for ordinary people to examine their religious practices and the roots of their faith through sonic and musical performances. For some ordinary members of the community, the musical performances make it simple to understand their faith and religion. For instance, Gharibmamadov one of the regular participants of funeral ceremonies emphasized

For me, it is difficult to understand the books, which I read about religion. They are hard to grasp. But I can learn so many good things about religion and my faith when I take part in a *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performance at mourning ceremonies. There, the musicians or the khalifa explain what the performers sing. (Goibnazarov, 2012)

*Qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performances allow the participants to internalize their faith and religion in an aesthetic way, which makes its understanding simpler for members of the community like Gharibmamadov. It is also a time for believers to devote some time to experience the spirituality of having a virtual *didor* [vision]. In the GBAO, the Ismaili Muslims consider it, *didor-i botinī* [a spiritual vision]. *Didor* is a fundamental concept in the Ismaili spiritual tradition. It is substantiated at a time when Ismailis find their way in the presence of the living Imam and embrace his blessings. There exist two prospective means of achieving *didor*: physical (*zohirī didor*) and spiritual (*botinī didor*). One includes a live experience of meeting and seeing the Imam, and another is reaching the point of enlightenment and spiritual blessing through religious and devotional musical practices.

Mamadbekov, one of the *khalifas* provided an interesting explanation of how the Ismailis survived under the Soviet rule:

Despite not being in contact with the Imam and Ismailis in the rest of the world for seventy years during the Soviet suppression, it was through the *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* that we kept our faith in our religion and our Imam being life. (Goibnazarov, 2012)

The participants during the funeral ceremonies listen to the songs, which are about the Imams, their generosity, support, and spirituality. Thus, witnessing these performances offers a means of achieving spiritual *didor*. Through the act of listening to the lyrics of the songs that are sung, members of the community present in the mourning ceremonies seek to understand God's existence and creation as well as approach their living spiritual leader. Through these practices, they potentially achieve an understanding of spiritual truths (*haqiqat*). For some in the audience, these performances can be a significant life-changing event, especially the achievement of spiritual *didor* if they have previously taken little interest in their religion. As Karimov reported to me in an interview,

At the time of *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performance one is granted a spiritual profit (*baraka*). This is a signal of continuous contact with the Imam. (Goibnazarov, 2011)

Utilizing the poetic texts and the music, which convey an effective religious message, the participants experience emotions that endorse them to transcend the physical world and induce in them a feeling of being closer to the world of spiritual realities. The music and the songs strengthen the participants' yearning for *didor*. While listening to the songs and the music, attendees shed tears, and sway their heads, experiencing a condition resembling ecstasy. The *qasoidkhonī* or *madokhonī* performance can be described as a powerful and significant means for the Ismaili Muslims in the GBAO to attain spiritual enlightenment and legitimizes social relations. Further, it represents an interaction of music and communal rites in a context in which members of the community from all social ranks are involved directly or indirectly.

## Conclusions

The Ismaili Muslims in the GBAO integrate music performances into their

mourning rites and consider them a fundamentally important aspect. As discussed above the mourning rites start in the home of the deceased, where the community collectively supports the family in their time of grief. The singing of devotional texts thus helps to celebrate and strengthen the intimate communal bonds and the understanding of accountability and responsibility among neighbors and community members. The ceremony, in particular, provides purification of the soul for the dead through the performance of *qasoidkhoni* or *madokhoni* and serves their community members who are in mourning. In this context, the music and singing function as a medium between the Creator and human beings, linking the Prophet, the Imam, and their followers. Likewise, it moves the listeners, participants, and the heavy-hearted families who lost their beloved members emotionally and spiritually. It is in the “shared understanding of intention and content” (Alexander, 2011, 30) that *qasoidkhoni* or *madokhoni* has an influence on the Ismaili Muslims in GBAO and in which a social union, relationship, and identity are created.

The practitioners and observers of the musical performances consider it to be a “powerful manifestation that reflects the values and beliefs of individuals and communities” (Dawe, 2003, 278) in contexts of village life, for the family of the deceased in mourning ceremonies and at religious occasions. It is not considered a performance *per se*, but instead, as a natural and necessary dimension of everyday social and religious life, to console and alleviate the bereaved and stress the importance of life regardless of the unavoidability of dying, to assert hopefulness through the medium of music and singing, to facilitate the soul of the deceased’s transition to its everlasting place, and to profess infinite realities advocated by the community.

The significance of the musical performances discussed lies in the communicative nature of the song texts that are chosen, the accompanying music, and the actual performance, a combination of which represents life & death and equally expresses joy and sadness. These performances articulate the transition of life and the ascent of the soul of the deceased to the afterlife. These artistic musical expressions are not intended to entertain, but rather to express sadness and to function as social and cultural patterns in the context of the death ritual. These performances are considered obligatory custom that serves to bring peace to the soul of the deceased and their family and friends. As an important ceremonial goal, these musical mourning rites maintain the well-being of the living and bring the community together through their friendship and shared faith and create a complex network of meanings related to the people’s worldview concerning life and death.

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