

Zahīrōk

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Zahīrōk: A Balochi Melody Type and Song Genre of Homesickness and Nostalgia¹ (Sabir Badalkhan)

Zahīrōk, also pronounced as *zahīrīg* and *zahīrōnk* in different dialects of Balochi, is the name of a genre of folksong as well as a term used for melody types. As a song genre, it is strongly associated with several kinds of work, and as a melody type, it is fundamental to the performance of Balochi narrative poems (*šayr*).

The term *zahīrōk* has its origin in the word *zahīr* (“yearning, longing for, homesick, heartsick”, etc.),² and thus *zahīrōk/zahīrīg* is “the song of a homesick person, a lament for one’s native land, a faraway beloved, or the family back home”. It is basically a song of strong

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² In one of the *zahīrōks* the poet expresses longings for his/her lover in the following: *taī zahīr par man dradēn hawr ant / har šapā kāhant u par manā gwārant*, “your *zahīr* (yearning thoughts) are like heavy rain-showers to me / they come every night and pour down upon me” (Balochi text from Sabzal Samigi, interviewed in Turbat, January 25, 1995). There also exist verbs like *zahīr kanag* (“to be nostalgic, to suffer from the feelings of nostalgia, longing, etc.”) and *zahīrīg būag* (“to be suffering from nostalgic feelings”).

nostalgic feelings for those who are left behind. Elfenbein describes it “a lamenting or yearning song” (cf. Elfenbein 1992, II:164). Some Baloch even suggested to me that the term *zahīrōk* is composed of two words: *zahīr* (“heartsick, yearning, homesick”) and *rōk* (“burning”), and thus *zahīrōk* being a song “coming from the burning heart of a yearning person” – either the one away from home and homeland or those left behind. It is basically the song of travelers and of those away from their homes and homeland (cf. the Arabic song genre *al-hanīn ilā l-awtān*, “songs of homesickness”, “of longing for homeland”, described as poetry of the kindling of fire in hearts; cf. Antrim 2012: 14; for more on this see below).

Some believe that *zahīrōk* originated from the cuckooing of the wood pigeon (*kapōt*). A popular account says that a man from Makran had gone to Sind, a fertile country with greenery all around contrary to the barren homeland of the Baloch. There he had seen a wood pigeon sitting on a tree singing yearning songs in a wailing tone. The man had asked it why it was singing wailing songs in such a paradise-like country. The bird had answered that it missed its homeland, Makran. From this, the famous Balochi proverb, “one wails for the homeland even if it is as dry as a piece of dry wood” (*wāe watan u huškēn dār*),¹ is said to have originated. It is said that the man had brought the melody of that wailing song of the bird and from it *zahīrōk* was developed and then all types of Balochi melancholic songs and music.

Zahīrōk tunes are known only in the Makran region of both Pakistani and Iranian Balochistan and among the Baloch population of Karachi. The Baloch living in northern and eastern Balochistan do not sing *šayr* with *zahīrōk* tunes. *Līkō* is the popular genre of worksong in the

¹ Cf. the oft cited Arabic saying ‘*usru-ka fi baladi-ka khayrun min yusri-ka fi ghurbati-ka*’ “it is better to be destitute in your country than to be well off abroad” (cited in Müller 1999: 39).

northern and northwestern regions of Balochistan and among the Baloch of Afghanistan (for details on the musical zones of Balochistan see Badalkhan 2000; Elfenbein 1966 for Balochi dialects; and Coletti 1981, Aksjonov 1990 for *likō*).

Songs expressing similar sentiments and states of mind have also been recorded in the neighbouring regions. Sakata reports on a song genre called *falak*, which is popular in the northeastern areas of Badakhshan and Kataghan in Afghanistan (Sakata 1983: 53; cf. Slobin 1970: 98). She translates *falak* as “sky” but adds that it is used with the metaphorical meaning of “fortune” or “destiny” (ibid.). Sakata writes that the people in Badakhshan describe *falaks* being sad (*ghamghin*). “The feeling of sadness stems from a longing for a lover, friends, family, and home” (Sakata.: 54). She records a poet maintaining that “*falak* signified a melody type, ... and further, that there were four or five identifiable types of *falaks*” (ibid.: 55). It has a sub-type called *zahiri* (sad, melancholy) (ibid.: 59). Although it seems that the Balochi *zahīrōk* is more elaborated and developed than the *falak*, both genres express similar states of mind and have relatively similar singing styles. The same is also true for the *gharībī* song genre of Iran, which has much in common with the Balochi *zahīrōk* and the Afghani and Tajik *falak*, in particular with the subject matter and in the singing style. Stephen Blum writes that the *gharībī* in Iran “takes its name from the condition of someone who is *gharīb* – a stranger or outsider – and gives voice to yearning for a home that has been lost or abandoned” (Blum 2002: 829). He adds that “in addition to complaints about fate, the topics may include complaints about unrequited love or requests for a lover’s favors; praise of family members (especially father, mother, and brother); the beauty and destructiveness of nature; complaints of hunger, illness, or lack of work; transgressions of the rules of hospitality; and many others”

(ibid.: 830). The *gharībī* song genre, with similar connotations, is also found in Kurdistan (information provided by Yelmiz Ershahin, a young Kurdish scholar originally from Turkish Kurdistan but now studying Kurdish folklore in Germany; Naples, April 2004; cf. also Allison 1996: 43).

A similar song genre exists in the Arab world where it is generally called *al-hanīn* (songs of nostalgia) as well as *al-hanīn ilā l-awtān* (songs of nostalgia and longing for homeland; *awtān* being the plural of *watan*, "homeland"). This song genre has a long history going back to the pre-Islamic times reaching up to modern times. Much work has been carried out on this genre and a rich body of such songs have been collected and brought to the public. *Al-anīn* songs often symbolize "the homeland to the body of a mother ... [expressing strong] attachment to the homeland in universal terms, establishing it as a category of belonging that crossed divides of gender and culture" (Antrim 2012: 11). These songs express strong feelings of nostalgia (*hanīn*) during *safar* ("travel"), *shawq* ("deep feelings of longing"), and *ghurba* ("alienation in a foreign land") (see ibid.: 14; see also Arazi 1993; Müller 1999; Khan 2020 for more on *al-hanīn ilā l-awtān* songs).

Zahīrōk as a Song Genre

As a song genre, *zahīrōk* is strongly melancholic, expressing deep emotions and strong sentiments about separation, mostly of those who are away from home in their travelling or in search of labour. It is also the deep yearning of those left behind who sing their yearning sentiments for the separation and absence of their sons, husbands, brothers and/or fathers. *Zahīrōk* is also the song with which women express their sufferings under certain heavy chores – especially if they work for others, as in the case of maidservants, as well as repetitive tasks such as grinding grain with a handmill, weaving carpets or quilts on

a loom and so on. Besides being sung in working contexts it is also the song of travellers who ride on their camels and sing of separation from their homes and dear ones. The only travellers who sing *zahīrōk* are cameleers, probably because it was only on camels that people made long journeys in the past, or because it was the smooth, rocking, and lulling motion of the camel in a perfectly quiet landscape that provided the tempo for *zahīrōk* singing; I have not heard of its being sung by travellers riding other beasts, such as horses or donkeys. As such, with the name *zahīrōk* one immediately thinks of someone riding on a camel and singing along the way. It is generally argued that the *zahīrōk*, like the *likō* of the northern and northeastern Balochi dialect speaking regions and *Dayhī* of the eastern Baloch (those living on the eastern sides of Kalat plateau), is sung on camels following the soothing movements of the animal. All these genres, which are similar to each other in many respects, are also sung by solitary workers like men tilling the land, women working on looms, etc.

Among Baloch scholars, Gul Khan Nasir believes that *zahīrōk* was originally the song of women and that all *zahīrōks* were compositions of women (1979b: 12).¹ He maintains that it was sung by women for their men-folk who were away from home and family, either because of tribal wars, for the purpose of trade and commodity exchange, with their flocks in search of pastures, and so on (cf. ibid.; also p. 61).

When sung by solitary workers or cameleers, the *zahīrōk* is usually in couplets with a third line as a refrain

¹ Cf. Al-Mas'ūdī who maintains that the *ḥudā'* (camel driver's song) of the ancient Arabs "developed out of the *bikā'* (lament of the women)" (quoted in Farmer 1965: 1073). With regard to the composition of *zahīrōk* by women, it is hard to speak with any accuracy as folksongs usually carry no names of composers, but we are well aware that women also sing many *zahīrōks*, and in the past, they would do so on a daily basis as they needed to grind grain every day and *zahīrōk* was the best company in these situations.

but it may also have a two-line refrain with a single line added at the end. Usually, the refrain is sung at the end but there are examples where it is sung before the preceding couplet or line. In such cases, the singer sings the refrain in a melismatic style, modulating the voice. Singers sometimes take 5 to 8 minutes, repeating lines and letting the *surōz* repeat the whole one or more times, before joining the *surōz* and singing the last line. The wording of a *zahīrōk* is often very appealing and touching, penetrating the heart and mind of the listener. It describes deep nostalgic feelings of longing and yearning in such a strong melancholic style that it penetrates one's inner feelings. In the music, the *surōzī* often makes the *surōz* cry, as is commonly described.

It is usually sung as a solo song, either by one person or by two or more singing in turns: one person sings a couplet, the second joins in the singing of the refrain, and then sings another couplet, then the third joins in the refrain and sings another couplet and so on. Despite its being basically a worksong, it is never sung in chorus as are the songs of solitary workers and travellers. When women sing it during their work, or men riding on their camels, or under other working conditions, such as ploughing land or collecting dates, the *zahīrōk* is sung with no instrumental accompaniment, but when it is sung for entertainment in a seated position then it is preferably accompanied by a *surōz* - sometimes even by a *baynjō* (a keyed zither), *nal* (flute), or even by a *sumā* (oboe). However, *surōz* is the preferred instrument for the accompaniment of a *zahīrōk* and all *surōz* players are generally expected to play at least some *zahīrōk*.¹ People often argue that originally it was sung exclusively with the accompaniment of a *surōz* or played on a *surōz*. As a rule, good *zahīrōk* singers do not sing with

¹ In fact, it is the first test for any *surōzī*. On the first encounter with a *surōzī*, people usually ask him to play some *zahīrōk* to establish his command on the art of music.

the accompaniment of any other instrument than a *surōz* although less famous or amateur singers may sing with other instruments as well. Occasionally, one finds someone singing with the *surōz* accompanied by a *dambūrag* (a fretless lute) where the *dambūrag* player strums the strings slightly providing a delicate rhythm only. When *zahīrōk* is played on *surōz*, without singing, the *surōz* is not accompanied by any other instrument.

Singers of *zahīrōk* in the working context come from any social background although the best-known non-professional female *zahīrōk* singers in Makran come from women of a low social class (called *mōlid*, lit. maidservant), who in former times did all the housework in the family of their masters. These *mōlids* had to grind grain for a large family of their masters as well as for their guests (cf. Sayad Hashmi 1986: 111). Each day they would start grinding grain at about 3 or 4 a.m. (only a few hours after they would finish the work of the day, such as washing dishes and clothes) with the millstone (*jintir*), whose heavy weight was often compared with that of a hill (*kōhēn jintir*, lit. "hill-heavy millstone"), and continued until the daybreak when they had to prepare breakfast, which was usually not less than a normal lunch, for the family of their masters. These *mōlids* belonged to the low social class¹ and were mostly endowed with surprisingly sweet voices - a gift of God that seemed to be in their genes as a social group. Under the burden of heavy tasks, they sang *zahīrōks* which emerged from the depth of their hearts and expressed the whole picture of their sufferings and hard life. In this context, *zahīrōk* was a song of purgation as well as a strong means of catharsis which accompanied their work on the one hand and provided them with a means to express their sufferings on the other. It was also a means to make the people of the neighbourhood share their sufferings as when

¹ They mostly came from groups of former slaves of African origin but there were also domestic servants coming from among other low social groups.

they sat at hand-millstones every night a little after midnight and continued until dawn, when they had to fill water containers, prepare breakfast and do other chores. They accompanied their work of grinding grain with such melodious and touching melancholic *zahīrōks* that sometimes whole villagers would wake up and listen to their pre-dawn singings every morning. Their sweet voices on the one hand, and their life full of suffering and hardship on the other hand, together with the weepy nature of *zahīrōk* songs, made the atmosphere so touching that people began crying (cf. Sayad Hashmi 1986: 111). I was told, for example, that the *mōlid* of the Sardars of Sami (a village some 45 kilometres east of Turbat) had such a sweet voice and such a vast repertoire of *zahīrōk*¹ that each morning she would wake up the whole village with the melody of her *zahīrōks*.² However, besides the *mōlids*, who worked for the families of their masters, common women too had to grind grain for their families. They also had to dedicate their days to other tasks, either domestic or in the fields helping their men-folk, or herding baby goats/sheep if they were nomads, and the best time for grinding grain

¹ These women had the ability to improvise their songs so that they never ran out of material.

² I was also told of an episode that once the sister of the Khan of Kalat (the ruling family of the Khans of Kalat who ruled Balochistan from 1666 to 1946) was staying as a guest of the *sardār* (local chief) of Sami. During the early hours of the morning, a *mōlid* named *Māhān* had started grinding grain with a millstone, singing heart-rending *zahīrōks* remembering her son, Allabakhsh, who had died in Dubai sometime before. The sister of the Khan had also lost a brother not long ago. The melancholic tune of the *zahīrōk*, coming from a broken heart over the loss of a son in a foreign land, was so penetrating and piercing to the heart and mind that the princess had fainted and lost consciousness. People immediately ran to the *mōlid* asking her to stop singing. That *zahīrōk* is still famous in the region and it begins as, *bačē gam u brāt hayāl, hičē bandagay kismat mabāt* ("sorrows of a son, and the remembrance [of the loss] of a brother, / should not befall in the *kismat* [destiny] of any human being"). This woman was said to be alive when I was doing fieldwork for my PhD thesis in the early 1990s but I was told by local people that she was aged and weak and was not in a position to sing anymore or remember much about the episode.

was early in the morning. Usually, two women would grind grain together which would make it easier for both of them – first grinding the grain of one and then of the other. They also sang heart-rending *zahīrōks* following the movements of *jintir* (hand millstone). These women came from all walks of life as this type of singing was acceptable for a society otherwise very strict about the public role of women, such as singing with a loud voice. Common women can sing only in groups on festive occasions, such as the birth of a child, circumcisions, and weddings; lullabies and religious songs are acceptable but otherwise singing and dancing are considered to be the affair of women of low social classes.

During earlier times all travelling, trade, and transportation was carried out on camels. People spent weeks, and even months, travelling from one major town to another or from one region to another to get necessities or for the purpose of trade or goods exchange. This whole trade or commodity exchange was carried out almost exclusively on camels. So *zahīrōk* and *likō* songs were the only company of camel drivers in their long journeys.¹

Until the early 1970s it was routine to hear camelmen singing *zahīrōk* on most mornings, especially during the summer when more trade and human movements took place because of the date and rice harvests in Makran but also because of the pleasant weather when

¹ We have no earlier records of the *zahīrōk* or other cameleer songs but Nicolas Manucci, the Venetian physician of the eldest son of Aurangzeb, who wrote during the late 17th and early 18th centuries, gives an interesting account about Baloch camel drivers and their singing songs while riding their camels. He writes: "There is also another race called Baloche (Baloch), who dwell on the farther side of the river Rāvi, near the city of Multān, and as far as the confines of Persia. In this territory are many camels, which they bring for sale into the Mogul country. Usually they are expert camel-drivers, and serve everyone in that capacity. They wear long locks of hair, and are of a dark, ruddy complexion. *During the march they sing as they ride their camels*" (Manucci 1907, II: 454-55; emphasis added).

camel-drivers were more lively and exuberant early in the morning and sang to their heart's content, especially when they passed by settlements during the early hours of the day. Each cameleer would sing a couplet in his turn. So, the person riding on the leading camel sang the first couplet, then the second one joined him singing with the last hemistich or the refrain and sang another couplet in his turn, then joined and followed by a third one, until the last one, and so on. Other times, the first couplet was sung by the man riding on the leading camel, then he was joined by the cameleer riding on the last camel both singing the refrain jointly, and it would then be the turn of the one riding the second camel from the front and then the second one from the back and so on. Most often there would be tens of camels and every cameleer would sing in his turn, often improvising the song and adding more couplets, keeping roughly the refrain only. In the pin-drop silence of the early hours of dawn, along with the jingling of bells tied around the necks of camels, the singing of *zahīrōk* created such a wonderful atmosphere that sometime the whole village would wake up and listen to them with great joy. I was told that on many occasions some music-loving people would follow caravans of camels for miles just to listen to *zahīrōks* and then return back to their villages. Now, alas, the jingling of bells around the necks of camels and the *zahīrōks* of cameleers are replaced by Hindi film songs of truck drivers who turn the volume of their cassette players to the highest level with powerful loudspeakers fixed in front of their trucks or buses so that their songs are heard miles away while they themselves arrive much later, running on dirt roads with huge stones and dry river-beds and hillocks descending from one and ascending to another one.

A similar atmosphere was also created by farmers working in their fields. During the paddy growing season (April-May) men start ploughing their fields as early as

about 5 a.m. – as soon as there is enough light to see their way. It was a common practice in the past that one farmer would start singing a *zahīrōk* from his field while ploughing and another in a nearby field would respond with another *zahīrōk* or would add a couplet to the same. In no time, the whole oasis would echo with the singing of farmers joining in from all sides. This type of singing also functioned to soothe the bullocks, who responded more willingly to the heavy burden in the company of singing men. The same was repeated during the date harvest when one farmer from the top of a date tree started singing a *zahīrōk*, soon joined by another one, then by another, and before long the whole oasis echoed with their songs coming from all sides. All such practices have stopped in present times with no plausible answers to why this popular practice has stopped so abruptly. I believe that as singing is related to the low social class and is looked down on by common people, so it is not practiced anymore with the coming of some sort of economic uplift and with the weakening of class stratification. In the past, even Baloch from upper social backgrounds sang work songs without any reservations, while in modern times people from low social classes sometime consider it shameful to sing in public unless they are professional or amateur singers.

As said above, *zahīrōks* are generally made of couplets with irregular rhymes but with more or less fixed refrains. Nevertheless, there are cases where poets have composed whole poems to be sung in as *zahīrōk* melody, normally in a working context especially by women on their millstones or while doing embroidery or working on looms. Here we give a few samples from this type. However, we would like to remind the readers that the texts of all Balochi folksongs are subject to improvisation (see Badalkhan 2002: 302, n. 2) and this is also true for *zahīrōks* in couplets. As we see in the examples that follow, not all *zahīrōks* talk of travel, homesickness and/or of yearning. Some of them are

beautifully composed songs which finely describe love themes. Being basically a melancholic song, singers always sing it from the very depth of their hearts, conveying a deep sense of suffering/yearning with very touching and penetrating words and expressions. See the following sample, for example,

*dil khayālē pa gōnagē kārīt
dīl manā bārt u dīr pīrrēnīt,
dīl manā pēšī trānagān gējūt,
kōnrumā jant čō bandēn naryānā,
gīrr bandūt čō gwānzagī tīflā,
čō cācūā danzīt pa watī hīrrā,
jōš kārīt čō rōden lōhīā*

(Gul Khan Nasir 1979b: 62).

My heart brings a remembrance to me in a strange way,
My heart takes and throws me far away,
My heart brings to me the memory of past days,
It (becomes so stubborn that it) stampedes like a fastened stallion,
It demands (the lover) stubbornly, like a baby in its cradle,
Like she-camels who kick dust (calling) for their baby camels,
(My heart) boils like a boiling bronze pot.

Another beautiful *zahīrōk* runs as follows:

*zahīr manī baššāmī dradēn hawr ant,
kī dāīmā grēwān ant manī čammān,
hīč manā naylant pa šapī wābā,
šap manī sāl ant, rōč manī šaš māh,
šap manī sālēn na bant bāmgāh,
rōč manī ūrmāhī tap ant trundēn*

(Gul Khan Nasir 1979b: 64).

My *zahīr* are like heavy downpours of monsoon rains,
They always pour down from my weeping eyes,
They never allow me to have a nightly sleep,
My nights are as long as full years, and my days are as long as half years,
My year-long nights never see a dawn,
My days are like the burning fevers of early summer months.¹

In the following example, which is said to be the composition of an anonymous woman (Gul Khan Nasir 1979b: 13), the arrival of the lover/loved-one is described as such:

*bālādē taššī trāštagēn miānē
lankukē gulbōg ant ka'amnakšēn
čammē gwašay bādām ant Khurāsānī
pōnzē gwašay kātārē Balōčānī,
bōrē pa bādāmay bunā bastā
jīndē man hīray sāhigā ništā
hīrē pa hīrwārēn dapā wārtā
mīsk mazārēn sarkōpagān muštā*

(Gul Khan Nasir 1979b: 13).
His stature is (slim) like a bow,² mended with adze,

¹ The Balochi text has the word *ūrmāh*, the period around May and June. It is usually considered to be the harshest period of the year as it is the hottest period in Makran and there is no harvest during this time of the year. This is the period preceding the dates and rice harvests so farmers usually finish their yearly provisions waiting impatiently for the ripening of dates and rice. As such, *ūrmāh* (lit. months with shooting arrows) is the most difficult period of the year. There is a famous Balochi proverb which says, *lōgā raway nān nēst, mulkā raway dān nēst* ("no food at home, (and) no grain at fields").

² The Balochi text uses the term *miyān*, which is the word used in poetry for the waist of a beloved referring it to the slender shape of a bow, such as *kamān miyān* (bow-like waist) but I believe that here it refers to the bow.

His fingers are (thin) with joints like a colourful reed,
 His eyes are (big) like the almonds of Khurasan,¹
 His nose is (pointed) like the poniard of the Baloch;²
 He tied his mare under the almond tree,
 He himself sat under the shade of the cardamom tree,
 He, accustomed to eating cardamoms, chewed cardamom with his mouth,
 He rubbed musk on his tiger-like shoulders.

In the following, we reproduce a few samples from a *zahīrōk* very famous in Makran, which we transcribe from the singing of Amir Jusakkī, a renowned *zahīrōk* singer from Jusakk, a village near Turbat. The subject of this *zahīrōk* is a famous event when a ship carrying passengers from Gwadar to Muscat caught fire and was wrecked, resulting in the death of all passengers. This incident probably occurred in the 1950s when Gwadar was still under the rule of the Sultanate of Oman. There are several other heart-rending *zahīrōks* and *mōtks* (dirges) composed on this event but here we give a few couplets of this *zahīrōk* to show how the refrain is used here.

*bačč manī sargiptag mazārbīmmēn,
 dēmē dātag mān Maškātā šūmmēn,
 kādiray nūr, manī baččī taī bāhōṭ int.*

¹ Almonds from Khurāsān were famous among the Baloch for their big size, and eyes resembling big almonds are a great mark of beauty among the Baloch.

² A Balochi poniard is pointed, sharp, a little curved, and was considered to be fatal, just like the beautiful nose on the face of a lover/beloved.

My son, having the wrath of a lion, has prepared
 (for the journey),
 He has started (the journey) to the damning Muscat,

O, Light of the Protector, my son is under your protection.

*yā hudāwand u kirdagār šāhēn,
 malkamūt saylānī [bali nīn] šikārā int,
 u kayt hamā arwāhay sarā nindīt,
 gwānzagī tiplān ča mādarān sindīt,
 kādiray nūr manī baččī taī bāhōṭ int.*

O God, the King, and Creator,
 The watchful Angel of Death is out hunting (for victims),

He comes and sits on the spirit (i.e., on lives),
 He separates babies in cradles from their mothers (i.e., he is too cruel and merciless),

O, Light of the Protector, my son is under your protection.

Zahīrōk as a term for “melody types”

When cameleers or women at work sing *zahīrōk* as a song genre, they may use a single melody or several different ones. Jean During (1997) speaks of “the emergence of a classical music” as *zahīrōks* are classified by Baloch musicians. His article reports the views of two Baloch musicians from Karachi, Abdul Rahman Surizai (a great master of *baynjō*) and Karim Bakhsh Nuri (a legendary *surōz* player of his times). According to During, “a significant point is that in the same way that knowledge of the *zahīrig*-s as modes serves to increase the competence of a singer or instrumentalist at the height of one’s mastery, the *zahīrig*-s are considered as the essence of Baluchi music, i.e., its very principle (*asil*), the matrices of all the melodies, tunes or songs” (1997: 41). Likewise, Baloch

men with some knowledge of the tradition often argue that *zahīrōk* is the base of all Balochi music and the essence of the melodies used in singing Balochi narrative songs (*šayr*).¹ Janmahmad, a Baloch writer from Dasht in Makran, maintains that “the entire Balochi musical structure is based on *zaheerag*. Some of the folk-music appears to be somewhat different from it, but in their formal structure all musical derivatives have their base in *Zaheerag*” (1982: 59-60). Baloch *pahlawāns* (professional singers of *šayrs*) often maintain that different parts of a *šayr* are sung with different tunes coming from different *zahīrōks*. They often argue that each part of a *šayr* has a different message and is to be sung with a different *zahīrōk*, and that there are *zahīrōk* tunes to express any sentiment and state of mind. A *pahlawān* always sings with the accompaniment of a *surōz*, and *surōz* players should have a vast knowledge of *zahīrōks*. Performance of a *šayr* may extend over several hours, with many changes of episodes and of *zahīrōks*.

It is to be added that only certain parts of a *šayr* are sung in *zahīrōks* while other parts are sung in different styles, such as *gāl-rēc*, *dapgāl*, and others (cf. Badalkhan 1994: 147-49). Famous *pahlawāns* with smooth tenor voices often begin a *šayr* with an appropriate *zahīrōk*, and *pahlawāns* usually mark shifts of scenes with a *čihāl*, which is always in a specific *zahīrōk*. The *čihāl* is an important way of capturing the listeners’ attention as well as an indication for the scene shift.

Being the richest body of Balochi music, *zahīrōk* is also the most complex. Not all *surōz* players are capable of playing many *zahīrōks* and minstrels singing in them. However, the *surōzīs* who perform with *pahlawāns* are

¹ Cf. Farmer who writes that according to the Arab historians “the first song is claimed to have been the *hudā*’ or caravan song It is in the *rajaz* metre, a metre said to correspond with the lifting and lowering of the camel’s feet” (Farmer 1967: 14).

always expected to be able to play most of the well-known *zahīrōks*, while *surōzīs* who do not play for *pahlawāns* have less need even to know many *zahīrōks* by name. It is often argued by *surōz* players that it takes from 10 to 30 years of active involvement in *surōz* playing before one is able to play most common *zahīrōks* in full without confusing one with another. In fact, there are few living *surōz* players who can play some *zahīrōks* in full though there are many who name the most common ones without being able to play them correctly.

Every *zahīrōk* has a beginning (*čist kanag*, “picking up”), carrying up (*burzā barag*), and once it has reached the peak (*sar*, *burzī*) then to bring it down (*ēr ārag*) in a prescribed manner. If a *pahlawān* or a *surōzī* does not respect the accepted standards people may shout at him¹ or the singer and the performer may rebuke each other for mixing up different *zahīrōks* in one (see Badalkhan 1994: 166).²

The communication process between a *pahlawān* and his *surōzī* creates a need for calling *zahīrōks* by name.³ Usually all *pahlawāns* of some fame have their own *surōzīs* and do not perform with the accompaniment of others but *pahlawāns* of lesser fame some time may perform with the accompaniment of any *surōzī* they may find, though necessarily with some basic knowledge of performance for

¹ One hears sometimes people from among the audience shouting either at the *pahlawān* or his *surōzī*, “*na kušay-ē, na kušay-ē*” (lit. don’t kill it [i.e., the *zahīrōk*], don’t kill it) if they are convinced that the *zahīrōk* has not reached its peak and either of them is about to bring it down. It shows that the listeners have often a scale in mind and expect that the performers follow it strictly.

² See the interesting discussion in Amanda Weidman (2009) about the relationship between the violinist and the vocalist.

³ During (1997: 46-47) describes notebooks in which two instrumentalists have listed names of *zahīrōks*, and he sees this as a process of “classicismation”. However, it is to add that names of *zahīrōks* have long been used by *pahlawāns* and *surōzīs* and no new names/melodies are known to have been invented or added in recent times.

šayr singing. In such cases, they may need to guide each other at certain intervals.

In comparison with *zahīrōk* as a song genre, the vocal-instrumental *zahīrōk* in performances of *šayr* differs in the following respects. Foremost is the *čihāl*, which is highly melismatic and expressive, sung either to a line of poetry or on a single vowel or several vocables. A *Zahīrōk* always begins with a *čihāl*, a vocal solo accompanied by *surōz*, which is followed by a small number of lines, some of which are normally repeated. The shift from *čihāl* to performance of the verses is marked by the introduction of a steady beat, which is kept by the *pahlawān* on the *dambūrag* as he sings. *Čihāl* is always in a high register, and the verses are sung in a lower and narrower register. The *surōz* player begins the *čihāl* and is joined by the singer. It is as if the *surōz* player takes the singer's hand for climbing a mountain, but the singer takes the lead as soon as he enters and the *surōzī* echoes his phrases. When they have reached the peak of the singer's vocal range, the singer rests a while as the *surōzī* continues to ascend. The *surōzī* reverses the melodic direction, the singer re-enters and takes the lead as they begin the descent. They come down together and the singer finishes first while the *surōzī* continues to descend into the lower register. A *pahlawān* with a good knowledge of *zahīrōk* may repeatedly sing the same lines several times and hang around for up to 20 or more minutes before going on with the *šayr*. In all these cases the singer is accompanied by the *surōzī* and sometime this latter repeats the whole *zahīrōk* more than once on the *surōz*. The relationship of a *surōzī* and the *pahlawān* is a complex one; when the *surōzī* is more knowledgeable about the *zahīrōks* he may publicly rebuke the *pahlawān* if he fails to sing them wrong (see Badalkhan 1994: 166). Because of its complex structure, it is easier for a *surōzī* to accompany a *pahlawān* than to play a purely instrumental *zahīrōk*, because in the latter he needs to play in high

register rather than subordinating himself to the singer at the melodic climax.¹

As *zahīrōk* is the most important variety of music in southwestern Balochistan, we find different types related to different regions, to different types of work and conditions, taking names of famous singers and musicians as well as referring to certain states of mind, and the like. As the number of expert *zahīrōk* players and singers has declined, the actual number of *zahīrōk* tunes is difficult to establish with any accuracy. Some put the number at 36,² some others put it even higher, while someone suggested that there are four main types, related to the four different parts (*pās*) of the night, with tens of other sub-types.³ Here I am listing 30 different types named by different musicians/*pahlawāns* in Balochistan over the years. However, there is no need to reiterate that our list is far from being complete as we are not yet in a position to give a detailed account of the number and nature of all *zahīrōks*. Extensive research and recording are needed, along with a good knowledge of music, before such a task is achieved.

All of my *pahlawān* informants agreed that the night is divided into different parts and each part has its

- ¹ Jean During concentrates on the instrumental *zahīrōk*, describing several of its distinctive musical traits. He gives notations of 14 *zahīrōks* as played by Abdul Rahman Surizai on the keyboard of "a synthesiser connected to a computer through a MIDI system" (During 1997: 49).
- ² This number was suggested to me by *pahlawān* Mazar, one of the hereditary musicians coming from a family where all male members played one or another type of music (for a detailed article on *Pahlawān* Mazar, see Badalkhan 2019). He claimed to belong to the Dāūdī branch of the Lūrīs. *Pahlawān* Mazar had given the same number of *zahīrōks* also to Prof. Lorraine Sakata of UCLA in 1995 in Gwadar (this information is from her field notes).
- ³ Janmahmad maintains that *zahīrōk* is "the Balochi *sur* or *raags*" (using Hindi terms to describe the *zahīrōk*), which he categorized under two main heads: *balōcī* and *kurdī* (Janmahmad 1982: 59). He maintains that "all others which may be as many as twenty come under these heads" (*ibid*; see below for the Kurds in Balochistan).

particular *zahīrōk*. For example, Bashsham (died in September 2011), one of the most famous *pahlawāns* who had inherited the art of minstrelsy from his father, who was one of the *surōz* players of famous *pahlawāns* before becoming a *pahlawān* himself and taking Bashsham as his *surōzī* until his death when Bashsham emerged as a *pahlawān*. He told me during an interview in Ball Nigwar in 1989 that in the early hours of the night he sings with the melodies of *kurdī*, *balōcī*, *baškardī* and other *zahīrōks* of low register because these are good to warm the throat as well as to get the strings of the *surōz* warmed; the *zahīrōks* of midnight are *mēdī*,¹ *kūkkār* and others from this group; while the *zahīrōks* sung at about 3 a.m. and afterwards, are *ašrap-i durrā*, *ṭaṭ* and others of the high register (for more on *ašrap-i durrā* *zahīrōk*'s high register see also the interview of Muhammad Yar in Gulzār Gichkī 2023).

From the names of the *zahīrōk* types available to us, it can be seen that most of them are named after:

- 1) different parts of the night (*šapay pās*), such as *saršapay* ("of early night"), *nēmhangāmay* ("of midnight"), *gwarbāmay* ("of early dawn"), *bāmay* ("of dawn"), etc.;
- 2) after regional or tribal names² with an attributive *ī* suffix, such as *baškardī* ("of Bashkard", the name of a region in southern Iran situated southeast of Minab and bounded in the west by Rudbār), *rōdbārī* ("of Rudbar"),³ *jahlāwānī* ("of

¹ This *zahīrōk* is believed to be named after the Mēd fishermen (for the Mēd see Badalkhan 2006).

² Cf. also Sakata who records *falaks* from Afghanistan, named after local areas (1983: 54).

³ We have three different places named Rudbār, which are somehow related to the Baloch migrations and settlements. One of them is in Afghanistan, one is in southern Iran in the Bashkard area, and the third one is northwest of Tehran which is said to be once the land of some Baloch tribes before they moved to Kerman and then to the rest of present-day Balochistan. It is hard to say to which Rudbār is this *zahīrōk* related but I suppose it is most probably related to the Rudbār in the Bashkard region in

Jahlawan" in central Balochistan), *sarhaddī* (of Sarhadd in Iranian Balochistan),¹ *balōcī* (of Baloch),² *jadgālay* (of the Jadgāl tribe),³ *sāsōlī* (of the Sasoli tribe),⁴ *kurdī* ("of Kurds"),⁵ *kiblahī* (of "western" regions of Balochistan), *zirkankī* (of "coastal areas"), etc.;

southern Iran as it is closer to the region which is related to the *zahīrōk* genre in general.

- ¹ *Sarhaddī* ("of the border") is also the name of a *falak* melody-type in Afghanistan "whose popularity is more confined to the Herat area" (Sakata 1983:53) and the name of a melody-type in Khurasan also (Blum 1974: 90 ff.). Sarhadd is also the name of a region in western Balochistan.
- ² This *zahīrōk* is probably named after *Baloch* nomads, who are usually called *baloch* by the settled Baloch population, while these latter are called *šahrī* ("of cities", settled along cultivated valleys) by the former.
- ³ It is named after the Jadgāl tribe who are principally settled in the Bāhō and Dashtyārī areas in Iranian Makran and in the Kulanch area in Pakistani Makran. This Baloch tribe is believed to have migrated once to Lasbela and Sind as a result of some prolonged draught or because of some feuds. After a few generations living there, many of them had returned back to their forefathers' homeland bringing along a dialect of Sindhi, called Jadgālī. Presently they are all bilingual if not monolingual, speaking only Balochi. They are basically a sedentary tribe.
- ⁴ *Sāsōlī* is the name of a tribe living in the Kharan area where they mostly speak Brahui but they are also found in Panjgur district where some of them are Balochi speaking. Formerly the majority of them were nomad but now almost all settled.
- ⁵ The attribution of this *zahīrōk* is intriguing. There is a Baloch tribe, called Kurd, who speak Balochi when settled in the Balochi speaking majority area, and Brahui when settled among the Brahui speaking tribes. Mengal (1989:3-10) argues that the Kurds were the Koch or Qufs of the early Arab chroniclers (8th and 9th cent. A.D.) and were ancestors of the present-day Brahuīs whose language has been referred to as *Kurdī* or *Kurdgali* (see esp. p. 6; see also Barker and Mengal 1969, II: 282). Dames also believes that "the original Koch or Kurds were the ancestors of the present-day Brahuīs or *Kurdgals*" (1904: 6). Gershevitch reports that "a more Islamic type of song is the popular *kordī* in Bashkard area of southern Iran, 'which the Biyābānī Baluchis also sing to the accompaniment of a flute' (1959: 222). He writes that "its long tune has as wide a range as a tenor voice can span, and is repeated many times with increasingly complicated modulations" (ibid.: 222-23). It seems that Gershevitch is either reporting of a *zahīrōk* or a song similar to *zahīrōk*. It would be interesting to learn whether *zahīrōk* is sung by Baloch tribes that far in the west or not.

- 3) after the names of famous *zahīrōk* singers and introducers of new *zahīrōk* tunes, e.g., *ašrap-i durrā* (named after an early 20th-century famous *zahīrōk* singer who came from the ruling family of Gichkis in Kech, Makran),¹ *begamī* (after Begam, a 19th-20th century famous female *zahīrōk* singer from Gwadar), etc.;
- 4) named after the strings of a *surōz*,² e.g., *ṭaṭ* (the first string from the upper side, facing the player, also called *ṭipp*), *miyānag* (the middle string, also called *zīll* or *dastgard*), *gōr u bām* (*gōr* is the gut string and the third in sequence while *bām* is the fourth and the lowest string); or named after a musical instrument with the possessive *-ay* ("of"), such as *šurnā-ay* ("of oboe", which is said to had been invented by an oboe player (*šurnāī*) in response to Ashrap-i Durra who had sung his *zahīrōk*); *gurr* (of conch/shell instrument), etc.;
- 5) named after different tasks and working conditions, e.g., *uštīr-ay* ("of camel", sung by cameleers; this *zahīrōk* is also called *sārbān-ay*, "of cameleer's"), *jintīr-ay* ("of handmill", sung by women while grinding grain with a handmill),

¹ He died in 1938 A.D. (Al-Qadri 1976: 115). He is said to had possessed the most melodious voice of his times. One proverbial saying praises him as such: *māt aḡan čukkārā bināzēnīt / ča Ašrap-i Durrāe na gwāzēnīt* ("a mother may sing the best while praising her son / but she will not surpass [the unique style and melodious voice of] Ašrap son of Durrā") (for a detailed study on Ashrap-i Durra, see Gulzār Gichkī 2021).

² A *surōz* has four main strings, "the 2 first being tuned just like those of the 1st and 2nd strings of a violin (E, A) while the 2 others are one octave lower, that is: E called *tip* string / A (*zil*) // E (*bam*); A (*gor* or *rud* = gut)" (During 1997: 42). During observes that "in the great majority of the performances, the fundamental (*sa*) is given by the 2nd string, A. In addition to the concept of high and low register (. . .), the strings of the sorud bring more of an accurate insight: the highest register is called *tip-zīl* (1st, 2nd string) and the middle register (one 5th below) is called *gor bam* (4th et 3^d) (*sic.*), the fundamental one being the E. The use of the 4th string (one octave below) is said to play *gorī*" (*idem*).

balluk-ay ("grand-mother's", sung by aged women to show their sufferings under hard working conditions or for their absent dear-ones), *janōzām-ay*, ("of the widow"), *mēdī* ("of Med fishermen"), *kūkkār* ("of shouting" shows the singing style of the *zahīrōk*), *jagarsind* ("heart-rending"), *salāt-ay* ("of the call to prayers"), etc.

All *pahlawān* and *surōzī* informants that I have interviewed so far¹ argue that there are further sub-types for most of these *zahīrōks*. The legendary *pahlawān* Faiz Mahmad Baloch² was recorded to have once said in an interview that there are more than 200 *zahīrōk* tunes (quoted in Faqir Shad 2003: 252). Faiz Mahmad was endowed with an hypnotizing tenor voice, ideal for *zahīrōk* singing. As a great master of *pahlawān* minstrelsy tradition, he was well aware of the importance of *zahīrōk* tunes in Balochi *šayr* singing. Whenever he realized that the audience he was performing for, was made of ordinary people with no proper knowledge of *zahīrōks*, he would often announce which *zahīrōk* he was singing in that particular part of a *šayr*. As the best time for *zahīrōk* singing is early dawn, Faiz Mahmad would hypnotize his audience with his *zahīrōks* when dawn would be approaching. It is in that part of a night-long performance that a *pahlawān* sings a *šayr* passing from one *zahīrōk* to another.³ It is this stage when the singing reaches to its

¹ I had interviewed majority of the then living minstrels from eastern Makran in early 1990s during the preparation of my PhD thesis on Baloch minstrelsy tradition.

² Faiz Mahmad, popularly called Payzuk, who died in 1979, was probably the last of the traditional Baloch minstrels with a vast knowledge of *šayr* singing techniques and the richest repertoire of *zahīrōks*. He had learnt the art from great masters of Baloch minstrelsy, such as Pahlawān Rami from Gwadar (died in the 1950s) and had sung with the accompaniment of some of the most famous *surōzīs* (*suorz* players), like the legendary Nuri.

³ It is at this stage when one realizes that there are probably *zahīrōks* to express any state of mind.

highest peak, when the audience is selective, and when the strings of the *surōz* are warmed enough to play any tune.¹ This type of singing is then described by the people as *pahlawānā ēthāl pa ēthāl kutag* (i.e., the *pahlawān* is now singing *ēthāl* after *ēthāl*, i.e., repeated singing in a virtuoso melismatic style in *zahīrōks*).

Conclusion

It is beyond any doubt that *zahīrōk* is the most important and well-known song genre as well as the most elaborated melody type of the Baloch in Makran (both in the eastern and western) which is often described as the "Balochi classical music" by the Baloch themselves. It is also the richest music with respect to its varieties and regional types. At the same time, like the rest of Balochi music and songs, it is neither recorded systematically nor studied properly so far. I believe that

- 1) there is an urgent need to collect as much material as possible, and from as many musicians and minstrels from as many regions as possible;
- 2) categorizing the material under names attributed to them by informants (the aim should be to see how many types of *zahīrōks* are found in Balochistan and whether a certain piece has the same name for different informants, or the names change from one musician/singer to another, or from one region to another, or from one performance to another;

¹ In fact, *pahlawāns* and their *surōz* players often say that the best *zahīrōks* are sung at the conclusion of a night-long performance: at early dawn when the performance has started at around 10 p.m. Rasūl Baksh Zangshahi, one of the great masters of Balochi classics, who belonged to the famous Zangshahi family of minstrels and musicians, once told me that his *surōz* needs twelve tunings before it is ready for certain *zahīrōks*. "It is after when I have given the twelfth tuning to my *surōz* that I can play any *zahīrōk*", he told me in 1997. Each tuning is given after about half an hour's playing and on the twelfth tuning the strings are fully warm and tight enough so that they can play any *zahīrōk*.

- 3) If possible, to organize a musical festival of *zahīrōk* singers/players to encourage them on the one hand and to study them to see whether they all agree on certain tunes and their names or not;
- 4) As a final stage, one could study any relationship, historical or incidental, between the Balochi *zahīrōk*, Afghani *falak*, the Khorasani and Kurdish *gharībī* and the Arabic *al-hanīn*.

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THE BALUCHI ZAHIRIG Jean During (CNRS. Paris)

In ancient times, the Baluchis dwelt in the north and in the centre of Iran. From the 10th century onwards, they slowly moved towards the south until they reached the border of India. Their tongue is close to Kurdish and antique Persian. They now occupy a vast territory covering the western part of Pakistan, Southeastern Iran and Afghan Khorāsān. More recently, they spread throughout the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf. During this long process of migration, they met other ethnic groups. Among them were some tribal groups who distinguished themselves by their skill in handicraft (jewelry, blacksmith, carpentry) and in music making. These groups belong to the social category of the ostā (masters) and mainly to the Rend and Zangeshāhi tribes. Baluchi music has a specific flavor between Iran and India, between maqām and raga. This impression relies on the centrality of the fundamental degree (sa in India) in all the tunes or modal structures, on the chromatic basic scale system, and on some modes unknown in the Iranian-Arabic traditions.

THE ZAHIRIG AS A GENRE AND MODE

The art of professional epic bards, shervāndi, combines vocal compositions (in 6/8, 10/16, 2 x 3/8, 4/4, 7/8) and non-measured sections in a virtuoso melismatic style called alhān which can be compared to the vocal Persian āvāz, the Arabic layala or the Afghan shakl, and of course to the

