

## **The Effect of Siavoshan Rite on the Religious Performance of Tazieh**

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### **Abstract**

Persian culture and art is one of the richest heritages of culture and art in the world history. In every country, its culture and art are rooted in that country's religions, myths, customs, beliefs, etc. In Iran, mythology is among those issues that played a significant role in the emergence of some original Persian cultures and arts. Among these, the myth of Siavosh can be mentioned. This myth has been referred to in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. In ancient Persia, after the innocent death of Siavosh, each year a ceremony had been held in order to commemorate the memory of this innocent martyr. After the advent of Islam in Iran, valuable arts, most of which indebted to Persian culture and art, emanated: the art of performing Tazieh of Imam Hossein and his companions which is rooted in Siavoshan Rite. In this article, we take a look at Siavosh's myth and Siavoshan's rite in ancient Persia in brief, then investigate the impact of this rite on the creation of Imam Hossein's *Tazieh* after Islam.

**Keywords:** Myth, Tazieh, Siavosh, Siavoshan.

### **Persian Art and Islam**

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The history of culture and civilization in Iran dates back to more than two thousand years before the advent of Islam. Studying Iran's ancient history acquaints us with a great culture and civilization and Persian art with its diversity and development has a special place in the huge collection of Persian culture and civilization; a culture which is derived from human's beauty-loving spirit and man has the ability to be a creator.

After the arrival of Islam in Iran an appropriate opportunity for utilizing ancient Persian cultural and art capabilities was made and Persian art provided valuable services for the development of Islamic culture.

### **Myths**

Myths are among those whose emergence led to the formation of ceremonies and rituals and that after the advent of Islam an appropriate scope was provided for them to develop and create valuable arts; arts which are particularly pertinent for Iran and its several thousand years' culture and civilization. An instance for this is the myth of Siavosh and Siavoshan ceremony which, as many researchers believe, paved the way for religious art and *Tazieh* after Islam.

Myths are the outcome of collective wisdom. "In its simplest English meaning a myth is a story about a god, or spirit of nature, who eventually becomes a saint". (Frye 101)

With meaning as such, myth is related to primitive culture or ancient periods. They are in fact displays of established facets and remnants of the past. "The content of myth is related to some specific social works and through studying this content, it is known that myth is not a story merely for storytelling, but instead it is the story that reports the features of the society to which it belongs. A myth explains why some myths are common in some societies" (101). It also clarifies and justifies the emergence of some

laws, totems, social structures, etc. In fact, what myth supplies is not something that has happened in the past, but something which validates at present what is assumed to have occurred in the past. All societies have their own particular myths that have been created by these societies themselves. "Myths are not solely expression of human thoughts. They are basic concept of life and charts that regulate human life and provide a logical justification for the society". (Hinnels 62)

Ghobadi has written thus about myth in *Ritual of Mirror*: "Myth is altogether an imaginative sacred history; history, since it has been a survey of some people's real beliefs and sacred since it has been related to supernatural forces. Not only is it regarded as their achievement but it is also the history of their life and it is imaginative for it doesn't have any logical and previously thought upon basis " (Ghobadi 89).

### **The Myth of Siavosh or Siavoshan**

One of the most ancient Iranian myths whose trace can be seen in Persian society today is the myth of Siavosh or Siavoshan. Siavosh which means the owner of the black and mighty horse, "is the prince whom in Avesta has been referred to with the title of Kooy (King)" (Hinnels 327).

Siavarshan whose name been mentioned in Avesta is made up of two parts, "Saya" which means black and "arshan" which means "male" and "male animal"; thus on the basis of an ancient Iranian tradition it can be defined as "the owner of the black male horse" (Zabihollah 494).

**As narrated by Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*:**

After the birth of Siavosh, Rostam comes to King Keikavoosh asking him to give Siavosh to him to breed him. When Siavosh grows up and learns all the martial arts from Tahamtan, returns to his father and displays a show of his arts and King Keikavoosh holds a feast to the honor of his presence.

And Soudabeh, King Kavos's wife falls in love with Siavoosh, but he rejects her love and this issue makes the wicked Soudabeh breed Siavoosh's rancour in her heart and by means of a guile proves him guilty of violating her private life, but the virtuous Siavosh calls Soudabeh's statement vain and false. In order to prove his innocence he goes through fire and manages to pass it unhurt. After that, upon his own request he is appointed as the commander of the army which is about to start a war with Afrasiab and when an opportunity for making peace is provided, Kaykavous does not accept to end the war and Siavosh goes to Afrasiab's court and gets married with Piran's daughter and after a while he is married to Farangis, Afrasiab's daughter. Kaykhusro is born to Siavoosh and Farangis's marriage and from his marriage with Jarireh, Foroud is born. After a while, Siavosh goes to Khotan and by establishing Gang Fort or Siavosh Gord takes residence there. Garsivaz and some of Afrasiab's relatives become jealous of Siavosh and through their malice and conspiracy Siavoosh is killed upon Afrasiab's order and out of his blood shed on earth a plant named Siavoshan emerges.

After Siavoosh's death, Rostam kills Soudabeh and destroys the land of Touran and through Piran's protection Farangis and Kaykhusro resort to Iran and by attaining the monarchy Kaykhusro takes revenge for his father's blood from his enemies.

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The story of Siavosh's being killed by Afrasiab can be on the influence of Siavoshan ceremony at Ferdowsi's time.

"The memorial of mourning for Siavosh or Siavoshan in history and common traditional rituals from Iran to Iraq and Northern Iraq to Turkey and Caucasus and on the other side, Caspian Sea in the Middle East, is the memorial of a forgotten myth that still has got past traces in it here and there. Many researchers consider the ancient Kharazm as the birthplace of Siavoshan myth (Hinnels 327).

The book "History of Bokhara" by Abubakr Mohammad Jafar Alnarshakhi is one of the valuable works that have embedded much information about this field in itself. The myth lasted for several centuries after Islam and after that appeared in mourning ceremonies especially the mourning ceremonies of the month of Moharram.

Narshkhi says "There are mournings for Siavosh as such that it is well-known in all provinces and minstrels have made a song of it and narrators have called it the weeping of the Moghs and this talk has been for more than three thousand years" (Bayzaie 30).

Interestingly, Alexander Mungait in his book "Archaeology in the USSR" has brought a picture of mourning ceremony for Siavosh which has been taken from the inscriptions on the wall of Soghdii Shahr "Panjkand" located in the valley of Zarafshan – with the distance of 65 kms from Samarkand which apparently belong to three centuries BC. As shown in the picture, men and women have torn their collars and hit their heads and chests. A howdah is on the shoulder of some that are carrying it. The space around

howdah is open and Sivosh or someone like Siavosh is in it. It appears as if the painter of the original wall painting has seen the incident and has drawn it afterwards. This congregation is similar to the incident of carrying howdah in Islamic squads.



### **Siavosh Mourning Wall Patterns**

In setting up this ceremony, in addition to carrying the howdah, the narrators would narrate the pathetic life and death of Siavosh and people would weep. It is likely that in between they would also turn curtain or that the simulation work which was in carrying the howdah was vaster and they would present the act of the semi-congregations of Siavosh's life. Also, minstrels would play and sing the anthems they had composed for the death of Siavosh." (Bayzaie 31)

"Sa'alebi relates that when the news of Siavosh's death reached the court of Iran's king, a deep sorrow and public mourning spread across the country and Rustam and the commanders of the troops sat mourning for seven days with bare head and feet. In fact, his description of the public mourning and Rustam's taking Soudabeh by the hair and killing her before the eyes of Kaykavous is as if it were the description of a ritual. Tabari says that according to reliable sources in Iran, the first man who wore black for mourning in Iran was Shidoush, Goudarz's son who did so as Afrasiab killed Siavosh (Yarshater 122).

Away from throne went Tahamtan	Toward Sudabeh's abode he turned
Through the curtain pulled her out by hair	From her throne of greatness put her to blood
With a dirk dragged her into halves	Didn't move on King Kavous's place (Ferdowsi 172)

### **Religious Character**

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Even though the religious character of Siavosh in Islamic sources is generally erased or obliterated, it has left adequate traces of a powerful religious ritual. Sa'alebi recalls a tradition upon which when Siavoosh was killed a galaxy disorder occurred: "A tough wind blew up, thick dust rose up and everywhere sank in heavy darkness." Such phenomenon is undoubtedly an evidence of the sanctity of the slain hero. The apparent reason for this aspect can be retrieved in Siavosh's securely passing through the difficult test" (Yarshater 121).

One put a golden pan on his head	Cut the head of that silvery cypress
To where the blood pan had decreed	Took an armor on pledge and overthrew it
A wind with dark black dust	Arose and covered the sun and the moon...

( Ferdowsi 152-153)

Another reason that can be stated in the sanctity of this hero is that in the myth of Siavosh we confront the sacrifice of the divine Siavooshan, a myth which maintains life. As mentioned before, according to Ferdowsi's narrative, right after the murder of Siavosh, a plant grows by the name of Siavoshan, even though Afrasiab had decreed to pour his blood on a barren rock.

Mourning for Siavosh as reflected in literature is a manifestation of all the prominent characteristics of our Islamic Shabihkhani. "Some believe that Iman Hossein's tragedy as depicted in Taziah is the next recreation of the legend of Siavosh" (Fadaie 182).

According to Jamshid Malekpour, "It can be deduced that Siavosh ritual either as its subject or as its performance has been influential in the formation of Shabihkhani";



especially if we haven't forgotten factors like the performance of Siavoosh mourning and simulating his body within howdah, then we will find out more about the effect of this ceremony on Shabihkhani" (Dehghani 16).

## **Tazieh**

As a word, Taziat - Tazieh means to give patience to the eye's calamity, to say health, bereavement and mourning" (Amid 588). According to Dr. Moeen in *Persian Dictionary*, "Tazieh means absolute mourning and setting up mourning ceremony for Hossein the son of Ali, demonstrating the events of Karbala and the happenings that came over some ready Imams, a religious ceremony and Shabihkhani. (Moeen 441). "But as a term, it is regarded as a religious ceremony with particular rules, customs and traditions and counter to its definition, being tragic is not its mandatory condition and at times might be funny and joyful which has been added to it as a result of the evolution of this art" (Homayouni 53).

Tazieh with the meaning of Ashura mourning and expressing sympathy with Imam Hossein and his family whose original and historical position is Siavosh martyrdom/Siavooshan is the only indigenously presented performance of Islamic world in Iran.

After the brutal atrocities that occurred to Imam Hussein and his companions in the desert of Karbala and the current land of Iraq, due to the pressure of this incident and the impact it left upon the Shiites and some Sunnis, every year, Shiites on the occasion of that hot day sit in mourning and express their feelings through reading rosaries, simulation and maghtal Khani.

The researchers believe that “the first time Ashura mourning squads began in the streets it was in year 325 hegira during the reign of Mu’izz al-Dowlah Deilami in Baghdad. On Ashura that year and the years after that, it was a public holiday. Public squads would scream and sob in the mourning for Imam Hussein beside going round bazaar. In this regard, bazaars were closed and people in groups while reciting poems in the mourning of Karbala would go to mosques” (Dehghani 8).

At this time, scope for performing the Master of Martyrs *tazieh* was provided and with Shiite recognition during Safavid, this ceremony was valued more than before. Naserbakht quotes Bayzaie on the manner of the development of *tazieh* evolution thus: “At the beginning there were just squads that would pass slowly for the spectators and chest beating and banging chains and cymbaling and similar things and carrying signs and banners that are not dissimilar to weaponry and also collaborations with vocals and chorus in singing the dirge, would remind people of the event of Karbala. In the next stage, choral singing would be less and signs would be more and one or two incident readers would narrate the event of Karbala for the spectators and cymbal, drum and dirge would accompany them. Later, instead of tellers they demonstrated some martyr-like figures to people that would come by simulation and clothing close to reality and would explain their ordeal. The next step was the conversation of the simulated figures together and after the emergence of the actors. Perhaps at the end of the last half-century of the Safavid period, *tazieh* went through its final transformation and came to be what we nowadays know” (Naserbakht 13).

According to what has been said, regarding the context of rituals, Siavosh mourning is similar to Imam Hussein’s *tazieh*. It definitely must not be stated that the tragedy of Imam Hussein as demonstrated in *tazieh* is the recreating of Siavosh legend, but it turns out that the ritual funeral ceremony in pre-Islamic Iran has a quite clear history. In fact,

tazieh ceremony has inherited a prominent characteristic of an old tradition which has its deep roots in the spirit of Iranian people.

## Conclusion

Knowledge, innocence and devotion to right and reality are the three common angles of tazieh and Siavosh mourning that the spirit of liberty and freedom has encompassed it like a sacred and powerful aura with pride and glory.

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