

DAMANAT

SINGING AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN YEMEN

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singer and singer

Introduction

Music is considered to be one of the most important arts in Yemen. Its inception dates back beyond Al-Jahily era in which Yemen was providing Hijaz and the other places of the Arab peninsula with singers and songstress. In this context, Abdullah Jada'an's Garadatas were not the first to perform the Arab singing. According to Al Qalqashandi, the root-era of this singing is descended into (Aa'd Era).

Yemen is famous for a variety of Yemeni singing such as (Hadhrami- Sana'anian, Lahji, Adeni, Al-Tehami singing and there is the nomadic singing....etc. It is famous for religious type of singing that is known as (Inshad), particularly the Soufi one which is prevalent in almost Yemeni governorates like Sana'a, Hadhrmout, Al Hudaida and in different places of Yemen. Yemeni music has drawn its basic support from three resources.

The first resource is the music rhythms and the folk songs which have special taste to deserts and countrysides, the sea songs, heritage melodies which all tend to be the cornerstone in forming songs and melodies in Yemen.

The second resource is the melodies of Gulf and Arab Peninsula which are close to Yemeni music in terms of stanzas and rhythms. These songs have been transferred into Gulf and Arab peninsula through hearing circulation, oral performance and also with the constant move of the performers themselves from and to it.

The third resource is the African-Indian rhythms by which it was heavily influenced; these rhythms came to Yemen through mutual trading among merchants from Yemen, Africa and India.

In attempt to get these rhythms adapted to their own music, Yemeni artists had modified them into their Yemeni local mood, for example "Al-Tanbura Dance" and "Bamila Dance" which are of African origins as well as "Al Zurbadi Dance" which has quick rhythms and Indian taste. Mohammed Jomma'a Khan was considered the first artist who mixed such rhythm with Yemeni music at the beginning of the twentieth century.

UNESCO has classified the Sananian singing as a cultural heritage immaterial to humanity which ought to be preserved and maintained. Sananian music is all about love, moderate flirting and almost ends up with praising and honoring the prophet Mohammed peace be upon him. It is clear that almost all its words belong to Al-Homaini poetry school which does not adhere to the rules and regulations of Arabic Standard and it is a mixture of local dialects and classical language (Fusha).

Unfortunately, the original authors of most songs remain unknown and so their poems were attributed to with no clear evidence to (Zaidi Imams) who in fact used to impose punishments on lyrics and singers. They tend to look at them with a strong sense of inferiority just like the other segments of the society at the time do. Sananian singing is clearly distinguished by (Ballad) which is equivalent to

Dandanah in Hadramout and Aden. The loss of the poets' names is attributed to old social and religious reasons. It is one of the main reasons that resulted in the steal of Yemeni heritage and attribute them to poets and singers from Gulf, to the extent that some songs and poems were plagiarized even though their original authors are known to Yemenis. There were efforts made recently by UNESCO in coordination with the Yemeni Ministry of Culture to document the Yemeni art.

Hadrami songs are one of the important art styles in the Yemeni sinning styles. Poets Hussein Al-Mahdhar and Abo-Bakr Salemare among the most prominent artists in this style. This type of art was more prevalent in the Arab peninsula compared to Sananian art. It reached east south of Asia. Mohammed Juma'a Khan who is of Indian origin had introduced into Al-Hadram music melodies and rhythms and to Aden art as well. The famous singers of this art are Mohammed Murshed Naji, Mohammed Saeed Abdullah and Faisal Alawi.

There are a lot of singing in Heritage Library of Yemen which keeps its ancient taste and it has never changed despite some attempts by singers like Ahmed Fathi and Fuad Al-Kibsi. Among the well-known singers in Yemen are Ayob Taresh who sang many national songs and Al-Tholathi Al-Kokabani.

There is a widespread tone in Yemen known as "Zamil": it is a type of "Chanting" much often sung in times of war and battles. It is an old Yemeni art related to wars. The purpose

of this type is to terrify enemies, and it dates back to older ages, and it was of one type only which is the Zamil of war. Later, the zamil improved across ages. So, Zawamil appeared like Zamil of welcoming, lamentation, weddings, satire and Tarbe'e which means calling for alliance with another tribe. The form of this type exists only in the northern regions of the country. As for Hadramout governorate there is another type of songs called (Shailat). The contribution of Jews to the Yemeni song was significant and affluent, and the most well-known poet of Yemen Jews was Shalom Al-Shabizi who was the most famous rabbi among Yemeni Jews, who lived and passed away in Taiz governorate in the 17th century. Most of those songs were of a religious nature which Yemeni Jews preserved, even Jews of other origins were amazed by Yemeni Jews' pride of their heritage compared to other Jewish societies. The Israeli government uses them to add a kind of authenticity to the State of Israel and especially in the recent years after decades of discrimination against them and other Mizrahi Jews. A number of Yemeni Jews sang the Dawdahi (a type of songs) which narrates a story that happened in the thirties of the 20th century, in addition to the poems of Shalom Al-Shabizi. The most famous of those singers are Afra'a Haza'a, Haroun Amram and Shoshanah Dhamari.

The Yemeni heritage is rich and the Yemeni singers took a lot of it. In addition, they revived it. Ahazeej is one of the prominent Yemeni type of songs that accompany Islamic

holidays, festivals, weddings and the like. Then the lyric came which have many types and the most popular are:

- 1- Al-Jamali Songs: They are performed for traveling and this type originally came from the art of Al-Hada (a district in Thamar governorate) whose language is close to the classic Arabic than to the colloquial language.
 - 2- Al-Kasir Songs: They are performed by sailors either for trading or fishing.
 - 3- Bani Maghrah Songs: They are performed in southern Yemen with dancing, this type of songs is especially for farmers and peasants.
 - 4- Al-Zarbadi Songs: They are performed with dancing, and are distinguished for using the percussion and the flute which is known as (Mardouf). Its artistic mould consists of tonic, lyrical mazhab and role playing, the rhythm. The role playing differs from the tonic rhythm and the lyrical mazhab.
 - 5- Al-Awadi Songs: They are heritage songs with monotonous rhythms. Its form consists of poetry and performed with flute. This kind is especially for Hadramout governorate, however, Hadramout singing decreased and was overshadowed by Hindi music because of the huge Indian community in Hadramout and in most coastal cities especially in Aden and Mukalla, in which the Hadramout song became an echo for Hindi rhythms or for primitive Arabic songs. It restored its glory by the poet Abo Bakir Al- Mihdar in 1965 who made a great couple with the singer
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Abo Bakir Salim Balfaqih, who sang many of his greatpoems like (O Grape Farmers), (Your Desert is Harmful To Me) and (Say hello Even with Your Hand Wave), which surpassed Yemen to reach all Arab countries, and were sung by famous singers.

- 6- Al-Hadri Songs: They mean the middle and bottom of Hadramout Valley, in which lines are chanted depending on extension, and this type of songs is grieving and touching.
 - 7- Aldan: It is a type of singing similar to Mawal, and it is of two types: Aldan Almoga'a whose performance depends on the colloquial language and rhythm, and Aldan Almorsal whose singing depends on poetry along with one musical rhythmic instrument, and it is similar in performance to Alzuhairi Mawal in the south of Iraq.
 - 8- Al-Mowashahat: All Yemeni artists agree that Mowashahat were first originated in Yemen before Andalusia. The first one to introduce Al-Mashah was Maqdam Bin Ma'afer Al- Yemeni, Ma'afer was the ruler of (Almua'afir) which is currently known as (Alhujariah). The Yemeni Mowashahat is a type of religious and heritage works of slow rhythm, and it is of many types like: Lahji Mowashahat relative to Lahj governorate and it is performed in Morsal, Moqa'a or Al-Yafi'i. It is similar to religious singing popular in Saudi Arabia as well as Sana'ani which requires high skills of performance.
 - 9- Sound: An artistic term was known among Arab in the Alabbasid era. It is nowadays one of the most important
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types of Yemeni songs. It was mentioned by Alasfahani in his book (Songs) classified his tones, rhythms and its ways of singing. He also mentioned some of its texts. Sound was also mentioned by Saif Aldin Al-Armawi in his book (Roles). He introduced its tones and rhythms using the musical terms of that time. The Sound Singing disappeared from the artistic life after the fall of Baghdad in the 17th century of Islamic calendar under the control of Mongols and only appeared in the 12th of the Islamic calendar. There is no scientific evidence that the Sound currently used is the one that Alasbahani mentioned, though researchers said that there are linkages between their singing origins. The Arabic Maqamat book mentions that the art of Sound was established in Hadramout, and was transferred to Bahrain and the Gulf countries by the artist Abdulraheem Al-Asiri, from whom the artist Muhammed Faris Albahraini took, and the latter taught Dhahi Bin Alwaleed and the Qatari Khairi Bin Idrees. The Sound is of two types: (Arabic and Shami (Syria-Palastine-Jordan-Lebenon)).

- a. Sana'ani Song: The heritage of Sana'ani song, which is popular across Yemen, dated back to hundreds of years. It is distinguished over other Yemeni songs with its texts that are full of wisdom and expressive meanings on social, patriotic and flirty values that are the conscience of the people. This is what made artists to care about, maintain and renew it by composing according to this type. This heritage whether the new or the old is still performed with outdated, old and classic musical instruments, like
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Alqanbous, flute with four chords made of Raq, Rababa, flute, Mirwas, copper drum. It is a rhythm instrument made of goat skin and copper frameworks, Alhajir (a big drum) and Alsasambah.

The Situation of Singing in Yemen

There is no doubt that singing in Yemen in the current days was deteriorated and reduced significantly due to many reasons other than the ongoing conflict. The following are some reasons:

- The lack of interest by the Ministry of Culture for art and artists in terms of supporting and capacity-building or protecting their intellectual rights as well as protecting them from any individual or any authority that may target them because of their artistic works.
 - The lack of interest to produce all sorts of songs but limited to national songs and occasionally religious songs. This is because of the focus of government-owned or private media TV channels to broadcast national and religious works persistently, which is in my perspective a form of suppressing the freedom of expression, and supporting only a certain attitude which mostly aims to bury it and bury all voices demanding that type.
 - The lack of production companies to meet the needs of integrated artistic production, whether in terms of searching of poems and buying melodies, producing and making it popular or protecting the artists' rights whether those related to intellectual rights or the freedom of expression.
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- The lack of schools and academies that care of teaching music in an academic way.
 - Some youth artists cannot afford to produce their works due to the economic situation and the high cost of producing such works.
 - The lack of new artistic experiences and the currently practitioners of singing are only the children of Yemen great singers of 1970s and 1980s and there is nothing new concerning produced songs as those children only reproducing the same songs of their fathers with some new unpopular experiences.
 - Seeking safety in the theme of songs and the accumulation of religious and national songs. When the civil society organizations began to work in Yemen and their tendency towards songs as they are a form of awareness, the song lost its artistic value and became full of advising and guiding on the issues of health like cholera or violence issues like war or woman issues like breast cancer.
 - The conservative nature of Yemeni people in terms of signing where the new songs are often unpopular and non- desired unlike old songs. This is a form of suppressing the freedom of expression relative to the youth artists who face one of two choices, whether to fall into the trap of the past and to perform the songs of great Yemeni singers of the past, or to be limited with the poor views/watching of their new singing experiences.
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Freedom of Expression Relative to Singers

Yemeni artist suffered disturbances in the last decades and restrictions related to their freedom of expression, especially in the northern regions of the country. The art of singing was only performed by lowly blood families as this job is regarded as humiliating and disgracing, because it talks about love unlike the Islamic chanter who was in the front and was called " Faqeeh". Of course, this is a form of restricting the freedom of expression. The conservative nature of Yemeni people in the field of singing and the restriction to the heritage became an obstacle for the youth from different classes of society to work in singing or to perform new form of singing as they must restrict themselves to heritage. Yemeni artist still suffers restriction in freedom of expression for many reasons:

- **Political Reasons:** Many artists were thrown to jails or trials or pursuing or even killing due to their opposing political opinions.
 - **Social Reasons:** The culture of the community, which still exists now, underestimates the artist and does not respect him. It is one of the reasons that restrict the artist, and it is a predominant overview not to support or help the artist. **Reasons Related to the Conflict:** Many artists became representatives and fans to their groups within the limitations that the group allows in terms of freedom and support by which the artist can keep going his/her singing. But as an independent art, there are many restrictions to
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the singer not just for the freedom of expression but also to the support, capacity-building as well as introducing the talents to the audience.

Proposed Future Vision

- Issuing a policy regarding freedom of expression in Yemen to the talented artists which shall provide at least the ground work. Then comes the role of production and supporting them, regardless of their creative practices such as singing, plastic art, photographers or whoever deals with the word like poets, narrators, writers, story writers and others.
 - Providing artists with financial and moral support as well as establishing specialized funds for supporting the youth and the creative work in Yemen, which ensures renewing the cultural and artistic scene.
 - Building the capacities of youth that are working in the field of photographic media in how to develop the singing work by photographing and video clip photographing, and to photograph the different artistic products whether they are new or heritage.
 - Activating laws related to intellectual property which preserves the rights of the artist, and to facilitate the procedures of preserving the rights of intellectual property to make it easy to preserve rights at the Ministry of Culture.
 - Activating rules regarding singers who face life risks due to their political opinions.
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- Supporting the artistic production in Yemen through contracting with private companies, donating organizations and businessmen.

Issuing and activating special laws that regulate the work of technical companies and motivate them to work in the Yemeni environment