The Social and Musical Life of Tombak and Tombak Players in Iran

By

Poorya Pakshir

Faculty Advisor: David P. Nelson

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts

Middletown, Connecticut May 2018
# Table of Contents

Table of Figures ........................................................................................................ iii
Acknowledgement ..................................................................................................... iv

Introduction

Part One: Opening .................................................................................................... 1
Part Two: Research Methodology ........................................................................... 2

Chapter One: The Social and Musical Life of Tombak and Tombak Players
through History

Introduction ................................................................................................................. 5

1- An Introduction to Tombak ................................................................................ 5
   The Origins of the Tombak .................................................................................. 6
   Unclear History of Tombak and Tombak Players .............................................. 9
   Hossein Tehrani, the Father of Modern Tombak Playing ................................. 10

2- The Social Status of Tombak and Tombak Players ............................................. 11
   Tombak and Motrebi Music .............................................................................. 15
   Tombak and Religious Beliefs ........................................................................... 17
   Development of Tombak in Pahlavi Era (1925-1974) ...................................... 19

Chapter Two: Tombak and Tombak Playing in Contemporary Iran

Introduction ................................................................................................................. 31

1. Acquisition of Tombak before the Revolution ..................................................... 31
   The Pahlavis’ Cultural Policy and Official Support ........................................... 31
   The Role of Schools in Developing Music and Tombak .................................... 33
   The Role of Media .............................................................................................. 36

2- The Condition of Music after the Revolution ..................................................... 41
   The Condition of Learning Tombak in the First Decade of the Revolution ...... 47
   The Condition of Music in the Subsequent Decades ......................................... 50

3- Tombak and Tombak Players in Recent Decades ............................................. 53
   Playing Tombak as a Profession ....................................................................... 55
   Tombak Playing, Challenges, and Implications ............................................... 57
   Hiding the Identity ............................................................................................. 60
   Tombak and Tombak players in the Society of Musicians ............................... 62
Chapter Three: The Training System of Contemporary Tombak Playing

Introduction ................................................................................................................... 66
Playing style .................................................................................................................. 66
First Notations for Tombak ........................................................................................... 69
The Prevailing Notation Systems .................................................................................. 74
Common Training Books .............................................................................................. 76
Tombak Teaching Methods ............................................................................................ 84
  Oral and Notation Tradition ......................................................................................... 84
  General Method of Teaching Tombak .......................................................................... 87
  Preparing Learners for Improvisation ......................................................................... 88

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 92
References .................................................................................................................... 97
# Table of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Different types of tombak</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Navid Afghah, the renowned contemporary tombak master presenting in Vahdat Hall, Tehran, Iran</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hossein Tehrani (1912-1974)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mohammad Esmaili (right) and his tombak ensemble performing the piece A Fantasia for Tombak ensemble and Orchestra conducted by Hossein Dehlavi</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rounama, a tombak ensemble and Iranian traditional dancers</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Shiraz Art Festival: David Tudor (left) and John Cage performing at the 1971 festival, photo courtesy Cunningham Dance Foundation archive</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hossein Tehrani accompanying Max Roach at the Shiraz Art Festival in Persepolis, 1969</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>samples of permit for carrying a musical instrument</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Hossein Tehrani - Right handed- placing tombak in regular direction</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bhman Rajabi - Right-handed- placing tombak in opposite direction</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sample of the three-line staff notation and place of strokes on the staff</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sample of Saba’s Notation for tombak</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sample of Eftetah notation for tombak</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sample of single-line staff notation from Rajabi's book</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>sample of Afghah's notation for independent hands</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>sample of Sadegh Sahriati's notation</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Series of short exercises in Esmaili’s book</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>sample a short piece in Rajabi's book</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>New notation in Akhavan's book</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>sample of transcribing tombak phrase and lyric in Ghanbari's book</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

This Thesis would not have been possible without the inspiration and support of a number of Iranian tombak teachers in Shiraz, Isfahan and Tehran. They kindly agreed to be interviewed despite their busy schedules, shared their thoughts with me, honestly answered my questions and allowed me to tell their stories in my thesis. I am thankful to my friend Mohammad Yazdanpanah, who, like a project manager, helped me with planning, organizing, and conducting all the stages of the fieldwork and facilitated this research for me by providing the requisite books and documents. I am really indebted to Jafar Ghaziasgar, the prominent tombak teacher, for his generosity and hospitality during my fieldwork in Isfahan. He helped me in making appointments with a number of Isfahan tombak masters and accompanied me to all the interviews in Isfahan.

My sincere gratitude goes to Dr. Alexandra Balandina for sending me her excellent research on contemporary tombak playing in Iran and for sharing her great illuminating insights with me. I particularly wish to express my special thanks to my tombak master Navid Afghah for imparting his great knowledge and experiences. His comprehensive analysis truly expanded my horizon about the development of tombak and addressed lots of my unanswered questions.

At Wesleyan University, I would like to thank Dr. Kate Galloway for her admirable sense of responsiveness toward her students, her great seminars and her invaluable guidance and suggestions for this thesis. I am immensely grateful to Dr. Eric Chary and Dr. Su Zheng for their beneficial classes during my master’s degree coursework and for all their support and advice.
I particularly wish to express my heartfelt thanks to my primary advisor, Dr. David Nelson. He has always supported and encouraged me like a caring father. I learned a lot from his patience, creativity in teaching, his discipline in work and dedication to reaching goals. His meticulous proofreading on all the drafts of the thesis improved my writing and brought the dissertation to its acceptable form.

I have extremely been fortunate to have great colleagues who always helped me to overcome the difficulties of studying in a second language. I would like to thank Gene Lai for his unconditional support and kindness. His hard work, modesty and generosity in helping others has made him a role model for me.

Finally, I am forever indebted to my family for their continuous love and support. I am truly grateful to my mother for sharing her hopeful interpretations of life and also thankful to my sisters for their constant words of encouragement. I could not have reached any of my goals without them.
Introduction

Part One: Opening

Tombak\(^1\) is not just a musical instrument for me. It is the center point of my life. Growing up with this instrument from childhood and playing it for more than twenty-five years has made it an inseparable part of my soul, mind and identity. It is the medium through which I perceive time, sound, aesthetics and the pleasure of creation. It is the reason for my academic study of music as well as for my career in music and it forms the basis of the community of musicians with whom I interact.

As a tombak player, I thought research on the development of tombak playing was a field that I knew perfectly well. Studying various resources and interviewing players from different generations made me aware that what I knew was mainly the musical part of the story. I discovered that there were also historical, religious and social aspects. Considering these points of entry into the history of the tombak and its performance practice has broadened my understanding of the history of Iranian music, the instrument that I play and my musical identity.

A life-changing combination of political, cultural and social events such as revolution\(^2\) and war has affected the evolution of music in Iran in the last hundred years. These revolutionary changes put music and musicians in dramatically changing social situations, ranging from governmental and social support to a total suppression. Despite these fluctuations, tombak, the main Iranian percussion

---

1. Tombak is one of the most important percussion instruments in Iranian traditional music with an appearance that looks like a goblet covered by skin on one end.

2. The Iranian revolution of 1979 led to overthrow of Pahlavi regime and establishment of an Islamic government under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini.
instrument, has experienced considerable advancement, elevating the status of both the instrument and its players in Iranian music.

The objective of this study is to examine the factors that have accelerated and slowed down this progress. It examines the role of governments and society and the role of cultural and religious belief in establishing the musical identity of this instrument’s performers. It also describes some players’ difficulties in their struggle to survive while preserving and developing their art. The training system of this instrument, one of the primary agents for its survival, is discussed in the last chapter. This research tries to narrate the story of tombak mainly from its players’ perspective and describe the way they see their social and musical lives through its development.

Part Two: Research Methodology

Researching Iranian music has difficulties that stem from socio-political realities of music in the country. Anti-musical policies and lack of governmental support and research funding for the field of music have led to a lack of academic research. The private cultural institutes that do musical research encounter many limitations. They face barriers and problems such as censorship, penalty, and punishment if they critique religious beliefs or social treatment against music or publish any positive views about the pre-revolution condition of music and cultural achievements of the Pahlavi era.\(^3\) It is difficult to find any musical research in Iran that explicitly examines these ideological and social issues. As a result, most of the surveys in these fields are conducted by non-Iranian researchers or Iranian scholars

\(^3\) Raza Shah Pahlavi and his son Mohammad Raza ruled Iran from 1925 until 1979. The Pahlavi reign ended as a result of the Iranian Revolution.
who study outside Iran. The book *Tombak and the Study of Rhythm from Different Perspectives* by the great tombak master Bahman Rajabi, and the Ph.D. dissertation “Contemporary tombak playing in Iran” by Greek researcher Alexandra Balandina are among the few resources that directly talk about the development of tombak in Iran. The former was published before the revolution in 1978, and the latter was written in 2007; both are cited in this thesis.

Considering the limitations mentioned above and the lack of resources that exclusively discuss the issues that influence the history and performance practice of the tombak, I decided to base this study on fieldwork with the community of masters and eminent teachers. I conducted interviews with more than 20 teachers and authors of training books in the cities of Tehran, Shiraz, and Isfahan. These cities are considered three centers of teaching tombak in Iran. Although being a tombak player helped me to easily arrange interviews with many young players and teachers, I confronted challenges meeting with the older generation of players. Some of these masters, who were from different schools than mine, were reluctant to be interviewed and some others refused when they found out that I had already interviewed their opponents or peers. To address some of these problems I asked some of their young students, who were my friends, to arrange and attend the interview sessions. Their attendance helped to create a comfortable and friendly atmosphere that facilitated communication with some of these capricious masters. Their guidance about how to treat each master and how to ask the questions truly helped me to conduct informative sessions that generated productive fieldwork data and prose.

The first chapter of this thesis discusses the history of tombak and describes the function of this instrument in music of the Safavid (1501-1722), Zand (1751-
1794), and Qajar (1785-1925) era. It examines the role of tombak in “Motrebi” music and the influences of this light form of musical entertainment on the musical identity of tombak players. It also talks about the modern era of tombak playing and the appearance of masters such as Hossein Tehrani.

The second chapter describes the condition of tombak playing in contemporary Iran. I sketch out the factors that influenced the development and acquisition of this instrument before and after the Iranian revolution and assesses the impacts of changing regime and war on the condition of tombak playing in Iran. The last part examines the current social condition of tombak players in Iran and describes some of the difficulties and challenges that they experience in their social and musical life. The final chapter is dedicated to the issue of the training system of tombak in Iran and explains some methods used in its teaching. It also examines the strengths and weakness of the conventional notation systems and training books of this instrument, and articulates the role of oral methods in teaching and preparing students for skills like improvisation.

---

4 During this period from 1501 until 1925 twenty two kings from the dynasties of Safavid, Zand and Qajar ruled over Iran.

5 This is a form of light Iranian entertaining music. “Motreb is a derogatory term that is applied only to musicians who perform at weddings, parties and other festive events to distinguish them from those who practice Iranian art music (Breyley and Fatemi 2016:1).

6 This term is commonly used for mentioning the developing trajectory of tombak playing, which is initiated by great tombak master Hoseein Tehrani (1912-1974) and still continues.

7 This term covered the era from the governance of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1941 until today.
Chapter One

The Social and Musical Life of Tombak and Tombak Players through History

Introduction

Tombak, one of the main Iranian percussion instruments, is not well known in the west. In spite of its importance in contemporary Iranian music, it was, until recently, considered one of the lowest ranked Iranian instruments. In this chapter, I examine the musical and social status of tombak and its players in recent centuries and discuss the factors that caused this low rank and how it has negatively influenced the social and musical life of tombak players. In the first part of this chapter, I briefly introduce this instrument and trace its origin through some Iranian literature and historical texts. Then, I discuss the function and role of tombak and tombak players in the music of the Safavid, Zand and Qajar era. I sketch out the factors and conditions that led to the low place of tombak and in turn its players in the society during the history of music in Iran. Finally, I examine how the social developments of the Pahlavi period and the appearance of players such as Hossein Tehrani initiated the modern era of tombak playing and created a new identity for this instrument and its players.

1- An Introduction to Tombak

Tombak is one of the most important percussion instruments in Iranian traditional music with an appearance that looks like a goblet covered by skin on one
end. Skins used to make tombak come from animals such as camels, goats, calves, and ewes. The modern instrument’s body is often made of walnut, mulberry, and ash wood instead of the metal or clay that was used in earlier times (see Figure 1). To play tombak, its neck, the lower narrow part, is put on one leg and the skin head is positioned near the knee of the other leg (see Figure 2). It is played using all ten fingers and all parts of the hand and can produce a wide range of sounds. This requires mastery of demanding performance techniques, which make it among the world’s most complicated and difficult drums.

The Origins of the Tombak

The origin of this instrument can be traced back to an ancient drum in Mesopotamia, Sumer, and Central Asia called “lilis,” which dates to the first or second millennium BC. According to Galpin, the author of The Music of the Sumerians, Babylonians & Assyrians, lilis was a big, goblet-like instrument which was played in temples. Its smaller, portable model was called “lilissu.” Its goblet-shaped shell rested on a foot very similar to that of the Persian tombak (Galpin 1937: 7).

Unfortunately, there is little information available about the history of Iranian music and its instruments in the distant past. Encyclopedias, poetry books, and literary prose texts are among sources that contain some information on the background of Iranian instruments, their different names, and the way they have been played in different historical periods. Bahman Rajabi’s book, Tombak and the Study of Rhythm from Different Perspectives mentions 23 names used for this instrument in different periods according to the lyrics of Iranian poets and writings of Iranian and foreign researchers. These names are: “Dombar, Dombarak, Tabang,
Tabnak, Tobnak, Tobnok, Tonbik, Tonbook, Tontak, Khonobak, Khombak, hommak, Damak, Dambal, Dombalak or Donbalak, Khooajak, Khomchak, Tombak, Donbak, Tonbak, Dombak, Tonbog and Zarb” (Rajabi 2017: 17).

Figure 1: Different types of tombak
Retrieved from HaPa Drums website

Figure 2: Navid Afghah, the renowned contemporary tombak master presenting in Vahdat Hall, Tehran, Iran
Photo by Mohammad Delkesh, 22 May 2016
https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/media/1395/03/02/1081345
The introduction of *Tombak Training with Association of Hossein Tehrani* mentions various names extracted from poems and dictionaries. Among the oldest literary texts that mention this instrument are Anvari’s and Souzani’s collections of poetry written in the 12th century. They respectively point to this instrument as Tonbak or Dombak and Tabang. Other names such as Khombak or Khomak, which means “little cask,” is found in the poems of Nezami from the 12th century (Dehlavi 2009: 31-36). This appellation is derived from the shape of Iranian casks, which are wider on one end like the tombak.

Nowadays, Tombak or Tonbak and Zarb are common names of this instrument. Although the oldest sources known to mention tombak date back to the 12th century, Reza Tarshizi, a researcher and tombak player, identifies and discusses sources that trace the existence of an instrument called Tombak to two thousand years ago. In his book, *Thousands of Years of Rhythm in Persian Music*, Tarshizi writes about a religious epic titled *Yadegare Zariran*, written in about 500 BC in the ancient language of Pahlavi (Tarshizi 1997). This ancient text narrates the stories of Parte heroes. One of the stories describes a party in the court of Shah Vishtasb at which ancient wind instruments including ney, gavdom, and tombak were played. Tarshizi put emphasis on the name of “Tombak” in that era to prove the antiquity of this name, since some theorize it as a modern name that refers to two key strokes in this instrument, Tom and Back. Zarb is another common name attributed to this musical instrument. One of the zarb’s definitions in Farsi is

---

8 Published in 1971, This book, which used the Western notation system, is the accomplishment of a group of Iranian musicians, including Hoseyn Dehlavi Ruh-Allah Khalegi, Hushang Zarif, Farhad Fakhreddini, and Mostafa Kamal Pourtorab, and based on the oral training of Hossein Tehrani.

9 It may be useful to explain that the word Tombak is another form of the word Tonbak as Persian speakers tend to pronounce /n/ as /m/ when it comes before / b/. 
rhythm; the fact that this musical instrument is also known as zarb shows its function and importance in keeping rhythm in Iranian music (Dehlavi 2009:14).

Unclear History of Tombak and Tombak Players

Though the sources mentioned above tell us how long ago tombak was played, they do not provide any information on how it was played, what place it had in music, how its players were perceived in society, or how it was taught in different periods. The first sources that give us some haphazard information on tombak, its functions and the social status of its players are texts that date back to the Safavid, Zand, and Qajar, from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries respectively. These sources include texts taken from Europeans’ travelogues or Iranian and foreign historians’ writings. In addition to recounting travels, ceremonies, and events, these texts also draw attention to some instruments, players, and cultural situations of the periods they document. For instance, these sources talk about a group of low-class players, who were called Lootis or Motrebs, and mainly dealt with festivities and entertainment programs.

Since most of these stories were told by those who were not musicians themselves, and not much attention was paid to musicians at that time, there is an incomplete image of the performers, especially tombak players, in those times. Though I do not intend to discuss the living conditions of players in these periods, a general reference to these conditions can illuminate the prejudices that existed and still exist to some extent in tombak players’ musical lives.

The first recordings made at the beginning of the 20th century in Iran can help us understand the social and musical status of tombak and the development of tombak performance practice. The quantity and quality of playing techniques in
tombak have changed dramatically in the past century. These changes had a direct effect on the function of tombak in Iranian music, the role of tombak players, and their social status in society and the music community.

**Hossein Tehrani, the Father of Modern Tombak Playing**

The progress tombak has made in the last hundred years is comparable to the progress airplanes have made since the Wright brothers’ prototype. In the history of music in Iran, tombak playing was revolutionized by Hossein Tehrani (see Figure 3). Hossein Tehrani (1912-1974) can be considered the founder of modern tombak playing in Iran. Not only did his creativity and art change tombak techniques, but it also raised the status of the instrument. Before him, tombak was not considered a serious instrument. It was his art and effort that changed the function of tombak from an instrument primarily used for accompaniment to an impressive solo instrument that is considered as one of the essential parts of a music ensemble. This progressive trend has continued because of the students he taught. The sounds, techniques, and phrasing of this instrument have flourished more than any other Iranian instrument in the last century.

*Figure 3: Hossein Tehrani (1912-1974)*
Shiraz/Persepolis Art Festival Catalogue, 1969, Public domain
https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/حسین_تهرانی
After Tehrani, tombak has evolved thanks to the effort of many players who struggled against the cultural and social prejudices associated with performing on the instrument. The question arises: what are the intentions behind this strong desire for advancing the playing techniques of this instrument? When I consider my passion, and that of my colleagues in the tombak community for developing this instrument, I find a hidden motivation. It is a desire to find an individually and socially respectable identity for tombak and tombak players in the musical society of Iran in particular and among people in general. The reason behind the players’ efforts, issues and problems must be sought in the dark background of tombak and the low place it and its players had in the history of Iranian music. This dark history has had a great impact on the place and condition of playing tombak in today's Iran.

2- The Social Status of Tombak and Tombak Players

One of the most important reasons why people and musicians in the past regarded this instrument with contempt was the simplicity of its playing techniques. This simplicity led to the impression that the instrument was less than serious. Since there are not any texts on how tombak was played in previous centuries, all the information we have comes from the records of the late Qajar\(^{10}\) period, which are the only sources for examining the playing techniques in that period and comparing them with contemporary tombak playing. Since tombak was not a solo instrument in this period, it can only be heard accompanying other instruments such as tar,\(^{11}\)

---

\(^{10}\) The Qajar dynasty ruled Iran from 1785 to 1925 and the first period of recording music in Iran is from 1906 to 1915.

\(^{11}\) It is one of most important Iranian stringed instruments. It is similar to a long-necked lute, which has 6 strings and played by a plectrum.
ney,\textsuperscript{12} and santoor\textsuperscript{13} in an ensemble of three or four players and a singer. According to what we hear of tombak in these records, there were only three or four techniques to play it. The first stroke is a bass sound that is produced when the palm of lower hand touches the area near the center of the instrument. The second stroke, Back or Tack, was performed by two fingers of the lower hand on the edges of the instrument. The third is a stroke by the palm or two fingers of the upper hand to the middle of the instrument. The last is by snapping the index and middle finger to the edge of tombak by the upper hand. Another technique, which is called Riz is performed while the fingers of both hands strike the instrument continually, which produces a sound comparable to that of a Western drum roll. These few techniques seem very rudimentary in comparison to modern playing techniques performed by different parts of hands and in different ways. Also, the quality of their performance was much lower than today’s and the sound produced was very raw. Even the aforementioned strokes have been refined so that they sound clearer and more mature than they did in the Qajar period. Moreover, playing tombak in this period followed a very simple rhythmic pattern and did not change during a piece. In fact, in this period tombak did not add artistic and musical value to music with its limited sounds and rudimentary rhythmic patterns. It mostly played the role of a timekeeper for other instruments. One of the names by which tombak players were and are still called by the public is “Zarbgir.” The suffix “gir” means player and “zarb” means beat and metric rules. Hence, the name Zarbgir clearly shows the role and responsibility of the tombak player in the group as the rhythm and meter keeper.

\textsuperscript{12} An Iranian traditional wind instrument. It is an end-blown flute that is commonly made from giant reed.

\textsuperscript{13} This is an Iranian oval-shaped melodic instrument, which is played with mallets and is considered the Persian variety of hammered dulcimer.
As I mentioned before, because of its simple techniques, tombak was not taken seriously in the past. This also explains why tombak is found in many Iranian households. A lot of people were able to play it and perform its limited techniques, positioning it as an accessible instrument for amateur music-making in the home. Everybody could perform these simple techniques on any surface that resembled tombak’s skin. A story told by Hedayat about Naser-al-din Shah, a king from the Qajar period, emphasizes this point.

One night the king calls Mirza Abdollah, the legendary Tar player. He sits beside the heater and asks the musician to play and he accompanies him by playing [tombak] on the edge of the heater. His Majesty might have been disturbed by agitating thoughts and wanted to calm down. (Hedayat 2009: 149)

Some people still think tombak is an easy instrument to play and despite its impressive progress and its position as one of the most technically demanding drums in Iran and even in the world, they expect to learn it in a short time. One of the reasons that this misjudgment is still prevalent among Iranians is the prohibition of showing instruments on official TV after the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979. This results in people’s unfamiliarity with modern tombak’s performance.

Tombak was not considered a serious instrument in the Qajar period because it was hard to find a musician who would play tombak exclusively. It was mostly considered a second instrument. A look at the famous tombak players of this period proves this claim. For instance, tombak players like Sama Hozour was actually a Santoor player, Hossein Khan Esmaili Zadeh was a kamancheh player, Mohammad Taqi Nasaqchi Bashi was a skillful tar player and other musicians like

---

14 It is an Iranian bowed stringed instrument, which is held upright and played like a cello.
Agha Jan Aval and Haji Khan who were very talented in singing old songs used tombak as a rhythmic background to their singing.

From the first period of recording music in Iran (1906-1915), few gramophone records are found on which the tombak player is acknowledged verbally or in the accompanying texts. On some records, other players are introduced orally but the tombak player is ignored. According to Sasan Sepanta, one of the few examples in which the tombak player is also mentioned is record number 19286, which introduces Hassan Khan as the Santoor player and Hossein Khan as the tombak player (Sepanta 1998: 136). The secondary role of tombak in that period’s musical ensembles explains why its players were not mentioned on records.

Even the name by which tombak was called in different texts attests to this fact. In most writings, two terms are used to describe musical groups: Sazzan and Zarbgir. Saz means instrument and Sazzan means instrument player. But this word is only used for the players of melodic instruments and the term Zarbgir is used for the players of tombak. This is not the only discrimination against tombak players; they were treated differently, too. Bahman Rajabi recounts a memory quoted by a tombak player from about 70 years ago showing the nature of discrimination against tombak players and how they were treated differently from other musicians and the group singer:

Zarbgirs were always viewed with contempt. For example, if we went somewhere with Miss. Ghamar or Molook Zarabi, two well-known women singers of the Pahlavi period, I had to go somewhere else to eat. Zarbgir could not sit with guests and had to carry the instruments of other players. He even had to run errands for them. In a room, Sazzan would sit in one part of the room and Zarbgir on the other part near the door. (Rajabi 2017: 130)
The image that comes to mind with these descriptions is that tombak must have had the lowest rank among instruments or was not considered as an instrument at all and the only role it played was providing the group with a rhythmic background like a metronome.

**Tombak and Motrebi Music**

Another reason behind the prejudices against tombak is the existence of other groups of players named Motreb or Looti. What we know of them dates back to the Safavid (1501-1722), Zand (1751-1794), and Qajar periods (1785-1925). Motrebs were groups of Sazzans, Zarbgirs, singers, and actors that had a low rank among artists and in the society. They performed in the court or public ceremonies. In his article, Fatemi notes that motreb music was mostly accompanied by immoral and sensual dances performed by prostitutes. That is why in the Safavid and Zand periods, dancers, prostitutes, players, singers and other performers such as puppeteers, acrobats, and entertainers had rather the same low rank in the society (Fatemi 2001: 34). The low social rank of motreb groups made other musicians avoid them. For example, during the reign of Naser-al-din Shah, the players of the court tried to separate themselves from motrebs of the Safavid and Zand periods and leave the name “motreb” to them (ibid: 30). During these years, sensual dances by prostitutes, dancers, eunuchs, and young men dressed as women were common. In the Qajar period, some separations were forced on women’s and men’s musical activities (ibid: 37). However, sensual dances by men dressed as women in parties became common.

What most concerns our discussion is the role that tombak players had in motreb groups. From the travelogues and history books which describe these
parties, we understand that tombak players were mostly chosen for their aesthetic qualities as handsome young men. In fact, playing tombak was mostly a pretext to use these young men as dancers in sensual dances typical of that time. Rajabi points to the reason for choosing these players and their role in the Qajar period:

Tombak players in the time of Shoao-al Saltaneh, Mozafar-al-Din Shah’s son, were good looking and young in order to dress as girls and arouse excitement in parties. Sadly, they were often harassed by the head of the group or others. (Rajabi 2017: 128)

In a paper titled “Motrebs from the Safavid Period to Constitutional Revolution,” Fatemi explains the reason for using boys in these dances. He states that while prostitute dancers were common in the Safavid and Zand periods, men’s interest in boy dancers ensured their place in motrebi groups. Another reason for using boys to play women’s role was the prohibition of prostitution and using prostitutes in entertainment programs in Qajar period (Fatemi 2001: 30). Another reason that has tainted the identity of tombak is using it in lootis’ music. Though the word looti signifies heroic shows, acrobatics, puppetry, and shows with animals, here we mean itinerant players that used animals to entertain their audience. Fatemi describes them as:

Some itinerant motrebs acted as lootis and used animals such as monkeys, bears and goats in their shows. Some lootis played tombak and could sing the common songs of that period. As soon as these lootis noticed that there was a wedding or a birthday in a neighborhood, they would enter the house by asking permission from the owner’s house to start a show. The quality of their music, their condition, and their itinerant life had a lower rank in comparison to motrebi groups. (Fatemi 2001: 48)

As mentioned above, lootis used animals, and the nature of their show was buffoonish. Since tombak was one of the main instruments in lootis’ shows, the identity of this instrument has suffered because it is tied to buffoonery in the
audience’s mind. In other words, the public identifies it as an instrument for slapstick. The negative effect that lootis and motrebs had on the social status of tombak and its players explains the reason why the words “Donbaki” or “Dombak zan” are offensive in folklore. As it has been mentioned earlier Donbak or Dombak are various names of tombak and the suffix “i” or “zan” mean player. In other words, both these words mean players of tombak, but in practice they were used to offend and deride others, particularly tombak players. Bahman Rajabi relates these insults to the role that tombak players had in motrebi groups and believes that they point to their having been sexually harassed (Rajabi 2017:128).

Tombak and Religious Beliefs

Religious beliefs and Islamic sayings are other factors that influence Iranians’ mentality toward music, musicians, and in particular tombak players. Although there is nothing written about music and dance in the Quran, clergymen and religious missionaries have laid down many inhibitions and obstacles for music and musicians with their interpretations and fanatical ideas with the aim of influencing the less literate class of society. The prohibition on showing musical instruments on TV and women’s singing are examples of the irreparable damage the clergy has caused. These clergymen consider many musical genres as diabolical and sensual. They also describe these music genres as the means of deviation, which discourage people from morality and righteousness and cause torment of their souls in the afterlife. The only musical genres they tolerate are religious, elegiac poems, and a few instruments that are played in religious funeral ceremonies.

In recent centuries and during the years that clergymen forbade people from turning to music, religious minorities, especially Jews, pursued music and played
an important role in maintaining and promoting both serious and light forms of musical entertainment. Laurence D. Loeb, in an article titled “The Jewish Musician and the Music of Fars,” points to the wide prevalence of music among minorities and the serious presence of Jews in musical activities in Shiraz, a city in the south of Iran, which has always been a center of art:

In Shiraz, until the 1950s, the term motreb (musician) was colloquially synonymous with Jewish professional musician. Informants report that in 1949 there were at least 150 to 200 motreb in Shiraz. Habib Levi (1960: 1011) confirms that in that year ten percent of the Jewish men in Shiraz, i.e., at least 250, were musicians. (Loeb 1972: 6-7)

The critical role Jews played in musical areas such as motrebi music, and pursuing music as a career and playing instruments such as tombak that has always had a socially low rank has resulted in the impression that tombak playing is a Jewish thing that Muslims would not do. Rajabi in his books recounts a memory about an old tombak player that illuminates the relationship between playing tombak and Jewish minorities. He writes:

Barbod said, “He has got talent.” My dad answered, “Muslims do not play Zarb.” At that time, Muslims played instruments like ney and kamancheh. However, Zarb was in the hand of another group (the Jews). (Rajabi: 2017: 129)

Such narrations illustrate the role religion plays in influencing people’s opinions about music and some instruments and show how playing an instrument can be considered a religious activity. Therefore, playing music and especially playing some instruments like tombak was considered heresy. In the past, Jews made and sold wine and alcoholic drinks, and also lent money with interest. These occupations made Jews unfavorable members of the society in the eyes of Muslims and indirectly affected music and in particular the social status of tombak.
It is not just in Iran that drums have a lower rank in comparison to other instruments. In other countries like India and Afghanistan, it is the same. Alexandra Balandina in her doctoral thesis about the current condition of playing tombak in Iran compares the social rank of tombak with other drums such as tabla in India and zirbaghali in Afghanistan. She concludes that they are looked at in the same way. She mentions some factors that cause these instruments’ low social rank. These factors are: not being melodic, being limited in playing techniques, having only the role of keeping rhythm, being related to dance and entertainment, the lower-class status of their players and their lack of musical knowledge compared to melodic instrument players (Balandina 2007:107-111).

The lack of musical knowledge among tombak players is an issue that I will discuss in the next chapter, but it is useful to briefly mention that this factor is only right about low-class tombak players who belonged to motrebi and looties musical bands that came from lower classes of society. On the other hand, in the realm of serious music, tombak was mostly played as a second instrument by professional melodic instrument players or singers who had a vast knowledge of Dastgah\textsuperscript{15} or Iranian musical modes. Therefore, a lack of musical knowledge was not a contributing factor for them.

**Development of Tombak in Pahlavi Era (1925 – 1979)**

Music in general and tombak playing, in particular, went through significant changes in the Pahlavi era. Reza and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s efforts to modernize Iran led to music achieving a higher social position and becoming a more

\textsuperscript{15} It is an Iranian traditional musical modal system consists of a series of principal modes and their sub-classes. There are seven dastgahs in Iranian music, and the names given to them are Sur, Segah, Cahargah, Mahur, Homayun and Nava.
serious discipline. European music masters were invited to Iran to teach martial and classical music. Many music instructors who had been educated abroad, especially in European conservatories, brought the knowledge of Western music to Iran. They founded music schools and began to teach Western classical and Iranian music according to the methods of European conservatories. Other measures taken in this period included exchanging students with foreign universities, sending young musicians for education to the centers of Western music, founding and developing musical schools of higher education, composing anthems for schools, adding music to school curricula, broadcasting radio and television in Iran and forming music orchestras specific to radio and television, building dance and music halls, and holding world dance festivals.

One of the most significant developments of this period was radio broadcasting, which began in 1940. This had a significant effect on the position of music players in Iran. Because a large part of radio programs included live performances, many players of Iranian and foreign instruments were hired in radio orchestras. Television broadcasting in 1958 opened more opportunities for musicians and players. Working in radio and television, which were very important to the population, brought particular respect for musicians and players. It somehow gave them the opportunity to shed their pejorative names such as “motreb.” Using this prestigious new position, they introduced themselves to the society with a new identity—that of artist. Working in radio and television became their main job and enabled them to follow music professionally and full time. These media had great influence among people; they became familiar with different Western and Iranian genres and instruments and made many songwriters, singers, and players famous.
Though professional musicians were able to redefine themselves, motrebs or lower-class players, who entertained people in ceremonies, were still struggling with their condemn-laden identity. In this new social setting, motrebs worked in cafes and nightclubs as well as ceremonies and parties. Playing music, sensual dances, drinking, and using drugs common in cafes and nightclubs of this era not only did not help the social class of motrebs but also reinforced the negative connotation of the word motreb. The kind of music and dance that were performed in these nightclubs presented a picture of motrebs that brought to mind sexual immorality and drug and alcohol addiction. The negative image of motrebs in people’s minds influenced their idea of music and musicians in general; many families prevented their children from studying music.

Other media such as cinema were also effective in reinforcing this negative idea in the mind of the ordinary people. Many movies of that time used sexual attractions such as scenes of girls dancing and music in nightclubs to lure common people. Displaying mostly motrebi musicians reinforced the negative uses of music in the mind of the audience and led to the belief that music was a low-class job.

The dark history of such an instrument as tombak reinforced the risk of it being degraded socially and musically. However, the appearance of players such as Hossein Tehrani in this era initiated the changes and developments that tombak playing has been experiencing ever since. Hossein Tehrani began learning tombak in 1928. His instructor was Hossein Khan Ismael Zadeh, a renowned kamancheh player. As I mentioned earlier, tombak was secondary to other melodic musical instruments at that time. The difficulties of learning tombak in this era make Tehrani’s efforts in the development and revival of this instrument even more valuable. In his autobiography he says:
When I began learning tombak, this instrument was inferior. Everyone considered zarbgirs (tombak players) as a low-class motreb and treated them with contempt, so no one dared to play it. In such conditions, playing tombak meant losing face. I started playing tombak in such conditions. I loved this instrument so much that I tolerated all insults and contempt and bade farewell to the honor that could be ruined by playing tombak. I said to myself that I should save tombak from its misery in any possible way. (Dehlavi 2009: 18)

While learning tombak, Tehrani had such players as Reza Ravan Bakhsh and Kangarloo as his instructors. However, the person who made the biggest impact on him was Abolhasan Saba, the great composer and player of melodic instruments. As he recounts in an interview, Saba’s teachings influenced the form and quality of his performance to a great extent, making him distinct from other tombak players (Asil Music 2011).

Tehrani used the opportunities that had opened up for music in the society in the Pahlavi era to the advantage of tombak. He was a member of radio and television orchestras and he performed many solo and duet concerts with tombak to introduce the new techniques and performance potentials of tombak as both a solo and an accompanying instrument. The role that radio, television and governmental and non-governmental orchestras played in producing music must be emphasized. Being a member of these orchestras made producing and performing music socially acceptable. It also improved the musical and social life of the musicians. This is one of the important factors in developing tombak. Navid Afghah, the great contemporary tombak master, interprets this factor on the development of tombak as:

16 Navid Afghah, the prominent tombak player teaches tombak at his music institutes, Darvak, in Shiraz, Iran. Part of his recognition is because of his innovative techniques in applying hands independently and creating new strokes and generating sounds from tombak. Some are his famous albums are Genesis and The Temple of Wooden Figures.
Playing tombak was revolutionized when it became a profession and its players could manage their life through playing this instrument. Now that it was their profession, they could spend long hours practicing and innovating in this instrument. They created new techniques and methods. Whereas before that, playing was more of an entertainment and the players did not have the time to practice and develop their abilities.\textsuperscript{17}

This evaluation illustrates the role of social changes in the Pahlavi era that enabled innovative tombak players like Hossein Tehrani to achieve so much.

One of the advances of this era was that tombak became a professional instrument. As I mentioned earlier, before this period tombak was considered secondary to other instruments. It was also an instrument often played by singers. The players of tombak were mostly singers who knew many folk songs by heart. They entertained the audience by singing these songs and performing simple rhythms on tombak. The tradition of singing these folk songs continues in some of Tehrani’s pieces and those of contemporary tombak players such as Naser Farhangfar. However, tombak playing after Hossein Tehrani became quite distinct from singing. Navid Afghah, explains that the emergence of radio and the tendency toward a specialist-oriented society were among factors that formed this distinction.

In this era, the knowledge of music progressed and various branches of music became distinct. The development in techniques of tombak and singing made it impossible for singers to play the new techniques of tombak and for tombak players to sing, which now required a lot of skill. Therefore, each group followed its own domain separately and of course more professionally.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} Afghah, Navid. (tombak master), in discussion with the author. August 2017, Shiraz.

\textsuperscript{18} Afghah, Navid. (tombak master), in discussion with the author. August 2017, Shiraz.
One of the most important achievements of Hossein Tehrani was his solo playing. Tehrani improved the technical and musical expression of tombak to the point that it removed the influence of other melodic instruments and became an independent and unique instrument, an instrument that could produce sounds other instruments were unable to produce. In his solo pieces, Tehrani imitated the sounds that according to Navid Afghah were the sounds of his epoch, for instance his diesel piece which imitated the sound of diesel pumps or the well-known locomotive piece which imitates the sound of a passing train. What affected other tombak players more than his innovations and techniques was his art of listening to the sounds of his epoch and evoking them with his instrument. This point of view influenced the other tombak players that came after him and resulted in the creation of many works of this kind. Today’s famous works of tombak in Iran such as Genesis and Wooden Figurines Temple by Navid Afghah are among the pieces that narrate the phenomena that audiences did not believe could be performed by tombak. In this way Hossein Tehrani’s view in creating new sounds became a model for the tombak players after him which in turn led to significant progress in the techniques of playing tombak.

Another factor in revolutionizing tombak was that it began to be taught academically. In 1941 and 1949, Tehrani began teaching tombak in the High Conservatory of Music and the National Conservatory of Music. This step had a positive impact on the acceptance of tombak as a professional and important instrument. The first training book on playing tombak was also published as a result of Tehrani’s teaching in the music conservatory. Teaching tombak academically necessitated a handbook. Hossein Tehrani’s handbook of playing Tombak was written by a group of educated musicians and theorists such as Hossein Dehlavi,
Houshang Zarif, Mostafa Kamal Pour Torab, and Farhad Fakhredini. They turned the oral teachings of Hossein Tehrani into written material. To do this they used common Western note values and invented a group of signs for showing different strokes on this instrument. Publishing this book was a big step in establishing tombak as a serious instrument that had its own teaching repertoire.

The number of tombak students grew significantly in these centers. These students chose tombak as their second instrument to learn different rhythmic patterns. Seeing this, Tehrani decided to form a percussion ensemble made up solely of tombak players. This step had a significant effect on introducing the new place and identity of tombak. Forming this group changed the role of tombak from merely a background instrument to the main instrument of the group without any other melodic instruments to accompany it. The tradition of forming tombak ensembles and composing pieces for them was continued by Tehrani’s students such as Mohammad Ismaili and showed the vast potential of tombak to the public and professionals. The new identity of this instrument and its vast sonic potential encouraged some composers to write pieces for orchestra and tombak groups. A piece written by Faramarz Paivar, a great santoor player, in memory of Tehrani, and another, _A Fantasia for Tombak Ensemble and Orchestra_ (late1950s) (see Figure 4) by the great Iranian composer Hossein Dehlavi, are among these works. They clearly demonstrate the progress of tombak in the course of the music of Iran.

---

19 High Conservatory of Music and the National Conservatory of Music

20 The exact name and the performance date of this piece was not acknowledged in its video available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5IdhizH6RO&t=940s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5IdhizH6RO&t=940s). According to Tehrani’s death in 1974 and the 1979 Islamic revolution, its date should be positioned between these two events.
The measures taken by the ministry of culture and arts during the rule of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to revive and promote Iranian arts such as Iranian dance also led to further flourishing of Iranian music and particularly tombak as the main instrument accompanying Iranian dance. The foundation of the Iran National Folklore Organization in Iran in 1958 under the supervision of the queen Farah Pahlavi provided a setting to design dance pieces based on stories and noble traditions of Iran. Some of the accompanying music of these dances was played by tombak. As it was the main instrument accompanying these dances, tombak found an opportunity to be respected and show its potential in Iranian music and dance. For instance, Rounama was one of the programs arranged for Tombak groups and dancers that portrayed the customs and traditions of marriage in Iran (see Figure 5). Mohammad Ismaili, the excellent student of Hossein Tehrani, arranged this piece for his own group and played it on the scene.

Figure 4: Mohammad Esmaili (right) and his tombak ensemble performing the piece A Fantasia for Tombak ensemble and Orchestra conducted by Hossein Dehlavi.

This scene is a screenshot of a documentary about the musical lift of Hossein Dehlavi available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpEk4hboT60
The prosperity of art in the last decade of the Pahlavi era provided the opportunity for tombak players to perform their various works for large audiences through media such as television and radio. Therefore, they were much more motivated to create more works. For instance, the talented and hardworking tombak player, “Hassan Ismaili composed and performed 115 pieces for tombak and other percussions in 12 years” (Sanati 2015).

Another factor that increased the artistic level and the knowledge of Iranian musicians in general and tombak players, in particular, was the rise of an art festival held in Shiraz in the last decade of the Pahlavi period. These festivals were held annually from 1967 until 1977 and featured live performances of both Iranian and Western artists. These festivals were considered encounters between the East and the West (see Figure 6).
The Shiraz Arts Festival provided a showcase for composers, performers, dancers and theater directors from Iran and the West, among them Iannis Xenakis, Peter Brook, John Cage, Gordon Mumma, David Tudor, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Merce Cunningham. (Gluck 2007: 21)

This festival also included traditional music from non-Western countries such as Balinese gamelan ensemble, the Senegalese National Ballet and famous Indian musicians such as Vilayat Khan, Bismillah Khan, Ravi Shankar, Ram Narayan, and many other traditional musicians and dancers from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bhutan, China, Egypt, Iraq, Japan, South Korea, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Rwanda, Tunisia, Turkey, and Vietnam. The Shiraz Arts Festival was a source of inspiration for Iranian young composers and artists who could expand...
their horizons by experiencing the innovative approaches of pioneer artists and learning contemporary techniques and aesthetics.

On one hand, meeting foreign musicians and drum players made tombak players familiar with the music of other nations, their drums and rhythms and on the other hand, introduced tombak to the world. Exchanging ideas with foreign players also resulted in tombak players seeing their instrument from the point of view of other nations. After experiencing the interest foreign audience and musicians showed toward tombak, tombak players found more potential and possibilities in their instrument. It is told that at one of the art celebrations in Shiraz, Max Roach (see Figure 7), the African-American percussionist who enchanted the world with his rhythms, said about Tehrani that “what I make with a group of drums, he can create with a skin on wood and sometimes even more delicately” (Dehlavi 2009:23). Such opinions by musicians of other nationalities not only brought credibility for tombak in the world but also added to its value among Iranian tombak players and motivated them to work for the technical and artistic progress of tombak with more determination.

Hossein Tehrani’s efforts for technical improvement of tombak were interrelated with his goal of improving the class of playing tombak in the society. In an interview he mentions that changing the social class of tombak players was one of his artistic achievements: “Before this, we [tombak players] were like the zero before a number that was not considered. Now we come after the number” (Shahrokhshahi 2011).

After Hossein Tehrani, other tombak players followed his path and used their technical innovations as a tool to help improve the place of tombak. Tombak
players have always been at war with their past inferior identity and have been trying to achieve a higher place in the music of Iran. For example, Bahman Rajabi spent his life trying to modify the viewpoint of the society and encourage other tombak players to try to present a new image of tombak to society. In his book Rajabi states:

The Iranian young have seen enough illiterate, addicted and lowbrow tombak players. The true responsibilities of an artist tombak player are giving speeches about the scientific and social value of art in general and tombak in particular, showing the beauties of playing tombak and also writing articles and books to introduce tombak to people the way it must be not the way it actually is. (Rajabi 2017: 85)

The significant progress of tombak in the last half century is the result of a lot of efforts on the part of its players and instructors who for the love of tombak have fought with the negative mentalities of the society toward this instrument and its players. They also tried to introduce a new image of tombak and its players to the society by improving their knowledge and their ability to play. Although their achievements have provided a respected and admirable place for tombak in the music of Iran, the dark shadow of the past still affects the social and artistic life of tombak players, and their efforts for the improvement of this instrument continue.

Figure 7: Hossein Tehrani accompanying Max Roach at the Shiraz Art Festival in Persepolis, 1969

This scene is a screenshot form a video about the Shiraz Art Festivals available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YelhJd33qKM
Chapter Two

Tombak and Tombak Playing in Contemporary Iran

Introduction

In the last century, Iranian music has experienced social, political and cultural events that caused many ups and downs in its development. The 1979 Iranian Revolution might be considered the most important of these events. It is hard to find any other incident that has had such a huge impact on Iranian music. The Revolution dramatically obstructed and even reversed the evolution of Iranian music. Tombak players as part of Iranian music society were heavily influenced by this event and encountered a lot of problems and challenges, some of which remain unsolved and still plague today’s tombak players. Analyses and examinations of these difficulties and influential factors on the development and acquisition of tombak before and after the revolution give us a clearer image of the effect of this revolution on Iranian music in general and tombak playing in particular.

1. Acquisition of Tombak before the Revolution

The Pahlavis’ Cultural Policy and Official Support

The Pahlavis’ particular attention to culture and art and direct observation and contribution by official figures like Empress Farah in many musical events improved the status of music in society and presented it as a valuable human activity. In this period, extensive facilities were dedicated to providing essential infrastructure for promulgating music in the society and training a new generation of professional musicians. To reach this goal, the Pahlavi implemented projects
aimed at teaching music to children and youth. Identifying musically inclined students and encouraging them to learn music by providing essential facilities in schools was an example of these activities. Other was establishing the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in 1961 under the supervision of the Empress Farah, which had many branches in different cities and towns and offered various art classes, including music. Another remarkable project in spreading music among the younger generation was the Children’s Music Workshop of Iranian Radio and Television. The director of this center was Dr. Khadiri, who had studied Orff music in Germany and was the founder of this system in Iran. Khadiri started teaching children’s music at the University of Tehran in order to train qualified teachers in this field. Then he started localizing the Orff method by adding some Iranian traditional music instruments, including tombak. He also included some regional music instruments such as dozale, a wind instrument, to this music system. To teach these Iranian instruments, he recruited some Iranian music masters such as Bighchekhani in tar, Dr. Behjat in santour and Mohammad Akhavan, one of the eminent masters of tombak, for teaching children.

In one of his interviews about the vastness of this institute’s activities, Dr. Khadiri states that this institute had eleven branches in some main Iranian cities and used 175 instructors for teaching music to children and youths (Said Khadiri 2014). One of this institute’s accomplishments was presenting and recording 300 children and youth concerts and broadcasting them on National Iranian Television (VOA Farsi 2012). These broadcasts introduced music as a useful tool for promoting children’s mental functioning and creativity and encouraged many families to send their children to music classes.
Navid Afghah, the renowned tombak master, remembers that he was first introduced to tombak by being sent to this institute for learning tombak at the age of four. When he was a child, his teacher recommended that his parents wait until he was older to learn tombak. Afghah remembers his teacher Mohammad Zamani was one of the Tehrani’s students. Afghah states that they took video of talented students’ performances and displayed them on television as an award for encouraging students to further their music studies.\(^\text{21}\)

These examples show the critical role of the government in providing a proper context for developing and preserving Iranian music. They also demonstrate how these cultural policies and official supports led to the spread of music and its introduction as a valuable and beneficial tool for training children. This issue has more importance when we are talking about a society whose religious contingent considers music an unspiritual, irreligious, or even evil action.

**The Role of Schools in Developing Music and Tombak**

Before the revolution, schools had an influential role in spreading music among youth. Attention to the development of music was important enough that there was a fellowship for talented music students, enabling them to further their music studies in reputable Western music schools. By this, the government tried to train a generation of up-to-date musicians who were familiar with Western teaching systems and could apply their knowledge to the Iranian music education system. These educated musicians attempted to design new course syllabi that satisfied both Western and Iranian music requirements and reinforced the theoretical and practical

\(^{21}\) All the quotations from Navid Afghah in this chapter are taken from his discussion with the author on August 16, 2017, Shiraz.
aspects of music. In the new system of music education, tombak, as the primary Iranian percussion instrument, was included in the curriculum in order to enhance students’ skill in rhythm.

Offering music in non-music schools and providing facilities for musical activities significantly affected both students and their families who did not have a positive opinion of music. Teaching music at school turned it into a skill, which both entertained children and youth and developed their mental and physical skills. Reza Ghasemi, a tombak master, states that having music in school was one of the key factors that gave him a chance to learn tombak. Although his father was not happy that he was learning music, because his tombak classes were in his high school, his father was relieved that he was spending most of his time in the school and was therefore far from dangers and delinquency that threatened youth.²²

One of the obstacles that has always challenged tombak players is overcoming the public prejudice toward tombak players, which is rooted in religious and social beliefs. Religious families’ bias against music has always been one of the serious obstacles to learning tombak. A considerable number of tombak masters and teachers whom I interviewed lived in religious families in which music was an unacceptable activity. Majid Hesabi, the prominent tombak teacher in Isfahan, talks about his family’s attitude toward music:

I got interested in tombak by watching the concert of Mohhamad Esmaili, the great master of tombak, from TV. I did not dare to express my interest because my father was religious and considering his negative mentality about motrebi music; he did not want his sons to do music. He already disagreed with my brothers who also wanted

²² All the quotations from Reza Ghasemi in this chapter are taken from his discussion with the author on July 12, 2017, Isfahan.
to learn tombak. Thus, for learning tombak, I had no choice but to do it secretly.\footnote{All the quotations from Majid Hesabi in this chapter are taken from his discussion with the author on July 23, 2017, Isfahan.}

Although religious families’ attitude toward music could prevent many children from learning music in both the Pahlavi and the Islamic regime, the difference was that the Pahlavis’ cultural policy attempted to support those interested in music by providing social facilities for learning it, while the Islamic regime condemned it. Thus, despite families’ beliefs, there were always accessible facilities, which eased the difficulties of learning music. In that era, there were different clubs in schools, including music, and many qualified music teachers were chosen to teach them. Majid Hesabi describes the role these clubs played in his learning tombak:

My father forced me to enroll in a religious class in my school and I attended one. During the class I used to perform the rhythm of famous songs from television and radio, playing on the table. When my teacher saw my talent in performing rhythm, called me and send me to the tombak class. In that time great tombak masters like Mohebi taught there. I used to go to this class three times a week. I did it secretly for three years and my father did not know about it. My mother was the only person in my family who knew about my class and she supported me by hiding my instrument in the home while my father was there. The only reason I could continue learning tombak was that my school provided room for practicing music so I could practice tombak six hours a day.

Schools had an essential role in motivating children to continue their musical activities by holding various festivals, recreational programs, and educational camps. During my interviews, some masters mentioned the competition between schools in different fields including music for sending their talented students to a great camp in the north of Iran called Ramsar. Between 1971 and the 1979 revolution this camp regularly hosted top ranks of both educational and artistic
Reza Ghasemi, a tombak teacher, talks about his experience of this camp:

Going to the Ramsar camp was my strongest motivation for playing tombak, and I always tried to win a place in the music competitions to be sent to this camp again. In this camp we could experience different cultural events and recreational activities such as concerts, theater, sport competitions and unique experiences such as flying model planes. In this program, they try to improve children’s personalities by teaching us essential life skills. These lessons had a high impact on my character. I came from a low-class family that did not even know how to use a fork and spoon. But in these classes, they taught me how to expand our positive characteristics and how to act like a gentleman. I could attain all these accomplishments through playing tombak, and this was what inspired me to practice this instrument seven hours a day.

Offering music in schools and other cultural institutes and providing facilities such as qualified music teachers, rehearsal places, and holding festivals were among factors that nurtured a new generation of musicians before the revolution.

**The Role of Media**

Holding a position as a member of a radio or television orchestra, or broadcasting musicians’ performances, were considered notable credits that distinguished professional performers from motrebs and promoted them to the rank of respectable artists. This is why many music players attempted to develop their musical skills to the level that was acceptable for broadcasting. Therefore, broadcasting a performance could be considered a valuable reward for a music competition. For some tombak players it was not just a reward, but also essential for convincing their religious family to let them continue learning this instrument. Majid Hessabi describes this role of media in his musical life:

Another function of the media was their role in developing music through specific music programs. Most individuals who began learning tombak before the
revolution or even in the following decades considered these music programs some of the most powerful motivators for learning music. There were programs in the Pahlavis’ radio and television that were dedicated to music and covered different musical genres such as traditional, pop, and Western classical music. The radio program of Golha was one of them. It focused on traditional Iranian poems and music and broadcast for 23 years from 1976 until the revolution. Many eminent critics, famous radio personalities, prominent singers, composers, and performers worked on this program, and the result was the production of remarkable and unique works in both poetry and traditional Iranian music. In addition to its role as a source of entertainment, this program had a significant effect on promulgating Iranian traditional music and poetry and enhanced the social status of musicians. The presence of many prominent players and their solo and ensemble performances made this program a source of inspiration and an excellent learning resource for many people who studied music without having a teacher. Jane Lewisohn, 24 who has studied this radio program, discusses the spread and popularity of the program before the revolution:

The Golha program created such a craze among the Iranian public at large that many people would organize their daily schedules around listening to its broadcasts, precious recordings of which were taped and bandied about among friends. Among musicians, the Golha program evoked a kind of neo-classical revival in Persian song and verse in which the great songs of the late Qajar period written by ‘Arif Qazvini, Shayda and Darvish Khan were re-interpreted and performed by modern musicians and vocalists, and they also caused the rediscovery of Persian regional vernacular musical genres and traditions that were carefully researched, recorded, and broadcast on air. (Lewisohn 2008)

---

24 Jane Lewisohn is a Research Associate at the Department of Music at SOAS.
This program opened up the opportunity for music to penetrate religious families and changed their attitude about music. Despite having religious families, many tombak players whom I interviewed mentioned their families’ interest in this program. Although many Islamic clergymen prevent their followers from even listening to music, many people just accept the parts of Islamic rules that are not against their rationality. Ghasemi, a tombak teacher, states:

Many religious families like mine invited a clergyman to their house every week to talk about religious issues. Although condemning music was a regular part of his speech, my family never cared about it and followed radio and television music. They also loved listening to music from a gramophone.

In that era radio and television music programs were not limited to entertaining music, they also included music programs such as learning tombak. Besides teaching music instruments, there were some other programs regarding the theoretical aspects of music for upper-level music students. For example, there was a program that analyzed the structure of Iranian music and examined its modes and musical features and demonstrated them practically by players who demonstrated a particular theoretical issue. Such programs encouraged many to begin playing an instrument and made music accessible for individuals who had no access to music teachers in their communities. Reza Kavari, tombak teacher in Shiraz, describes the way he became interested in playing tombak:

It was about 1977 when I accidentally watched some tombak training program from TV. I am not sure who was teaching it, but it was probably Mohammad Esmaili. At that time I was eleven years old, and I tried to imitate the strokes that I learned from this program. I did not have any instrument so I practiced them on any surface.
Indeed, this short program awakened my passion for this instrument and led me to start learning it in my youth.²⁵

The role of radio and television was more than endorsing and teaching music. Judging by the large number of music ensembles that produced music for radio and television in different cities of Iran, there were plenty of opportunities for musicians to make money and gain experience by performing in ensembles. In fact, the increasing volume of music production required these media to absorb more composers and players. Arzhang Kamkar, the renowned tombak master, mentions the role of these ensembles in achieving mastery of this instrument:

My father who was a musician conducted several music ensembles of radio and center of art and culture of Sanandaj, a city in Western Iran. I started music by learning santoor from my father, but because these ensembles needed tombak players, he started teaching me tombak. First I became the member of children’s music ensemble, then step by step I reached the adult ensemble. The increasing demand for performing music for different organizations including radio and television, schools and art festivals made these ensembles very active. All I know in tombak comes from playing in these ensembles since childhood.²⁶

The golden age of tombak playing is characterized by the dynamic and stimulating atmosphere of music, increasing support of the government, and the appearance of innovative tombak players such as Tehrani, Rajabi, Farhangfar, and Esmaeeli. Tombak players attempted to show the different roles of tombak playing: solo, accompaniment, or tombak ensemble. Audio and visual media for sharing these musical ideas helped tombak players to present the new identity of this instrument better. The release of a video clip for one of the famous tombak pieces

²⁵ All the quotations from Reza Kavari in this chapter are taken from his discussion with the author on July 27, 2017, Shiraz.
²⁶ All the quotations from Arzhang Kamkar in this chapter are taken from his discussion with the author on July 12, 2017, Tehran.
of Hossein Tehrani, Locomotive, for example, had a considerable positive influence on people’s opinion about this instrument and made it a memorable piece for them.\(^{27}\) After its release many tombak players were asked to perform this piece, and for many people, tombak was associated with this piece and with Hossein Tehrani.

Despite all tombak players’ efforts to create a new image of this instrument in people’s minds, some other factors obstructed it. The active presence of motrebs in cafés, cabarets, and parties, along with street performances by looties with tombak and animals, reinforced the old identity of tombak as a low-class instrument. Using motrebs and looties in many movies and TV films accompanying sensual dances for attracting larger audiences also confirmed and spread the old identity of tombak as a motrebi instrument. This explains why many tombak players considered motrebi music as an activity that had ruined all their attempts at improving the status of tombak in Iranian music and society.

It should be noted that motrebs’ musical activities were not utterly devastating. They had some advantages for professional tombak players too. Watching motrebs’ performances in different ceremonies—a wedding, for example—motivated people to learn tombak. Actually, for poor and low-class families who did not have access to radio and TV, motrebi music was the only medium that gave them the opportunity to experience music. At that time, they were children who became fascinated by the sound of this instrument itself without the distraction of judgmental thoughts that constantly categorized people and phenomena. In fact, watching motrebi music provided them the essential passion they needed to learn tombak.

\(^{27}\) To watch this clip, use this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3XUolbdXks
Many professional tombak players believed that most ordinary people did not distinguish between amateurish motrebi tombak playing and professional artistic playing. Tombak players constantly tried to remind their listeners of these two separate categories by creating and performing impressive skillful pieces, performing in official concert stages, and giving explanations about their works. Indeed, changing the people’s opinion about tombak, which had been formed over centuries, required more than a few decades and required developing social awareness and improving the artistic taste of the society. The cultural path that the Pahlavi regime aimed for also required a long time. However, it was stalled in the late 1970s when the revolution ruined all of these cultural goals.

2-The Condition of Music after the Revolution

The rapidly developing flow of music in the Pahlavi era was stopped or obstructed in many fields by the 1979 revolution. Although different political parties contributed to this revolution, the Islamic parties under the leadership of Khomeini took power. Khomeini’s sharp critiques of the Pahlavis’ cultural projects and the clergymen’s radical views about music shaped the cultural policies of the Islamic government after the revolution, which created one of the darkest periods in the history of Iranian music. In Khomeini’s point of view, many of the Pahlavis’ cultural efforts, such as founding the Iranian national ballet institute, establishing different music organizations, and holding art festivals, including the festival of Shiraz, were all signs of Westernization. He also considered the artistic programs of radio and television as a tool for spreading Western culture in Iranian society. Based on his ideas, music ruined rational thoughts, awakened evil passions, and had been used by the Pahlavi regime as the means of weakening Islamic culture.
Studying some of Khomeini’s critiques about the Pahlavis’ radio and television music programs explains how an anti-musical atmosphere was created after the revolution. In one of his speeches, Khomeini states:

The Radio and Television should be informative; it should give power to our youth and make them strong. It should not broadcast music for long hours because it changes youths’ power to a hangover mode of a drug like opium. There is no difference between music and opium. Both of them cause hangover mode. This issue should be changed. If you want to have a free and independent country, take these issues seriously. Change the radio and television to an informative one and remove music. Do not be afraid of being accused as a stick in the mud. (Sahifeh-ye-Nour 1990: 146)

In the first decade of the revolution, the new cultural policy not only did not support music and musicians but also suppressed them based on Islamic and revolutionary ideologies. In such an atmosphere, learning and following music was a difficult and challenging process. For followers of Khomeini, who now had control of state affairs, his ideas and thoughts were considered a guide for spiritual life and for the religious authorities and were an official verdict for limiting and removing many musical activities. As a result of these anti-music approaches many concerts were banned and many musicians, especially pop artists, lost their jobs. The fear of getting arrested, convicted, and punished led many of them to leave the country. Numerous music institutes and organizations such as the Iranian National Ballet were closed, and the art of dance except for some regional dances that were exclusively performed by men was abolished in the society. All the activities of Iranian and classical music orchestras were halted and salaries of the musicians and researchers who were under cover of the Pahlavis’ culture organization were stopped.
In this atmosphere, all musical fields including composition, performance, and even making and trading instruments became illegal. The people who were active in these fields were obliged to quit and find other work. These bans were not specific to a particular genre like Western music; they included all types of music such as traditional and regional music. Revolutionary authorities in many cities and towns began to eliminate music and musicians from the society. Ameneh Youssefzadeh describes the critical condition of music in Khorasan, one of the eastern provinces of Iran.

According to my informants in Khorasan, the Pasdaran (revolutionary guards) organized raids to collect and destroy musical instruments. Playing music was forbidden. The bards who participated in concerts and festivals under the old regime were summoned and cross-examined by the revolutionary authorities. Some of those who performed at festivals, such as Karegar, died in obscurity. On the other hand, Haj-Qorban Soleymani (a famous bard from the Quchan region in northern Khorasan) told me: Since I had stopped playing eighteen years before Revolution, they left me alone. (Yousefzadeh 2000: 38)

In the early years of the revolution, only music that had religious and “revolutionary” content was allowed to continue, and only in some governmental organizations such as radio and television. The name of the Ministry of Cultures and Arts changed to the Center for Revolutionary Hymns and Songs. Although the total removal of music from society and media was impossible, at the same time displaying any musical instruments on TV and broadcasting women’s singing were utterly illegal, so these media had no choice but to use instrumental music (non-vocal) and non-dance music, which were less controversial.

The war between Iran and Iraq just two years after the revolution put the country in a severe political and economic condition, which made the music condition worse. However, the demand for producing religious, epic and war music
as a means for motivating soldiers in battlefields gave a small chance for traditional music to emerge by creating nationalistic and epic war music. Some tombak masters like Arzhang Kamkar believed that the post-revolution transformations—like new limitations on other musical genres such as pop and motrebi—provided an opportunity for traditional music to retain its place in Iranian music. Producing patriotic music like the series Chavosh, which expressed the social and political condition of those days, was one of the significant accomplishments of Iranian traditional music. Although the absence of other music had provided ample space for spreading traditional music, the lack of supportive plans and a fixed budget, and moreover, the suppressive role of religion and Islamic ideology that shaped the development of cultural policies hindered the growth of this genre.

The combination of such factors as the post-revolution social and economic disorder, Iraq’s invasion of Iran, and a ruinous eight-year war, the remarkable role of Islamic ideology in governing the country, and anti-musical policies made the first decade of the revolution one of the darkest periods in the history of Iranian music. During this time, only those media that cooperated with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance were allowed to engage in musical activities. All these activities had to be compatible with the Islamic policy. The music society was under such pressure that many musicians had to apply for a permit for carrying their musical instrument in the street. Otherwise, the revolutionary authorities could

---

28 It is a series of 12 albums of Iranian traditional music. The first ten albums, the more important ones, were published between 1979 and 1985. A good number of prominent Iranian traditional composers, players, and singers such as Hossein Alizadeh, Mohamadreza Lotfi, Shahram Nazeri and Mohamadreza Shaharian collaborated in recording these albums.

29 An Islamic name for the Ministry of Culture and Art after the revolution.
arrest them and seize their instrument. The following is the contents of one of these permits (see Figure 8) for a tar master.

It is hereby certified that Mr. Ataallah Jangouk is the artist of the Centre for the Preservation and Propagation of Traditional Music and allowed to carry his musical instrument and practice it at home.

Another permit (see Figure 8) mentions that the individual is allowed to use her musical instrument for just learning and practicing the revolutionary songs in the learning centers. He/she also cannot play in unofficial public places and ceremonies that are inconsistent with sharia laws. Otherwise, the officers can seize the instrument and the permit becomes invalid.

According to these permits, not only carrying a musical instrument in the street, but also keeping and practicing any musical instrument at home without a permit could be considered a crime. Because of the limitation on private music institutes in this era, many music teachers had to hold their classes at home, and carrying and keeping instruments for the students and teachers who were not members of government organs was a serious challenge. The other issue was that the players could not perform in nonofficial public places. Only religious and revolutionary music was legitimate; other music, regardless of its genre and contents, was illicit. Also, any players who performed in an unofficial place were considered motreb. For the religious government, “motreb” did not refer to the low-class amateur musicians but was a label for convicting any musician who performed for the public.

---

30 One of the sub-organization of the Iranian radio and television, established in 1969 in order to study and develop Iranian traditional music.
Figure 8: samples of permit for carrying a musical instrument

The images are respectively taken from the websites of Seratnews and Iran Khabar New Agency available at:


http://irankhabarnews.com/2017/07/29/
The Condition of Learning Tombak in the First Decade of the Revolution

Because it was both a key instrument for accompanying dance and a primary percussion of the motrebi group, tombak was at the center of government allegations of heresy on two fronts. For religious people and revolutionary authorities who were ignorant of the art of music and the development of instruments like tombak, music in general and tombak in particular were considered as heretical as festivity, drinking, dancing, and other non-religious behaviors. This kind of radical approach made conditions worse for tombak players and forced many of them to quit playing. It was a stressful and arduous process for those who persisted. Alireza Kavari describes his difficulties learning this instrument after the revolution:

Having a religious family and considering music as motrebi, I hid playing tombak from my father for some years. Also, the anti-musical atmosphere of the society after the revolution and not having a permit for carrying instrument made me learn it secretly both inside and outside the house. My main worry was that if the revolutionary officers captured me for carrying tombak, they would call my father. Then he would figure out and prevent me from playing it.

Since many music stores had gone out of business, musicians had difficulty obtaining their instruments. Thus musical instruments were traded secretly and with prices much higher than their real value. In cities like Shiraz some of the gypsies who were motreb and knew woodworking made tombak. Other tombak makers were Jews who had been in the music business for generations and created and repaired musical instrument secretly. Before the revolution, many of motrebs were Jews who had their own entertainment businesses (bongah-e- shademani) and provided music players and dancers for people’s ceremonies. After the revolution, they were obliged to change occupations, including fabric selling or selling luxury and decorative items. Navid Afghah remembers that he bought a tombak from the
fabric store of Sheker, one of the oldest Shiraz’s Jewish motrebs, at the high price of 550 toman.\footnote{It is the "unit of ten thousand" of the official currency of Iran, the Rial.} Navid states that Shekar hid the tombaks under the table of fabric and after getting money secretly put them in the customer’s car.

The limitations on the music industry and inactivity of professional instrument makers led to low-quality instruments. Most tombaks were made by individuals like gypsies who had not the required science or amateur makers who suffered from a lack of experience in this field. Also, the absence of manufacturers who could produce large numbers of high-quality wooden tombak caused many students to use inappropriate metal or amateurish wooden ones that were common in homes for entertaining purposes.

Not having access to an appropriate instrument was not the only problem of a tombak learner. Finding a place to practice was a more critical issue for those who had to hide their playing from family. Reza Kavari describes that in order to hide tombak from his father, he had to conceal it in a tree in the yard of his neighbor’s ruined house, which was the only place he could practice during the night. In later decades, when musical activities became legal in the society, there were still difficulties. Sadegh Shariati, a tombak teacher in Shiraz, states that he often practiced in his store during his free time. However, the problem was that there are many mourning days in Iranian religious calendar dedicated to the spiritual and political successors to the Islamic prophet, that prevent individuals from practicing music in public or even private places.\footnote{All the quotations from Sadegh Shariati in this chapter are taken from his discussion with the author on August 10, 2017, Shiraz.}
Another problem in this period was that the government attempted to prevent people from learning music by decreasing their access to musical activities. Restriction of all motivating factors like concerts, music festivals, and radio and television music programs were part of these anti-musical attempts. These restrictions along with the total ban on displaying musical instruments on TV, and not issuing permits for private music institutes deterred people from learning music. Although the flow of music in the society became slower, many people attempted to maintain it within their families. Families with higher cultural status encouraged their children to learn music and motivated them by creating conditions for presenting their art in their family circles. Navid Afghah talks about his family support:

> In the 1980s, there was not any particular entertainment facility in Shiraz and music was a serious entertainment for us. Performing music in our family gatherings was one of our most significant motivations for furthering music. My big family gathered every two weeks, and it was a great chance for my brother, who played santour, and me to be seen and encouraged by showing our art.

In the absence of private music institutes, motivated music learners who did not find their intended teachers in their local areas tried to hold music classes in their homes by gathering other music learners and inviting prominent masters from other cities. For example, famous tombak masters such as Farahngfar and Rajabi held many biweekly or monthly masterclasses in their students’ houses in different cities of Iran. Some other music enthusiasts used self-teaching methods for learning musical instruments by using audio and videotapes of the Pahlavis’ music festivals and concerts. Navid Afghat describes the way he learned tombak techniques:

> On those days, watching videos of the Pahlavis’ artistic events was nostalgia for some families and a great music education source for us. I learned tombak by watching videos of the tombak masters like Naser Farhangfar and Morteza Ayan in Shiraz Art festivals. I also
repeatedly watched the tombak performance of Mohammad Esmaili’s accompaniment of Mohammad Heidari (santour player) and Golchin (singer) and tried to imitate his rhythmic patterns and motives.

Despite the atmosphere of suppression, many music teachers accepted the risk of teaching at home and tried to maintain the ancestors’ musical works by teaching them to the young generation. They also created small artistic circles by finding other musicians and artists and holding house concerts. Although dealing with such difficulties had become routine for the young generation of musicians who had begun music after the revolution, new music conditions were intolerable and painful for those who had experienced the Pahlavis’ attention and support toward music.

Reza Kavari, one of the students of Naser Farhangfar, the grand master of tombak, describes Farhangfar condition after the revolution:

In those years, Farhangfar had depression and drunk a lot. Part of his depression stemmed from the restriction on his musical activities. In the pahlavis’ era, he was paid by the Ministry of Culture and Art just to further his playing and train students. After the revolution, the state stopped paying him. He also lost part of his income, which was from publishing his works, which were distributed illegally. All of these factors ruined his motivations for furthering his musical activities.

The Condition of Music in the Subsequent Decades

The country experienced better conditions for artistic activities after the eight-year war (1980-1988). The ending of the war provided an opportunity to recover from all the economic, social and cultural problems imposed by both the revolution and the war. This new atmosphere provided new hopes for music and musicians. Ten years after the revolution it appeared that Khomeini took a moderate approach towards music because he authorized the purchase and sale of instruments for legitimate purposes. This religious decree opened up a golden opportunity for music to return to the society legally. The death of Khomeini in 1989 and
appearance of governments that were more flexible in the field of culture helped music to recover from its damage. In subsequent years, some schools like Tehran University and Art University were allowed to add the music major to their curricula. Private music institutes were allowed to work, and music stores reopened. The musicians also used each opportunity for spreading music in the society. For example, they used the occasion of annual celebrations related to the revolution to ask for governmental facilities and funding to hold more concerts and music festivals. The third decade of the revolution and the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), a reformist government, was a turning point in the condition of music after the revolution. In this period, center named Music House (Khane-ye-musighi) was established for defending musicians’ guild rights. One of the accomplishments of this center was the recognition of musicians as a guild and offering them benefits like health and retiree insurances. During this era, the increasing trend of issuing permits for concerts and music albums that had started in the era of the last president (Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani) continued. The cultural authorities also attempted to give other musical genres like pop more chances to be presented in the society.

One of the positive measures of this state was paying attention to regional music. They designed a plan for acknowledging the musical activities of regional musicians. They started paying a monthly salary to regional musicians who lived in poor economic conditions. Another great plan was a research project about the regional music of Iran that had started in the era of the last president (Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani). In this project, more than one hundred hours of music was recorded by prominent regional music masters in different parts of Iran and was published (Najva 2005). Attention to female musicians and running music festivals
specific to women was a significant step in loosening restrictions on music in general and in women’s music in particular. With thanks to these measures, women who were already banned from singing for the public could perform for female audiences. Although women could not be solo singers, they could participate on music albums by accompanying male singers.

The trend toward recovery became slower during the presidency of Mahmood Ahmadinezhad (2005-2013), who was a fundamentalist. This political camp has always had radical beliefs and attempted to reinstate the ideologies of the Islamic revolution. In the field of culture and music, this government tried to satisfy opinions of the supreme leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei:33

Although music is halal, promoting and teaching it is not compatible with the highest values of the sacred regime of the Islamic Republic … It is better that our dear youth spend their valuable time in learning science and essential and useful skills and fill their time with sport and healthy recreations instead of music. (Kamali Dehghan 2010)

Using the phrases like “halal,” “not compatible with highest values,” or “it is better” in Khamenei’s comments and comparing them with the Khomeini’s early extreme views show how the religious leaders had withdrawn their radical approaches. In fact, religious authorities had not any other choice but accepting music and could no longer talk about absolutely eliminating it from the society. Instead, they recommended people to spend less time on musical activities. Considering the rapid growth of music among youth and families, they attempted to slow down this heavy flow by decreasing the official music budgets and increasing the difficulty of obtaining permits for publishing music albums and

---

33 The second supreme leader of Iran since 1989 until now.
holding concerts. Today, music receives the partial support of the moderate
government of president Rohani, but it cannot overcome the influences of religious
forces in power. For example, in some sacred cities of Iran like Mashhad and Ghom,
Friday prayer’s Imams prevent holding any musical concerts, even the ones that
have the government permit. In some cities like Isfahan, they force the official
music organs to prevent the performance of women players. However, in other
cities like Tehran and Shiraz, there are fewer obstacles for women’s musical
activities. Despite all these obstacles, both old and young generations of eminent
musicians consciously fight against these limitations by extending the range of their
musical activities to different parts of Iran and employing more women performers
in their musical projects. In addition, the endless facilities of the internet have
helped musicians to surmount many of these restrictions and enabled them to share
their musical products with a wide range of audience in different parts of Iran.

3- Tombak and Tombak Players in Recent Decades

The post-revolutionary situation of traditional music as the only allowed
musical genre gave tombak a chance to survive. In the subsequent decades, the
creative musical works of a young generation of players such as Navid Afghah
marked a turning point in the development of this instrument. Introducing new
techniques and producing creative sounds from tombak made more people
interested in learning it. Publishing various instruction books for tombak promoted
the general performance level and also encouraged tombak learners to improve their
techniques and experience different playing styles. New albums of tombak
ensembles, solo, and accompaniment presented the limitless potential of this
instrument to both society and other musicians. Indeed, it is hard to find any other instrument in Iranian music that experienced such a huge change.

All these musical accomplishments have not satisfied tombak players, who still consider themselves in a battle for achieving a respectable place in Iranian music and the society. Many players believe that the development of tombak itself has not been able to promote the social status of its players. Although they now experience a better position among the small community of musicians, they have not attained this improvement within the whole society. Some parts of this failure stem from the lack of official support. The anti-musical policies of Islamic authorities have always been designed to downplay the role of music and musicians in Iranian society. The ban on displaying musical instruments on television has caused the general public to be less connected to music and musical instruments. Thus, the development of music and musical instruments are not easily accessible for the general population.

During the post-revolutionary era, only a limited part of the society who could afford to go to concerts have had the chance to witness the musical innovations. Because of the ban on displaying musical instruments on television, most regular people do not even have basic and general information about musical instruments and their playing techniques. As a result, the development of music and musical instruments are not tangible for them. This issue is a severe problem for tombak players who are seeking higher social status through introducing the new features of modern playing. For them attaining a higher social standing is not just a matter of ambition or perfectionism; it is a critical factor for their survival.
The major part of the obstacles that influence today’s life of tombak players is similar to what challenged the previous generation. The respectable status that masters like Tehrani were seeking is still their unfulfilled desire. Establishing a new identity of tombak in society is an incomplete mission that players attempt to accomplish. The social life of contemporary tombak players shows why completing this mission is still a high priority.

**Playing Tombak as a Profession**

For many players and teachers, playing tombak cannot be considered a principal occupation. The low social status of music in general and tombak, in particular, has made it a second job for many players. Many families are still unwilling for their children to choose tombak playing as a profession. Many tombak players learn this instrument as a hobby. Only limited numbers of players whose family members are musicians have a chance to choose playing tombak as their future job. Some families are afraid that playing an instrument will prevent their children from furthering their academic studies and earning a respectable high-income job.

Many players I interviewed had first studied other disciplines under pressure from their families and then came back to playing and teaching tombak. For example, Hamid Ghanbari, teacher and author of some tombak instruction books, states that his family's disagreement with music obliged him to choose applied chemistry as his university major, but his passion to tombak made him leave it uncompleted and choose music as his major.\(^{34}\) Navid Afghah is another example;
he first studied agricultural engineering, but ultimately choose tombak as his profession.

Much of the resistance to music as a profession stems from its social image. Although today, playing and teaching music on average is a middle-income job, it is not a secure employment in the society’s point of view. The religious limitation and ban on holding concerts in some particular months like Moharram and Safar,\textsuperscript{35} and some other dates related to Shia mourning ceremonies, have made music impractical as a permanent job. Also, strict rules regarding the contents of music and lyrics, the long and tough process of getting a concert or album permit, and the limitation on female musicians have made this work, a temporary, insecure side job. Many professional performers are obliged to rely on teaching to earn money.

In today’s economy, teaching music is more secure than some engineering jobs, though for many regular people it has a lower social position. For them music is something related to entertainment and it does not count as a serious job. For some radical religious families any income related to music is not halal and it can ruin the spirituality of both life and the afterlife. All these unfair prejudices regarding music jobs get worse when it comes to tombak due to its dark history related to motrebi music. To play and teach tombak, players and teachers must accept all its wide-ranging social implications, which negatively influence different aspects of their lives.

\textsuperscript{35} During these two months of the Islamic lunar calendar Shia hold a series of mourning ceremonies in commemoration of the historical events such as such as the death of the prophet Muhammad and the martyrdom of his grandson al-Husayn ibn Ali.
Tombak Playing, Challenges, and Implications

For some tombak players, especially those who come from the poor and low-culture neighborhood, difficulties begin from the first days of learning tombak. The frequent appearance or even residency of motrebs or looties in these regions has tied the definition of tombak to motrebi music. The public’s perception of a tombak player in these areas is an itinerant player who plays in wedding ceremonies or shows with their dancing animals. Professional tombak players who live in these parts of cities often are exposed to public ridicule by scornful titles like motreb or dombaki. Karim Ebrahimi states that he was anxious about carrying tombak in his impoverished neighborhood and was ridiculed by some neighbors, so he always tried to hide his tombak while walking in the street.36 Many players have some memories of being ridiculed or scoffed at by their classmates or school teachers because of playing tombak and being held in lower esteem than their peers who play instruments like piano or guitar. Navid Afghah states that even in cultural places like universities, whenever he missed a class because of the musical activities, he was asked “are you again going for motrebi.”

Tombak players are sensitive about titles or phrases that relate them to the motrebi, looties or any other light entertainment music. They often avoid communicating with people who cannot differentiate their work from amateurish tombak playing. This issue has severely affected their personal lives. For example, many tombak players are reluctant or nervous to attend parties and ceremonies. It is because they are often asked to play for dancing, which gives them a sense of humiliation. It does not mean that they are opposed to the art of dance. By contrast,

36 All the quotations from Karim Ebrahimi in this chapter are taken from his discussion with the author on August 12, 2017, Shiraz.
many of them welcome accompanying a professional dancer in an artistic gathering. They think performance in a party cause them not to be taken seriously by the audiences and they are treated like motrebs. In many of these parties, people ask tombak players to perform some repetitive common dance patterns like Bandari\textsuperscript{37} and Gheri,\textsuperscript{38} which means they just want to dance and have fun; such people do not care about tombak and its player. Many players believe that performing these simple rhythms undervalues the art of playing tombak because it makes people think that playing tombak is nothing but these simple rhythms. It also reinforces the common false belief that fewer than ten sessions are necessary to learn tombak, though it requires several years to master its complicated techniques. According to Ghaziasgar asking a professional tombak player to perform in a party is analogous to asking a brain surgeon to work as a nurse. Sadegh Shariati states:

Performing in parties degrades the result of many years of learning, practicing, studying different tombak schools, and lowers the place of a professional tombak player to a motreb who does not know anything about these issues.

Many tombak players feel humiliated after playing at a party. Some of them do not even go to their families’ and friends’ weddings or birthday parties. Others leave the parties or refuse to play in order to get people to understand the value of their work. The ones who accept playing are afraid of sharing their performance videos on the internet and being judged by their peers and other people.

Some of these reactions stem from what tombak students have learned from their teachers. According to Arabpour, one of Esmaili’s students, for teachers like

\textsuperscript{37} A rhythmic pattern in 6/8 for dance, which is common in music of southern Iran.

\textsuperscript{38} A slow rhythmic pattern in 6/8, which is used for kind of Iranian dance that mostly focuses on neck, shoulders, and pelvis movements.
Esmaili, playing tombak in parties is a catastrophe destroying Tehrani’s attempts at promoting the social status of this instrument. Esmaili strongly advises students to only to play when the audiences do not talk, drink, or laugh, and completely pay attention to the performance. He also recommends that his students offer their performances, including dance accompaniment, in a respectable official venue such as a concert hall. 39

Some younger tombak players have developed a strategy to deal with this issue. They think that it is not people’s fault if they are not reasonably familiar with professional tombak playing. They instead believe that the restrictions on music and limitations on the media for presenting the musical developments are the root cause of this issue. These players have decided to address this problem by some cultural measures. For example, Majid Hesabi says that whenever he is asked to play in a party, he requests people to let him have a solo first. He says this kind of performances shows them the sonic capabilities of tombak and make them interested in learning it. Players such as Hamid Ghanbari have extended their activity to the society. With the contribution of some other musicians, he has started a project to familiarize regular people with serious music and the role of tombak in this music. In his performances in public places such as cafés, Ghanbari teaches and plays different rhythmic patterns and encourages people to accompany him by clapping. Some other tombak players use social networking sites and apps such as Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Facebook to share their innovations in playing tombak. Social media help players present their works to a larger audience

39 All the quotations from Amirhossein Arabpour in this chapter are taken from his discussion with the author on, 2017,
with whom they can virtually interact through comments and messaging. It provides players an opportunity to familiarize the general public with this art without undergoing the complex procedure of getting permission for performing a concert or publishing an album.

**Hiding the Identity**

Although these cultural measures have positively affected the opinion of some parts of the society, they have not removed the motrebi image of this instrument for the public. This unresolved problem has led tombak players to hide their identity in their communication with people. They protect themselves in this way from facing challenges that put their social and personal life in jeopardy, since being a tombak player is not a familiar identity for the public and also not appropriate employment for the religious part of the society. They introduce themselves as teachers, musicians, artists, or use fake titles related to other professions. This is a defensive strategy to prevent any adverse reactions while communicating with people whom they do not know.

Reza Ghasemi, a tombak teacher, says that in many situations he has to hide his profession. Otherwise, he would be deprived of some social advantages. For example, he has a garden in a small religious village; if people notice that he is a musician, they will not give water to his garden. He also says that some of his religious family members never eat food in his house because they believe that it is not halal. Kamran Montazeri, says that whenever he introduces himself as a tombak player, he will probably be asked if he plays at parties, and must always explain the difference between a professional tombak player and a motreb.
Therefore, he often introduces himself as self-employed to prevent all these recurrent conversations.40

Some tombak teachers believed that their profession is meaningless for many ordinary people because their impression of tombak is that it is a simple instrument that does not need someone to teach it. Ghanbari, a tombak teacher with music training, says people understand his social position better when he introduces himself as a bachelor of music and then adds the title of tombak teacher.

When asked about their profession, many tombak players choose their answer based on the beliefs and culture of the questioner. When filling out official forms, they prefer to use less controversial titles like just teacher or tutor or music teacher but not a tombak player or tombak teacher. There are also players who have a great love and respect for their instrument and they not only do not censor their musical identity but also deliberately use the title of tombak player.

The identity of “tombak player” does not provide the prestige, respect, and social acceptance that these musicians seek. The consequences of this low social status even appear in the personal aspects of their lives, such as marriage. Many tombak players declare that this profession has been a serious obstacle to their marriage and they had a fear of not being accepted by the spouse’s family. Although many families admire the art of playing tombak, they do not consider it as a profession. Raza Kavari quotes from one of his peers that:

When we have a concert, people scramble for getting a ticket and seeing it. However, when we ask them for marriage, they want us first to change our job or have a second job besides it.

40 All the quotations from Kamran Montazeri in this chapter are taken from his discussion with the author on July 3, 2017, Tehran.
Majid Hessabi remembers that before his marriage he started working in a cement factory as his alternative job just in case his wife’s family did not accept his profession of tombak teaching. Some tombak players prefer to marry into families who understand and value the art of music and tombak playing. Many others, who want to avoid these obstacles, choose academic disciplines or jobs that are more acceptable and respected in the society and continue tombak playing on the side. Some of them attempt to further their studies in music and earn a certificate in this field. Having academic credentials puts them in the category of professional musician and gives them the opportunity to gain government advantages such as establishing a music institute through a straightforward process. All these options are considered as kind of compensation for the low social status of tombak and allow players to preserve both their art and their social lives.

**Tombak and Tombak players in the Society of Musicians**

Tombak players’ attempts to establish a respectable identity is not limited among the ordinary people; it also includes in the community of musicians. Given the history of tombak and reliable sources, like recordings of the Qajar era, the place of tombak in a music ensemble was so low that the players’ names were seldom mentioned. Despite all its development, this instrument still experiences discrimination. Some tombak players believe that it is still treated as a second-class instrument. To prove their claim, they mention some of the musicians’ attitudes toward tombak and its players. For example, it is sometimes called Saz-e-Hamrah or “accompanying instrument” by other musicians. This type of expression shows the importance given to melodic instruments and the assumption that tombak is an unimportant adjunct instrument. Sometimes this expression is deliberately used to
belittle the tombak and its player. Sadegh Shariati, a tombak teacher, explains the reasons behind using these offensive titles:

In Iranian music, melodic instruments have always been the center of attention. However, the advances of tombak in solo and accompanying attract remarkable part of the attention to this instrument, which is not favorable to some melodic instrument players. That is why they always remind tombak players the previous place of tombak by using these words.

Another type of discrimination that puts tombak in the low ranks of an Iranian ensemble is pay inequality. Many tombak players report that they receive lower pay however proficient they are. This was a routine attitude toward tombak players among the older generation of musicians. Navid Afghah describes santour master Faramarz Payvar’s thoughts about tombak players:

In Payvar’s view, the melodic instruments formed the central part of music and tombak was the follower. His explanation for giving lower payment to tombak players was that they do less work, their patterns are changeable, and they do not read and memorize notes.

Some tombak players’ intensive concentration on developing performance techniques and rhythmic issues has resulted in inadequate knowledge in the broader musical fields such as knowing the melody structure, musical modes, harmony, musical expressions, and theoretical matters. The result is that other musicians do not regard tombak players as serious musicians. Even some tombak players believe that playing tombak itself does not make one a musician and that they need to study other musical subjects. Hamid Ghanbari states that the old generation of tombak players was aware of this weakness and compensated for it by learning and singing various songs in different modes.

Today many tombak players try to learn other instruments and take music courses such as ear training and music theory to improve their understanding of music and help them design rhythmic patterns for accompaniment and solo
Navid Afghah believes that although studying these courses brings a lot of musical benefits for tombak players, its social functions exceed all other advantages. He states:

During recording tombak for a piece when I mention some part of the piece by determining the musical modes, type of chords, and other musical features, the composer notices that he is working with a professional musician that can analyze and evaluate his music. Therefore he considers me equal in terms of musical rank, and knowledge and never allows himself to have any discriminatory treatment.

It seems Hossein Tehrani’s goal to enhance the place of tombak and tombak players is still the first concern of modern players. The duty to respect and preserve its dignity and raise the status of this instrument is one of the lessons that tombak students learn from the first days of their training. Making constant efforts to reach this goal becomes part of their lifestyle when they choose tombak playing as their vocation. Today, tombak players work hard toward this goal by improving the musical functions of the instrument and raising its value in the community of musicians. However, introducing this new identity to the people who know tombak in the frame of motrebi music is an obstacle that seems impossible to overcome without the support of cultural organizations. Lack of government cultural support and the anti-musical policies of the religious part of the government have disappointed many players’ hope to change the ordinary people’s view toward tombak. This explains why sometimes they choose to hide their musical identity instead of trying to explain it. Navid Afghah states:

It is so painful to see all of my skills, knowledge, and accomplishments in the field of tombak playing reduced to a word (motreb). It is like a skillful drilling engineer called a well-digger. To explain its difference, one should recount the history of engineering. It is similar to tombak players who have to relate the history of tombak playing for introducing their current identity. Tombak players are tired of describing themselves from zero. Therefore they prefer to conceal it.
Despite all the difficulties and adversities, the next generation of tombak players is optimistic about the future of this instrument. They use any possible opportunity to present the new features of tombak playing in Iranian music. It is tombak players’ true passion for and dedication to this simple magical instrument that motivates them to overcome all challenges and further their efforts to elevate it to the social, aesthetic, and musical status the tombak deserves.
Chapter Three

The Training System of Contemporary Tombak Playing

Introduction

The training system of a musical instrument is one of the chief agents in its development. Productive teaching methods develop the music appreciation and performance skills of learners and enable them to explore and unlock the musical potential of their instrument. The methods of teaching tombak in Iran have constantly been improved along with their advancements. The rapid development of this instrument through last hundred years has generated new playing techniques and performance styles. Each school of tombak playing has its own manner of teaching and applies a combination of different oral methods, notational systems, and alternative approaches to train its students. This chapter provides a general picture of modern tombak teaching in Iran and explains some prevalent methods used in different schools. It also examines the strengths and weakness of the conventional notational systems and training books and talks about the role of oral methods and other approaches in teaching and preparing students for skills like improvisation.

Playing style

Right-handed people put the tombak’s neck, the lower narrow part, on the left lap and position the skinhead near the knee of the right leg. In this position, the wrist of the non-dominant hand rests on top of the tombak’s body, and the dominant hand plays free strokes. This form can simply be reversed for a left-handed person.
This is the conventional style taught in many training books; it enables a player to perform the free strokes with his/her strong hand. However, in practice, there are left and right handed players, including me, who do not obey this rule and place tombak in the opposite direction of the regular style\textsuperscript{41} (see Figure 9&10). Although these players are the minority, among them, there is a good number of masters like Bahman Rajabi, Navid Afghah, and Naser Farhangfar. Some believe that this difference enables its player to perform techniques that are tricky for regular players. However, there is not any academic research that shows any relations between these styles and the quality of performing.

\textbf{Figure 9:} Bhman Rajabi - Right-handed- placing tombak in opposite direction

This image is taken from Rajabi’s 
\textit{Tonbak Training: Preparatory and Intermediate Course}, 2014, page 18

\textbf{Figure 10:} Hossein Tehrani - Right handed- placing tombak in regular direction

This image is taken from \textit{Tombak Training with Association of Hossein Tehrani}, 2009, page 6.

\textsuperscript{41} It means right handed players’ style is similar to left-handed and vice-versa.
Although the direction of positioning a percussion instrument with one head does not seem a serious issue, some masters’ irrational views make it a significant obstacle for learners. For example, Eftetah recommended positioning tombak on the left leg for all students, including left-handed players. Although many teachers consider it just a recommendation, some believe it as a rule. In my first experience of learning tombak as a child, I was obliged to place tombak opposite to my natural tendency, which led me to play each stroke with the opposite hand. This negative experience caused me to quit tombak for one year. If I had not been lucky enough to find my next teacher, I would probably have given up playing this instrument forever.

Despite the large number of masters using the opposite style, there are still teachers who insist on the regular style. Karim Ebrahimi likens the direction of playing tombak to the placement of the accelerator, brake and gear stick in a car, which is same for a right or left handed person. In the same way, a player can get used to one direction.42

Today, the majority of teachers let their students choose their comfortable style. Learners who are not sure which style they prefer are asked to try playing strokes in both directions for few weeks to discover their natural position. To prevent any confusion in teaching strokes teacher avoid using word of “left” or “right” for indicating hands. Instead, they apply “up” or “down,” which works for all different styles. Modern tombak performers should acquire the ability to perform each stroke with both hands. To reach this level, they sometimes reverse the position of the tombak in order to enhance their mental abilities and strengthen their weaker

42 All the uncited quotations from tombak players are taken from the Author’s interview with them.
hand. This practice enables each hand to imitate the opposite hand’s strokes. The technique of shifting strokes between two hands without changing the direction of holding the instrument is one of the key skills of modern tombak playing. It also prepares learners for playing polyrhythmic patterns or modern contrapuntal pieces, which require each hand to perform a separate pattern. These abilities have arisen from the possibility of playing in both directions. The different abilities of right and left-handed players in performing specific techniques persuade them to imitate each others’ styles and overcome the dominance of one hand to promote the techniques of this instrument.

First Notations for Tombak

The first tombak training book was published in late 1971. This introductory book, which used the Western staff notation system, was the accomplishment of a group of Iranian musicians such as Hoseyn Dehlavi,43 Ruh-Allah Khaleghi,44 Hushang Zarif,45 Farhad Fakhreddini,46 and Mostafa Kamal Pourtorab.47 They designed series of exercises based on the oral teaching of Hossein Tehrani at the National Conservatory of Music. They used a three-line staff and Western note value signs to transcribe the rhythmic patterns. In this system, each line represents

---

43 Hossein Dehlavi, director of National Conservatory of Music from 1962 until 1971, is one the prominent Iranian composers. *The Ballet of Bizhan and Manizeh, Sabokbal, A Fantasia for Tombak Ensemble and Orchestra* are among his famous orchestral compositions.

44 Roh-Allah Khaleghi (1906-1965), Iranian composer and theoretician, was the founder of National Music Conservatory in 1949 in Tehran and the music director of the radio orchestra *Golha*. The three volume book named *History of the Persian Music* is one of his great works in Iranian music.

45 The renowned Iranian tar player.

46 Iranian film composer and music conductor and the founder of Iran’s National orchestra in 1998.

47 Mostafa Kamal Pourtorab (1924-2016), Iranian composer, conductor, and theoretician was the director of the National Conservatory of Music Between 1971-1973. *Theory of Music* is his famous book in the field.
one zone of tombak related to the placement of strokes. Strokes like “Tom” or “bass”, which hit close the center, are written on the lower line. The second line is for the ones that occur in the middle zone like the tremolos, and the top line is for strokes like “Beshkan” and “Bak” that touch the edges of the tombak (see Figure 11).

This classification only demonstrates the approximate zone of each stroke. In practice, for playing Tom, the center, middle, and edge are touched simultaneously. For differentiating between techniques that are played with both hands, specifying fingering or specific performance style, some symbols are put on top of the notes. Some players believe that staff lines mostly indicate the lowness or highness of strokes’ sound, and not their placement on the skin. Navid Afghah states that this system was first designed on a two-line staff and that they had considered the interspace for the middle zone. They also had used symbols like B for Tom (or bass) or M for middle zone strokes. Then they changed both the number of staff lines and the signs. He believes that based on this system, on can add more
staff lines for tombaks with larger heads, which offer more zones for the movement of strokes.\textsuperscript{48}

\textit{Tombak Training with Association of Hossein Tehrani} was not the first to use notation for this instrument. There is a tombak notation sample by Abolhassan Saba, published in Iran Music Magazine in 1958, that shows he was the first musician who used notation for tombak (Ghanbari & Khavarzamini 2000). Abolhasan Saba (1902-1957), the prominent Iranian musician and teacher of Hossein Tehrani, used a single line staff\textsuperscript{49} with Western note values. He put symbols above notes to show techniques (see Figure 12).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{saba notation}
\caption{Sample of Saba's Notation for tombak}
\end{figure}

This image is taken from \textit{Playing Tombak in the Style of Amirmaser Efietah}, 2016, page 6

\textsuperscript{48} Afghah also uses the interspace of three-line staff for showing the movement of strokes.

\textsuperscript{49} Despite having no line staff here, the appearance of all of the notes on same level is considered one-line staff notation.
According to Alexandra Balandina, Saba learned Western notation from a prominent tar player, Alinaghi Vazire, who had learned notation from martial music\textsuperscript{50} teachers in Iran and in his education at French and German music schools. Balandina names Amirnaser Eftetah (1936-1988) as the first tombak player who used the notation in his teaching. He wrote each learner’s exercises on a one-line staff (Balandina 2007). Eftetah’s notation was very similar to Saba’s (See Figure 13). The difference is that Eftetah added more symbols for new techniques. Balandina cannot say for sure that whether Eftetah had used his system before or after the publication of Saba’s notation sample (ibid). The one-line notation system was used in reputable books by Eftetah’s students like Bahman Rajabi (see Figure 14) and Morteza Ayan and was developed with new symbols.

\textbf{Figure 13: Sample of Eftetah notation for tombak}

This image is taken from \textit{Training Tombak Based on Amirnaser Eftetah’s Manuscripts}. 2016, Page 53

\textsuperscript{50} The compositions used to announce military events or assist in organizations of martial activities.
Figure 14: Sample of single-line staff notation from Rajabi’s book

This image is taken from Rajabi’s Tonbak Training: Preparatory and Intermediate Course, 2014, page 117
The Prevailing Notation Systems

One and three line staves are the main systems of notating tombak in Iran. Typically a school\textsuperscript{51} or player uses one of these systems for transcriptions. However, they change or add some symbols based on the features of their performance styles. While some of the changes have been made with the aim of improving symbols, others are just means for differentiating one school from another.

Many tombak teachers teach both notation systems. Some schools, which insist on one system, re-transcribe other books to their preferred notation system. For example, there are three-line versions of Ayan’s and Rajabi’s books, which were originally on the one-line staff.

Some teachers believe that the single-line system has more advantages compared to the three-line. It is a faster method for writing notes in class and transcribing masters’ records. It is also more straightforward for sight reading. One of their critiques is that the reason for showing strokes in more lines is to reduce the number of symbols. However, the three-line staff use both more lines and nearly same number of symbols, which make it a messy system for new learners. On the other hand, the supporters of three-line staff mention some advantages of their system such as the possibility of showing double notes or using the interspaces of staff lines for showing the movement of the strokes. Some of the teachers who apply both systems report that students can shift from three-line to one-line more

\textsuperscript{51} Generally, tombak schools are defined based on the type of techniques, shape and style of performing strokes, notational system, and the training books they use.
comfortably compared to the reverse order. However, the supporters of three-line
disagree with this view.

Reza Kavari, tombak master, likens these two systems to Apple and
Samsung. Each has its advantages, but their followers try to show one is superior in
all aspects. He believes that it only takes one month for a learner to get used to the
new transcription and teachers can easily apply both notations in their training
system, Sadegh Shariati states that both systems have been designed and developed
to fit the requirements of their own schools’ techniques and seem awkward when
converted to the other system.

Shariati has designed his own notation, which has the symbols placed on
note heads. This type of notation addresses the problem of seeing symbols on top
of notes and note heads at the same time (see Figure 15). Navid Afghah uses a
combination of two three-line staves for demonstrating his pieces, which utilize
each hand independently (see Figure 16). I have cooperated with Navid Afghah to
find a graphical notation that can precisely demonstrate the type, place and various
movement of techniques on the circular playing zone of tombak. Although our
notation system addresses many of the requirements, it still needs to be assessed by
other teachers and students to evaluate its practicality. The evolution of tombak
notation is in its early stages and needs both time and innovative ideas to achieve
an integrated system that can properly fulfill the demands of different performance
styles and have the potential of expansion for compatibility with the anticipated
technical advancement of tombak.
Common Training Books

Tehrani’s training book, as the first introduction to tombak, has never found a good place in the training system. Part of the problem comes from its poor technical content. Navid Afghah believes that given the presence of great masters like Rajabi and Farhangfar at the time of the book’s publication, it does not even reflect the technical level of tombak in that era. He believes that the musical content of this book was changed under the influence of its authors’ Western musical thought. He claims that some main strokes were substituted with their weaker alternatives to show a semi-strong beat, which is not common in tombak playing.
One of this book’s weaknesses is that it introduces some techniques such as Riz or tremolo without offering any preparatory exercises. Some teachers believe this book does not convey the main features of the Tehrani school and that to reach them, one should examine Tehrani’s recordings. Despite all these deficiencies, this book is taught in many training systems. The reason is that players are required to pass this book in their qualification exams for getting a teaching certificate, establishing a music institute, or other advantages offered by the Music and Culture Ministry. Some tutors teach parts of it in their introductions to different schools of tombak, and some use it as a preparatory to the training book of Mohammad ‘Esmaili.

The book of Esmaeli, one of Tehrani’s important students, was published in 1991. Although this book is considered as within the Tehrani School, its exercises are very demanding compared to Tehrani’s book. Navid Afghah believes that part of the toughness is because of its exercises’ density, which makes learners perform high numbers of strokes in the unit of time. Some players believe that this book should be practiced in a thoughtful, careful way, otherwise it would hurt the hands. One of the inspiring parts of this book is its first four exercises, which are also written for opposite hands. Although Esmaili suggests this idea is just for playing the first simple exercises, Afghah performs all the book’s exercises with opposite hands. He also encourages his students to play both Tehrani’s and Esmaili’s books in this way. Afghah states that this idea inspired him to create etudes and pieces that enable the hands to imitate each other and work independently. Despite the benefits of this method, it is not a prevalent book in other schools because its exercises sound old-fashioned and it demands a high level of technique and power for a precise
performance. Afghah strongly recommends this book as a great method for enhancing the hands’ capabilities and preparing them for demanding techniques.

The training book of Bahman Rajabi, the grand master of tombak, was written in 1982. Rajabi was a student of Eftetah and used his single-line staff for his book. He changed some stroke symbols and added new ones based on his new creative techniques. This book comes in three stages: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. He added an upper-advanced level in later years. Unlike the books by Tehrani and Esmaili, which consist of a series of one or two line short exercises (see figure 17), Rajabi’s book is a collection of composed pieces (see Figure 18). One of the notable features of this book is attention to the issue of form in creating pieces and composition techniques such as inversion, retrograde, and augmentation/diminution in developing a motive. One of the outstanding parts of this book is a collection of pieces, named Dances of Two Fingers, based on the movements of a single-finger stroke in different zones of tombak.

![Figure 17: Series of short exercises in Esmaili's book](Mohammad Esmaili Tombak Training, 2008, Page 39)
Figure 18: sample a short piece in Rajabi’s book

This image is taken from Bahman Rajabi’s Tonbak-Training: Advanced and High-Advanced Levels. 2012, Page 1.
“The Dialogue Between Left and Right” is one of the famous pieces of this collection.\textsuperscript{52} This book also includes pieces, based on famous melodies, songs or lyrics, in which the tombak tries to simulate the rhythm and movement of a melody or lyric. Introducing and developing the techniques such as glissando and new types of tremolo is another feature of this book. Shariati believes that the “accompanying role of tombak has mostly led its players to the skill of improvisation rather than following a fixed structure. Memorizing and performing long pieces of Rajabi’s book can help players to address this fundamental weakness.”

Some teachers are of the opinion that Rajabi’s book is not a training book, and only suitable for the advanced players. It is because the order of the pieces does not follow the logic of a training book; for example, some of its elementary pieces are so demanding that one should categorize them into upper levels. Many players feel that the feature of highlighting some definite strokes through a series of pieces in this book assists players to master a technique and establish their hand gestures. Performing some part of these pieces in their accompaniment gives students the opportunity to have solo parts. All these features put this book among the references that each professional player should experience.

The books of Mohammad Akhavan are another set of invaluable resources. \textit{The Tombak Self-Taught and New Tombak Playing} are his latest books. The former is an elementary book, which is mostly used for teaching children, while the latter includes upper levels. The older and thinner version of the second book was first published in 1991 using the single-line staff and stroke symbols similar to those in Rajabi’s book. In the book’s later versions Akhavan changed the majority of

\textsuperscript{52} Use the following link to watch this piece. It starts at minute one
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-axCFQjaVdM
symbols (see Figure 19). The reason for this change was to find more practical symbols, an effort that has been successful to some degree, though some masters mention his arguments with Bahman Rajabi as the main reason for this transformation.

Figure 19: New notation in Akhavan’s book

This image is taken from Akhavan’s New Tombak Playing. 2000, page 275.
New Tombak Playing benefits from both short and long exercises. First, it introduces a technique through a series of one or two line exercises; then it shows its function in a pre-composed piece, which prepares learners for solo performance. One of the distinct features of this book is the detailed transcription of some compound techniques, which consist of several smaller strokes. Previously most players performed these types of techniques roughly. Showing the small elements of these compound strokes enables players to increase their control of the details of techniques and play them precisely. Navid Afghah believes that transcribing these details has increased players’ sensibility about producing a clear sound and led them to have more discipline in performing techniques.

The manuscripts of Navid Afghah are challenging, innovative pieces written for tombak. Only a small number of his pieces have been transcribed so far. Afghah’s etudes have not been published as a book and are copied by students. His exercises are suitable for advanced students who have already finished other books. Afghah uses the three-line staff for his etudes, which enables him to demonstrate double strokes in a clear way. He also applies a grand staff for the pieces using hands independently. Since it is impossible to transcribe large numbers of his techniques using the current notation systems, he teaches major parts of his works orally. Some of his recorded pieces have been transcribed by me and some of his advanced students. However a versatile graphical notation is necessary to capture the details of his performances.

Afghah is about to publish a series of books that explain his musical thought. He categorizes them in the frame of three languages of tombak playing. The first one explains the role of accent games in generating different variations of a
rhythmic pattern. Independence of two hands is the issue of the second language, and the third book talk about generating sonic and rhythmic sectors in modern tombak playing. He believes that each language requires an independent specific method of transcription. However, they can share some similarities. In Afghah’s opinion, today’s tombak players need to develop their musical understanding along with their techniques and get familiar with the musical thought of great tombak masters. To address this demand, Afghah is working on a book about the ontology of tombak, which examines different schools from Tehrani until the contemporary players.

There are approximately thirty other books or methods, which are less frequently used and are limited to a few masters or schools. Some of these books are dedicated to collecting or transcribing older masters’ works. For example, *The Poet of Tombak* has notated some of Naser Farhangfar’s albums. It is a good reference for analyzing the improvisation style of this creative master and is rarely used in regular training. The book of Eftetah is a collection of his manuscripts, which is mainly used as an introduction to the books of his student, Bahman Rajabi. This collection demonstrates the origin of Rajabi’s school and the development of tombak methods in a short period of two decades.

Some books address the deficiencies of other resources. For example, The books of Hesabi and Ghasemi offer etudes that prepare learners for the advanced techniques of Rajabi or Tehrani’ books. They also concentrate on musical meters and rhythmic patterns that are vital for accompanying Iranian music and had been neglected in other main books. There is also the young generation of players who have tried to systematize what they learned orally from their teachers. The forthcoming training book of Kamran Montazeri is a collection of etudes, which
has been designed based on some performance strategies of Navid Afghah such as accent games or performing with opposite hands. There are also books that have been written with the aim of receiving credit and attracting more students and have no educational value.

**Tombak Teaching Methods**

**Oral and Notation Tradition**

Notation has been an indispensable part of teaching tombak since its introduction. Notation is not only an educational tool but an efficient means of getting credit from both musicians and regular people. The early usage of notation in the late nineteen century by the foreign music teachers and Iranian musicians who had studied in Western music schools, made it a symbol of possessing professional knowledge of music. For tombak players it had more practical benefits. Reading and writing rhythm, as a sign of music literacy, helped them to keep themselves separate from the amateurish, illiterate motreb players and improve their place within the community of musicians.

The social function of notation is still one of the leading causes of its usage. Tombak players have believed that using a written training system could change people’s view regarding the seriousness and difficulty of this instrument. For many people reading musical notation is an ability that requires both knowledge and skill and the players who have this capability are considered specialists. This view directly affects the social status of tombak and the way people treat its players. The talk of my host at a party truly made me wonder when he said “I am embarrassed to ask you to play for our dance because you play tombak based on notation.” It
showed me the extent to which using notation influences people’s view about tombak players. It explains why even players who do not believe the usefulness of notation try to learn it and why some teachers insist on having a written teaching method.

The considerable value of using notation is an undeniable fact for tombak players. The creation of pieces for tombak solo, group and accompanying an orchestra, using knowledge of music in designing training methods, faster learning, improving the quality of performance, and the possibility of examining masters’ written methods, are just some examples of the merits of using notation. These have made notation a necessity. The only controversy is how it fits into training.

Both oral and notation systems are used in today’s training of tombak. Some teachers define academic training as using notation and place a high priority on it, while others emphasize the advantages of the oral systems and use it as their principal method. Tombak teacher Reza Kavari claims that the oral tradition was suitable for the era in which tombak only used a few strokes but that it cannot address various modern techniques. Navid Afghah teaches large parts of his works orally. Afghah believes that music must be heard, not seen. In his opinion books are a small part of teaching, and should be mainly used as to guide teachers in organizing their training. He states that concentrating on correct techniques and improving learners’ sensitivity toward the quality of sound through oral methods should be the major priority of each training system but that the process of learning notation should not be delayed, because it is a challenge to learners who are only accustomed to the oral tradition.
Although there are masters who start teaching notation from the early sessions, many teachers avoid any written document for the first few months. They emphasize learning through hearing and ask students to apply their vision only for checking their hands in front of a mirror. They feel that using notation can stop new learners from listening to their playing and ruin the process of attaining a correct style. To address both teaching notation and keeping students’ style, some teachers ask learners to perform books’ rhythmic patterns without tombak just by clapping or singing. It allows students to master both skills without one disturbing the other. Some old masters demonstrate rhythms or strokes by spontaneous meaningless syllables that roughly represent the sounds of strokes. However, the younger generation of teachers applies additional methods for teaching notation and rhythmic structures. The book “Vaznkhani-ye-Vazhegani” [Word-based Rhythm Reading] by Arshad Tahmasebi is one of these methods. In this approach, there are words that represent common rhythmic patterns. These words have been chosen from musical instruments’ names or are otherwise related to music and their combinations have a meaning. Ancient Iranian musical sources used a system named Atanin, which defines rhythmic patterns by using meaningless syllables such as ta, na, tan, nan and their bigger compounds like tanan, tananan, tanananan (Azadehfar 2004:61). This system is beneficial for teaching complicated rhythmic structures and compound meters to advanced students but is seldom used for beginners. Hossin Eshaghi Gorhi published a training book in 2012 based on this system and introduced a series of tombak patterns for performing rhythmic structures. Since its exercises require relatively advanced performance techniques, it is not considered suitable for teaching rhythm to new learners.
General Method of Teaching Tombak

Teaching the basic strokes and some simple explanations about the theory of rhythm is the common approach of many tombak first training sessions. Despite this similarity of content, the order of teaching strokes is different from one school to another. For example, Jafar Ghaziasgar has removed strokes like upper Bak from his early teaching because of its probable disturbance to forming other strokes, while Ganjeie teaches some demanding ornamental strokes like Eshare, in the first sessions. For the same reason, some masters do not follow the teaching orders of training books and teach with their own exercises.

The starting time of using notation is different from one teacher to another. Some never use any notation until they are sure about the accuracy of strokes while others correct students’ hands through performing written exercises. Some masters do not believe in using a single training system or book for all beginners and prefer to write exclusive lessons according to the strengths and weaknesses of each learner in each session. Arzhang Kamkar states that the daily composition of material for each student is a beneficial challenge for him because it keeps his mind fresh and improves his creativity in composing on the spot.

The number and type of books varies from school to school. Some masters only teach their own or their teachers’ book, while others emphasize experiencing different styles. The ones who use others’ books try to adapt them to the features of their styles. For example, in Afghan's school, learners should perform the whole or parts of books such as Tehrani, Esmaili, Ayan, Rajabi and Akhavan according to his approach. In this manner some books are performed with opposite hands, many
ornamental strokes are added to most of the exercises and the patterns are played with a different set of techniques or in different meters.

Preparing Learners for Improvisation

Teaching accompaniment and improvisation is one of the challenges of training tombak players. Teachers apply different approaches to prepare students for these skills. Developing an extensive vocabulary of rhythmic patterns and variations is the first step to reach this goal. To address this issue, students are asked to memorize long pieces and summarize them by selecting their favorite parts. Some tutors highlight important patterns and encourage learner to create a piece from them. In next steps, teachers explain the relations of patterns and conduct learners to creating more meaningful phrases. In next level, students should alter patterns in a way that does not match any of original ones.

Sadegh Shariati believes that notation has a crucial role in teaching improvisation. He writes a series of rhythmic patterns for learners and asks them to try different permutations of strokes on them. This method leads them to a deep understanding of the hierarchy of strokes and their interrelationship. In his opinion, the ability of correct listening and transcribing can assist learners to promote their skill of improvisation. By this, learners will be capable of transcribing, analyzing, and imitating the patterns they hear from their favorite players. To promote these abilities, Shariati begins dictation of rhythm from the fourth month of the training by asking his students to transcribe the exact notation of his performance. Some other teachers attempt to improve these skills by asking students to imitate what they play just through listening. This practice prepares players for accompanying
melodic instruments and enables them to create rhythmic equivalents of melodic phrases on the spot.

One of the key goals of learning improvisation is elevating students to the level of accompanying a melodic instrument. Each master has his method for developing this skill. The teachers who are familiar with melodic instruments play a song and ask the students to accompany them. They choose each song considering the meter and rhythmic patterns that learners are working on. Other masters who teach in music institutes often ask their peers in the melodic instruments to introduce the same level students with tombak learners who learn to accompany them. During the rehearsals, tombak teachers guide their students about choosing the suitable materials for accompanying a song.

There are masters who have systematized their training in accompaniment. For example, Ghesmi has provided a CD for his students including a series of popular traditional songs that have been categorized based on difficulty, musical meter, and tempo. In each session he chooses one song for his students and shows them how to accompany it based on their previous patterns. Some teachers pay particular attention to the ability to sing and know the musical modes. They mention the old tradition that many tombak players were also singers. Masters like Tehrani and Farhangfar were the last generation of tombak players who knew Iranian musical modes and sang many traditional songs while playing. Today, tombak teachers again attempt to add singing to their training systems. Familiarity with the musical modes helps students to understand melody, its structure, and the way lyrics sit on the beats. In this method they learn how to play a song in different meters and how to deal with lyrics that land in different beats of a meter. Singing and playing
at the same time leads to the improvement of mental ability and enables learners to adjust the pieces’ features like pitch register and tempo based on their abilities.

Hamid Ghanbari has designed an organized training system for this skill by publishing a book named *Zarbava* (2015). He wrote this book to address tombak players’ deficiency in the knowledge of Iranian musical modes and some singers’ weakness in understanding rhythm and keeping meters. He offers a series of traditional pieces in each of the twelve Iranian musical modes. For each piece there is a melodic notation and on the following page there is a simple transcription that includes a simple tombak phrase along with the lyrics’ syllables, which are written under each beat (see Figure 20). This book comes with a multitracking audio CD that allows audiences to listen to each compound of a piece separately: tombak, singer, and tar, the melodic instrument. This feature has made this book a practical training method that is used both in tombak and traditional singing classes.

Today the training of tombak does not follow an integrated standard system. It is a combination of various oral and notation methods that have formed according to the requirements of each school. Even the books that are common to multiple schools are taught in different manners. Today many tombak players do not limit themselves to one method or performance style. They attempt to experience different books and styles and acquire the special techniques of each system. There are even students who prefer to complete a book with more than one teacher to learn their interpretations. These demands have encouraged many teachers, especially from the young generation, to put a variety of books and methods in their training and apply new useful approaches. They have also arrived at the understanding that being open to diverse styles, thoughts, and approaches is one of the keys to the development of tombak and elevating its place in Iranian music.
Figure 20: sample of transcribing tombak phrase and lyric in Ghanbari’s book

This image is taken from Zarbava: Playing Method of Twelve traditional songs. 2015, Page 22
Conclusion

What we know about the origin of tombak is extremely limited. Tracking its names in literary and historical texts turns up very few resources. Discovering the history of tombak requires interdisciplinary approaches and collaborations with scholars from literature, history, and archaeology. The anti-musical policies of current Iranian religious governors, the imposition of strict censorship in humanities studies, and the lack of government funds for academic research, particularly for the arts, have made researching this subject a problematic, arduous work. Also, the absence of tombak as one of the accepted principal instruments of the music studies has led to a lack of serious academic studies about it. However, the recent establishment of ethnomusicology in some Iranian universities and the increasing attention of music students and scholars to the unique capabilities of tombak is a cause for hope that there will be more academic studies about this instrument in the future.

Despite murky information about the origin of tombak, our knowledge from the Safavid, Zand, and Qajar eras provides a clearer image of the social and musical life of this instrument in the recent past. The simplicity of playing techniques in those eras and its historic role in motrebi music gave it a social and musical identity linked with unserious entertainment, festivity, sexual immorality, and all the motrebi’s negative reputations. This identity put tombak in the lowest social and musical places among the public and the community of musicians. Like a convict who needs a new identity in order to re-enter the society, tombak players are trying to reshape their identity and get rid of all the implications of their dark history. To
fulfill this aim, they attempt to develop elevated performance techniques and functions of this instrument in Iranian music and present its capabilities to the society.

The golden age of tombak playing arises from the coincidence of the Pahlavi art-lover governors and innovative players such as Hossein Tehrani, Eftetah, Rajabi, and other masters. The combination of purposeful cultural policies such as holding music festivals, establishing music and dance centers, the contribution of an influential organization such as the Ministry of Education, and the role of radio and television in the development of music, enabled tombak players to unlock and develop the musical potential of their instrument. It also set the stage for presenting and spreading this art to the public through different art festivals and musical and educational programs of radio and television. These cultural policies also identified and supported many talented young players, who were suffering from the anti-musical views of religious or uncultured parts of the society. The Pahlavis’ fundamental efforts in providing skillful teachers, rehearsal facilities, public performance opportunities, encouragements, and stimulations brought up a new generation of players who could preserve and develop the art of tombak playing during the later dark period of the post-revolution.

Although the post-revolution catastrophes such as the destructive domination of revolutionary religious authorities in cultural affairs, the imposition of strict limits on musical activities, social and economic disorders, and war could not stop the technical development of tombak playing, they severely obstructed presenting this art to the society. According to the documentary “Bazm-e-Razm” in the first decade of the revolution the historical relations of tombak with dance and festivity had made many television and radio managers cautious about broadcasting
This sensitivity was so great that if a piece included tombak, it could not get permission for radio or television broadcast (Homayounfar and Hosseini 2016). Bizhan Kamkar, Daf master, also affirms that the absence of tombak in that period was one of the critical reasons for introducing daf, an Iranian frame drum, to the traditional ensembles (ibid). Ignorance about the development of tombak and the negative public perception of this art carried ominous implications for its players and hugely affected the social and musical place of this instrument.

Reformist governments during the third and fourth decades of the revolution have created a relatively moderate socio-cultural environment for musical activities. While these new conditions allow tombak players to preserve and develop the art, a series of unsolved problems such as the total ban on showing concerts on TV, or any program with the aim of spreading music and limitations on holding concerts in some cities, still obstruct the presentation of the growth of this art and the establishment of its new identity.

Today, the attempt to elevate the social, aesthetic, and musical status of tombak has become an inseparable part of practicing this art. Attaining a respectable place among the community of musicians has been one of the priorities of tombak players. Alongside their innovation in creating new techniques and performing styles, professional players try to expand their music knowledge. Taking different courses such as rhythm study and music theory has become a routine part of playing tombak. Creative compositions and musical skills by genius masters such as Navid Afghah have stimulated many tombak players to enhance their musical perceptions, learn melodic instruments, study new approaches in creating and performing music and apply new technologies such as recording and composing software in their musical innovations. Some tombak players’ expertise in the field of rhythm has
enabled them to hold rhythm training workshops for music students and create a new musical identity. This new culture of tombak players has promoted its musical place among the community of musicians and has diminished much of the discriminatory treatment they had suffered at the hands of other musicians.

The passion for advancement and new approaches is also seen in the training systems of tombak. The young generation of teachers barely imitates their masters’ teaching methods. Rather than obeying one school, one method or a book, they attempt to create a training system based on their own experiences. They try the new books and add or substitute them for the previous methods. The variety of books and systems, despite their difficulties, has made players flexible about accepting new ideas. Young educated teachers apply any new approaches and educational tools for teaching the increasingly complicated techniques of tombak playing. Jafar Ghaziasgar, the eminent young teacher in Isfahan, has designed a training system that uses a group of teachers for developing different performance skills. Some teachers such as Shariati uses audio and video tools for observing his students’ practicing procedure. Some others use social networks or messengers like WhatsApp and Telegram for conveying educational matters and having a forum for exchanging ideas with their students.

To present their art to the public, tombak players benefit from the numerous advantages of the Internet. The ban on showing performance on television and the limitations on performing a concert has led players to apply the social networks as their presentation tools. Social networking application such as Telegram or Instagram enable players to introduce their art to a large part of the society and share their works with a widespread network of users. The breadth and powerful influence of social networks on the society has made them the most beneficial tool for raising
public awareness about the new identity of tombak and attracting more people to
learn this instrument. For tombak players social media are more than just tools; they
represent the intended prestigious venue they always dreamed of for connecting to
the enthusiastic audiences who understand and respect their art and stimulate them
to promote their works.

The development of tombak has come about because of players who eagerly
aim to promote its place and its players. To answer the question of “what made you
a figure in tombak playing?” Navid Afghah said that his family heritage, well-
educated, and of high social status, gave him no choice but to strive for excellence
in music. 53 The same drive has stimulated tombak players through the last hundred
years and has accelerated the evolution of the instrument. The main part of this
motivation stems from the dark history of tombak with all its implications. Tombak
players’ experiences of all the indignities and low status has highlighted their
necessity of self-promotion. This aim has defined a framework within which the
main priority is elevating tombak to the social, aesthetic, and musical status that it
deserves. Understanding this constraint helps tombak players not to be ashamed
about the history of their career, but to consider it as a necessary stage of evolution
and to be proud of their impressive achievements.

53 This quotations is taken from his discussion with the author on August 16, 2017, Shiraz.
References


Balandina, Alexandra. 2008. [The Spread of Tombak Notation]. Mahoor Quarterly 38: 53-64


Dehlavi, Hossein. 2009. [Tombak Training with Association of Hossein Tehrani]. Tehran: Mahoor Publication


Galpin, Francis, W. 1937. The Music of the Sumerians and their Immediate Successors, the Babylonians & Assyrians. Cambridge at the University Press.


**Websites**

Aqazadeh, Behnam. 2014. [interview with Master Amirnaser Eftetah]. [accessed at August 3rd 2017]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxUprEM8jnU&t=1426s

Asil Music. 2011. [Interview with Masters Abolhassan Saba and Hossein Tehrani]. Radio Interview. [accessed December 27th, 2017]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnQ7asqDVPe

Bidaad. 2016. *Jahne Honar Shiraz* جشن هنر شیراز با روایت شهرزاد [accessed November 5th 2017]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ye1hJd33qKM

Doostmusic. 2011. *Maestro Hossein Dehlavi* [accessed February 5th 2018]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpEk4hboT60


MrBaharestan. 2013. [The traditional Iranian marriage ceremony]. [accessed December 4th 2017]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taA5SrRG1wE


Said Khadiri. 2014. [Children’s Music Workshop of Iranian Radio and Television-part II], Video Recording. [accessed February 16th 2018]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGAoz0gDIYA&t=149s


Shakrokhshahi, Iraj. 2011. [Hossein Tehrani’s Talks]. [accessed September 13th 2017]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhT0Wf5OVRw

VOA Farsi. 2012. [VOA Farsi Interview with Dr. Saeed Khadiri] Video Recording. [accessed December 12th 2017]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pZ28kSznCs

 documentos de VOA Farsi. 2012. [VOA Farsi Interview with Dr. Saeed Khadiri] Video Recording. [accessed December 12th 2017]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pZ28kSznCs

Documentary


Personal Interviews

Afghah, Navid, in discussion with the author, Shiraz, 16 August 2017.


Ebrahimi, Karim, in discussion with the author, Shiraz, 12 August 2017.


Ghaziasgar, Jafar, in discussion with the author, Isfahan, 11 July 2017
Kamkar, Arzhang, in discussion with the author, Tehran, 05 July 2017.
Montazeri, Kamran, in discussion with the author, Tehran, 3 July 2017.
Shariati, Sadegh, in discussion with the author, Shiraz, 10 August 2017